

## Section III: Conscience, freedom and redemption

### 1. The global figure of Jesus: conscience and freedom

The history of theology has shown that the figure of Jesus can be better understood if one starts from the unity of his person. The Christological dogma of Chalcedon delimits the framework in which reflection on the ontology of Jesus is reasonable and ecclesial. He was true God and true man, one and the same Son of God. However, Chalcedon did not specify how the two natures are to be considered in a unified way, so that the dogma does not become a "Christological artefact", a merely logical formalisation of faith in Jesus, a kind of "mathematics" of persons and natures.<sup>1</sup>

To arrive at a unified vision, it is perhaps best to consider the assumed nature as a "human expression" of the divine person of the Word<sup>2</sup>, as a "translation" into human language and the conditions of history of what takes place in the intra-Trinitarian dialogue. There are, of course, other possible interpretations. St. Thomas, for example, following in the wake of Damascene, considered the humanity of Jesus to be an "instrument" of the divine person of the Word<sup>3</sup>. Blessed Scotus did not consider it necessary to think of a relationship between Person and assumed nature that went beyond a merely formal contact. Ultimately, the different hypotheses depend on the different views of the meaning and purpose of Jesus' coming into the world<sup>4</sup>. Recent theology is more inclined to think of the Incarnation from the perspective of the Trinitarian love that constantly calls out to sinful man. Thus, it sees in the Thomistic idea of "mission" as a world-historical prolongation of the eternal<sup>5</sup> processions, an adequate way to "identify" immanent life with the incarnate existence of the Word<sup>6</sup>, and to conclude that Trinitarian love is poured out on the world through Jesus and his whole "history". After all, this is the idea that dominates the whole Johannine *corpus*: the divine life has manifested itself, has become visible in the man Jesus and in his history.

If we think that the Word of God expresses his own person through his assumed humanity, then the investigation into the way in which his divine life was made present

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Ducay, *Introduction*, in ID. (ed.), *The Council of Chalcedon 1550 years later*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> If the visible reality (Christ's humanity) is understood as an effective expression of his divine person, one can also speak "in terms of a sacrament".

<sup>3</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, ch. XLI. See also T. Tschipke, *L'humanité du Christ*, pp. 67-70; J.-P. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères*, p. 715.

<sup>4</sup> On this subject, see A. Ducay, *An examination of contemporary soteriology*, "Annales Theologici" 25 (2011), in particular 164-166.

<sup>5</sup> "Missio includit processionem aeternam et aliquid addit, scilicet temporalem effectum". St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 43, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>6</sup> There is an abundant literature on the relationship between the life of the Trinity and its economic manifestation. In particular, we note the aforementioned study by J. Prades López, *De la Trinidad económica a la Trinidad immanente*, 285-344. For our use of the expression economic Trinity, see [note 264](#).

through the anthropological structures of the man Jesus<sup>7</sup> is oriented towards a precise perspective: the human nature of Christ must have been "elevated" in the very act of his assumption, configured from the very first moment, to be *configured* with the divine person to which it gives visibility. It cannot be otherwise, because what is required of this humanity goes far beyond normal human possibilities. To make the divine subject recognisable in the world, to be able to give him a visible form, the human in Jesus had to have a richness and newness of existence that were a sign and guarantee of the singularity and uniqueness of his person<sup>8</sup>. If this had not been the case (if human nature had not been elevated), Jesus would not have been distinguishable from so many other realities in the world. Knowledge, conscience, free will, emotions, passions, instincts and impulses, all had to be the object of this "elevation", because all belonged "to the Word", all "was" the Word, and all was the means of His presence in the world.

The necessity of the "elevation" of Christ's human nature was strongly underlined by medieval theologians who, in formulating what would later be called the "perfection principle" of Christological ontology, admitted all forms of human and supernatural perfection in Jesus because of the dignity of his person and the greatness of his mission<sup>9</sup>. According to this principle, Jesus possessed every form of grace, natural perfection, etc., compatible with his redemptive mission. Only this last aspect somewhat limited the principle of perfection, because it implied that Jesus had to be passible, mortal, etc., in order to redeem the world. The mission, to some extent, prevented one from attributing to Jesus absolute perfection in any order.

The Second Vatican Council accepted the idea that the Word, by becoming incarnate, raised human nature to its highest dignity, and concluded that Jesus was the true man, the prototype of the human, the creaturely place in which the "image of God" in which man had been created and called was fully realised<sup>10</sup>. The elevation, therefore, detracted nothing from his true humanity; on the contrary, it could only be understood as an expression of the destiny of the human being towards fullness, as true and complete humanisation. Jesus was therefore the perfect man, the model of man.

However, the Council also recalled that, in order to affirm the human perfection of Jesus, it is not necessary to consider him exempt from the constraints of history or the intrinsic limitations of nature. Christ was the perfect man, but his perfection was realised in the ambiguous and uncertain circumstances of earthly existence. Although it may seem

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<sup>7</sup> Evidently, according to the Chalcedonian ruling on the true "unmixed" and "altered" humanity of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> This is the basic idea of G. Moiola's study, *La cristologia. Proposta sistematica* (Glossa, Milan 1989, republished by Centro Ambrosiano in 2015), in which the author elaborates a "Christology of singularity". See in this regard our review of his volume in "Annales theologici" 31/2 (2017), 511-513.

<sup>9</sup> Mini S. Johnson, for example, says: "Like every other medieval theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas took the principle of perfection - the conviction that the humanity of Jesus had to excel in all orders of reality - to its limit. Aquinas took the principle of perfection - the conviction that the humanity of Jesus had to excel in all orders of reality - to its limit". *Christology: Biblical and Historical*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi 2005, p. 76 (our translation).

<sup>10</sup> Christ "manifests [to man] his highest vocation. It is not surprising, then, that all the truths set forth above find their source and reach their summit in him. He is (...) the perfect man (...). Since in him human nature has been assumed, without being destroyed, it has also been raised in us to a sublime dignity". PastConst. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

otherwise, there is no contradiction in this statement. Of course, if God had wished to express the infinite perfections of His supreme being in the "ontology" of a human nature, the more numerous the limitations or conditionings of this nature, the less would be the result in expressing these perfections, just as, to take a concrete example, the more limited and deficient a musical instrument is, the less it will be able to play a piece of great sonorous richness. But since the fundamental reality to be manifested in the life of Jesus was that of the love and mercy of the Triune God, the limitations and weaknesses present in the assumed nature not only do not prevent this manifestation, but make it all the more luminous. For the more love abases itself and becomes self-denial for the beloved, the more it shows its purity and greatness. The weakness of the Cross, the *kenosis*, are not an obstacle to the revelation of God, nor do they compromise the uniqueness of Christ.

Elevation and *kenosis* are thus two principles that shape the way the Incarnation is conceived. Although they appear to be opposites, in reality they are directed to the same end: to show the face of God and his intimate nature. However, there is a certain dialectic between them, which is necessary, moreover, to prevent one of the two from imposing itself, so to speak, on the other. Christology would be on the wrong track if it were to present Jesus so far above earthly miseries that he could no longer be considered "one of us", or, conversely, if it were to exalt his likeness to us so much that we could no longer see him as the divine Face, as the saviour of all. On the contrary, the right balance between the two concepts allows us to understand and frame Christ's mission correctly. Jesus made God's sovereignty present in the world, but according to the new logic of service and self-giving. Though he was the Lord, he served in humility. Though He was the One, while He lived on earth, He made Himself available to all, especially sinners. His human reality was situated at the crossroads of a twofold intimate contact: with the divine Person, to whom He belonged, and with the world, to which He was sent, with the purity of the divine and the frailty and misery of men. He thus united the two opposites, because He came to unite, to mediate, to return the world to the Father. While he was in the world, his singular excellence (*uniqueness*) was "fused" with the imperfection of the world itself. In him, "ontology" and "history", "elevation" and "kenosis" were inseparable, reflecting and limiting each other.

*As for knowledge/consciousness*, these ideas lead to attributing to Jesus a complete and faithful knowledge of the face of God (the fruit of elevation), but also to admitting his submission to the uncertainty and unpredictability of history (the consequence of *kenosis*). *As for freedom*, on the other hand, it will result in the recognition of the perfect totality and purity of the gift of Being (elevation), realised, however, in the painful and opaque circumstances of history (*kenosis*). Only this balance makes it possible to give an adequate and harmonious image of Christ, of the "who" and the "how" of his ontology and his mission.

More specifically, with regard to the consciousness of Jesus, the intuition of a part of recent theology, which speaks of an "immediate vision", the fruit of the hypostatic union, seems to be correct. What is not easy to determine, however, is how this "vision" is to be understood anthropologically and gnoseologically. But this, perhaps, will always remain a mystery. Personally, I understand Jesus' consciousness as a space illuminated by the

constitutive relationship he had with the Father, which was at the origin of his being sent into the world. Perhaps the Rahnerian idea of knowledge as the "self-luminosity" of being<sup>11</sup> can be applied here: in man there is an inner light that illuminates the space of relationship with reality; in the case of Jesus, in that space also shone the light of the divine decision to send the Son into the world, of the mission rooted in his relationship with the Father in the Spirit. That light, in fact, did not shine only on Christ's human consciousness, but was reflected, as we have said, on all levels of his human life, from the biological-vegetative to the instinctive and vital, from the sensory and perceptive to the affective-emotional and volitional-rational. It could not be otherwise, moreover, because his whole human reality existed, so to speak, "in the mission", in the eternal act of his being sent by the Father. Therefore, all human dimensions reflected this light, which was not limited to the levels of the vital and intellectual consciousness, but also embraced the vast areas of the unconscious present in every man, the varied and manifold spheres which do not immediately present themselves to consciousness.

Through the human process of self-perception, Jesus came to know his relationship with the Father better and better. He knew that this relationship was present at the centre of his consciousness as something natural, something foundational. But not only that. Human beings are very good at translating their experience into *habitus*. All the operative instances of the psyche (upper and lower) and the corporeality are capable of producing habits as the fruit of action. Habits give freedom<sup>12</sup> and are, as a rule, the highest forms of revealing the self<sup>13</sup>. They are also a measure of human and personal growth, of degrees of perfection. As for Jesus, psychic, spiritual and moral habits "gathered", under the action of the Holy Spirit, his inner richness and wisdom, and made his relationship with the Father more immediate and deeper. "No one knows the Father except the Son" (Mt 11:27): Jesus always perceived himself in the Father, and knew that the Father was in him. The paternal face of God was always present in his soul, because the hypostatic union was reflected in all spheres of his humanity. This aspect, which was innate in Jesus as a fruit of the Incarnation, did not, however, exclude the possibility of growth and progress on the plane of inner perception.

It is a human characteristic to "accumulate", to grow "in layers", to "collect" in the spirit. Although to varying degrees, every moment and every circumstance of life allows us to do this. Von Balthasar said that self-awareness awakens and progresses when it perceives the self as a gift. The child's conscience, he said, is stimulated by the "mother's smile"<sup>14</sup>. In the case of Jesus, however, the "outer" smile of Mary and Joseph (along with many other experiences) helped him to better perceive the "inner smile", that is, the relationship of love that united him to the Father even before the world existed. Enlightened by the grace of the

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<sup>11</sup> See note 149. The idea is present above all in the work *Hearers of the Word*. The German theologian refers to the "presence of the spirit to itself", but this presence is also the space in which "the other" can appear in subjectivity.

<sup>12</sup> "Habit is that by which man acts when he wills", explains St Thomas (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 49, a. 3), following the Averroist definition. Cf. J.I. Murillo, *Operation, habit and reflection. El conocimiento como clave antropológica en Tomás de Aquino*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1998, p. 219.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 215-220. His considerations are also based on Leonardo Polo's philosophical approach.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. TD III, pp. 165-170; *Only love is credible*, Borla, Rome 2002, p. 78. Balthasar is inspired by some considerations of the philosophers Gustaw Siewerth and Ferdinand Ulrich.

Holy Spirit, his self-consciousness perceived in every earthly gift the link with the great Giver, with the first person of the Trinity, from whom he had received, in eternity and in time, the gift of being. The experience of the mother's smile and the other gifts of the world initiated the self-consciousness of the child Jesus in the task of giving adequate expression to his relationship with the Father, in which the word *abba* became established as an essential term. All the other events of his life contributed to delineate more and more in him, in his "conscience" and "non-conscience", the paternal face of God. Moreover, he had the lights and the extraordinary graces (those which, eternally, and in unity with the Father in the Spirit, he had predetermined to have) necessary to carry out his mission, to show the presence of the Kingdom in his words and in his works. This, among other things, also enabled him to give form and expression (in human words) to his unity with the Father. Like every man, Jesus learned many things, but in his way of knowing there was always something different and superior, because the divine light, present in his conscience, enabled him to judge and evaluate the realities of the world according to the judgement of the Father. His uniqueness embraced the whole range of his experience.

Similar observations can be made about the freedom of Jesus. The elevation of his nature translated into the purity of the goods and values to which he was attracted, from the fundamental one of fidelity to the Father and to the mission received, to the more concrete and immediate ones, such as love for the disciples, the desire for universal salvation, etc. His sinlessness was not only the "impossibility" of sinning, but an "insurmountable distance" from sin. In no way could he be attracted by that which does not originate in God, by that which originates in the devil. Jesus was the pro-existent one, the one who lived for the benefit of all, who spared nothing, and who sacrificed himself to facilitate the reception of salvation. An icon of the agapic love of the Trinity, he brought the loving face of God to the world. This divine "transparency" in Jesus' human freedom, however, was not separate from the opaque and unjust conditions of history. His warning "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41) also applied to himself. And not because he felt in himself the "*stimulus carnis*" of which St Paul speaks (2 Cor 12:7), but because, in the earthly condition, the flesh does not naturally tend to that openness to others which his pro-existent life required: it tries to resist what opposes it (fatigue, hunger, cold, the harshness of the earth), to impose its biological and psychic rhythms, to make its lament heard in the depths of the soul in the face of pain and deprivation<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, Jesus also experienced a certain contrast between the disposition of the spirit and the weakness of the flesh. Moreover, there was also an external factor weighing on the exercise of his freedom: human meanness. Love desires to be reciprocated, and the good done to others aspires to be accepted and appreciated. In the world, on the other hand, Jesus often had to "be content", in the hope that one day the incomprehension and hardness of hearts would be overcome and his love would triumph. Given the purity and nobility of his feelings, the world's rejection of him could not but weigh heavily on his soul.

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<sup>15</sup> Marcello Bordoni highlights it well when he says: "the entry of God's *agape*, as generosity and absolute pro-existence, into the human world, then generates the drama of a struggle, of a resistance on the part of the self-sufficient and self-satisfied human being". *Jesus of Nazareth. Lord and Christ*, vol. III, p. 517. This resistance is not only a consequence of sin, but is also due, to a large extent, to the very configuration of the material structures of today's world.

From what has been said so far, it is evident that the Lord Jesus must have been clearly aware of the meaning of his mission, of what he had come to accomplish. The perception of his relationship to the Father was, at the same time, also a perception of his being sent, of his being in the world in the name of the Father. John often underlines this, quoting in his Gospel the expression of Jesus "the one who sent me"<sup>16</sup>. Jesus was in the world by the will of the Father, to fulfil a unique mission: the mission of the Son, which culminated in that of the "servants" of the parable (cf. Mk 12:1-11). He was the Messiah, the Son of God, who came to establish the Kingdom of his Father. This does not imply, however, that he knew in advance all the details of the unfolding of the mission. The details did not belong to the original intuition, they could not be derived directly from the perception of the hypostatic union, because they depended on the contingent facts and situations of created reality. Unless revealed by supernatural inspiration, whatever the future holds can only be known in individual details in the form of a prediction, through signs that are usually generic and open to multiple interpretations.

Von Balthasar has repeatedly stressed that Jesus knew his mission day by day through the inspirations of the Spirit and the concrete circumstances of his life, from which he drew essential elements and data. He did not know everything beforehand, but he was really in the condition of the *viator*, that is to say, he was subject to the normal order of the flow of time: past known, present to be examined, future unavailable to be welcomed with confidence. However, what was said above remains valid, namely that extraordinary light and knowledge provided him with the necessary details to carry out his mission. Jesus was therefore able to foresee his passion, the betrayals of Peter and Judas and the destruction of the Temple. These anticipations were, so to speak, "at the service" of the full awareness with which he would give himself up to death ("No one takes it from me; it is I who offer it of my own free will": Jn 10:18), so that his sovereign freedom with regard to the events of the Passover could give figure to God's agape and be a sign of his dominion over human history. These lights, however, did not extend to the ordinary, they were not a kind of foreknowledge about a future or a destiny that Jesus could dispose of at will. If Jesus could say a phrase like "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mt 26:37), it is because he thought that his destiny was not "closed", determined "*ad unum*", and that the possibility of not having to drink that cup was compatible with the divine plan. However, as we know, Jesus entrusted his destiny to the Father, making the plan of God's unique will his own.

## *2. From the acts of Jesus to redemption*

As we have said, Jesus came into the world to establish the Kingdom. His preaching was aimed at enabling people (first Israel, then all mankind) to accept the Kingdom, and come under the sovereignty of God's love. However, for this to happen, man, with the help of grace, must have a righteous disposition. Divine friendship is not compatible with injustice, with a way of life suggested by the devil, the father of lies. The gift of grace brings peace, joy and divine charity into the soul, and only takes root if the person is ready and

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jn3,17.34; 4,31; 5,223-24,30...

willing to receive it. The salvation brought by Jesus thus implies a change of sovereignty; it is a deliverance from sin, a redemption. But we do not think it necessary to dwell here on these "elementary" aspects of Christian doctrine.

On the other hand, we want to underline that redemption, before being *something in us*, is *something in Jesus*. It is first of all realised in him, in his human<sup>17</sup> interiority, which is the place where salvation germinates and the Kingdom takes shape. The Kingdom is a new reality, recreated, reconfigured, in which God's love is made concrete, and which has God as its origin and author. Before it is perfected, as in the Resurrection, and even before it becomes, thanks to the teaching of Jesus, a form of life in the messianic community, it has a hidden existence in Christ: it is born and progressively receives form in his soul, it becomes, in his heart, an idea and a word of life. It is constituted "from" that light, which derives directly from the hypostatic union, and which allows Jesus to have an intuition of the Love that sent him into the world. The intuition of the redemptive yearning of the Father was decisive and active in every spiritual act of Christ; it was the most relevant and decisive aspect of his consciousness, the one that informed all the other contents, his whole inner world.

Jesus' inner world, like that of every man, was extraordinarily rich: it contained all that he had learned in his life, in contact with earthly realities. Jesus knew the promises of God to Israel, the messianic expectations of the people, the needs, the miseries and the sinfulness of men. By becoming one of us, he came into contact with all these realities. Thus, not only the Father and the Holy Spirit, but also the world, with its misery, "finds a place" spiritually in the intimacy of Christ, and precisely from this encounter between the divine and the human, between holiness and ungodliness, between love and injustice, something new could take place, a renewed reality could be born, purified from the dross and rottenness of sin. This new reality, which was born in the heart of Jesus, which arose in his conscience, was the redeemed *reality*, purified, redeemed for God, pleasing to the Father. Of course, in Christ's soul the Kingdom existed only in germ or, so to speak, in ideal form, but it was there, it had been born, and this is what is important, because for the reality itself, this birth already constituted a first and hidden passage from sin to grace, to the Kingdom, to the beauty of God's fatherly love. When contemplated inwardly by Jesus, the created reality appeared beautiful, devoid of all traces of sin, full of the meaning it has in God and in his plan of creation and salvation<sup>18</sup>. Thus in Jesus the redeemed world found its origin, its "cradle", the place of grace in which it could be born.

But the Kingdom is not just an idea, and is not born exclusively as such or as an ideal of perfection: it is first and foremost life. It is embodied in an existence, that of Jesus, and in a practice of life, that which he proposed to the community of disciples, that of the ecclesial "we". What gave substance and visibility to the Kingdom were the actions and words of

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<sup>17</sup> On this subject we refer to our work *Riportare il mondo al Padre*, chapter IV; *La redenzione come apertura della vita umana all'grazia* (Lecture delivered on 21 January 2014, on the occasion of the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas), *Annales Theologici* 29 (2015), 123-138.

<sup>18</sup> In the inner silence of Jesus, every man, however unworthy and miserable he may be or feel, is known and loved, esteemed and respected, as only God can do; he recovers his value in the eyes of God and is then handed over to the Father.

Christ, the fruit of his human freedom (with the different dimensions we have highlighted above). The Kingdom shone in his struggle against evil, in his attempt to lead Israel to a different life, marked by radical love, to unmask sin, the enemy of God, the "dark background" in every child of Adam, and in his commitment to restore dignity to those who had lost it, individuals and institutions, society and nations. In Jesus' contact with the world and the evil inherent in it, the Kingdom was shaped and configured; what the new life of the children of God is and what it demands was made explicit. Genuine attitudes of love, in fact, are translated into action in the trials that arise during mission. Patience in the face of misunderstanding, perseverance in carrying out what has been undertaken, generosity in the face of people's needs, joy in their conversion... all this is manifested when it is necessary, when external circumstances make it urgent, when it is necessary to take sides and show others the true Christian way. It is in these circumstances of trial that every Christian is measured by the light of Love and the concreteness of life, and it is here that the freedom of Jesus is put into practice as deliberation, as evaluation of the different situations and options, as a decision on the right way to face what the mission required each time. And all this then became Christ's word and gesture, external acts aimed at repairing what was "defective" (the man, the situation, the social structure...) and replacing it with his redeemed form, which had just taken shape in his heart.

This way of seeing the dynamics of redemption (the birth of the Kingdom) leads to the understanding that the whole life of Jesus is a source of salvation. He came into the world to establish the Kingdom, and he did not establish it with a single act, but with his whole life, which for man is light and strength. Each of his acts, especially the immanent ones (judgement, decision, choice...), had the value of salvation, it was the source of redemption. But also his external acts (words and silences, gestures and omissions, public activity and inner suffering) contributed to build the Kingdom of God in history, the Kingdom of salvation. Not all of Jesus' actions, of course, had the same scope or salvific efficacy: his Passover was undoubtedly decisive. For, in fact, the Cross summed up the whole of Christ's existence in a single act. The Cross, therefore, can undoubtedly be considered a source, a wellspring of redemption<sup>19</sup>, but, on closer inspection, it is merely the synthesising and extreme act of what the Lord Jesus ordinarily lived and accomplished in the course of his life. Let us dwell briefly on this aspect.

### *3. The role of Easter in redemption*

Jesus knew that he had been sent into the world to fulfil the messianic promises and thus to implement God's faithfulness to Israel. However, after years of proclaiming the Kingdom, preaching and performing miracles, he clearly understood that his activity met with growing resistance, that Israel would not convert and that its leaders would not accept his messianic claims. Jesus had sufficient experience of how skilfully the enemy of Israel and of God was at stirring up opposition to his message. He had preached forcefully,

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<sup>19</sup> Both the New Testament and the doctrinal tradition of the Church have always recognised the Cross, and Easter in general, as central to human salvation. This is based on Jesus' own words, who, among other things, said that he had "come to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28), and that his blood would be shed for the remission of sins (Mt 26:28).



sometimes with some severity, about the need for conversion in order to receive the Kingdom<sup>20</sup>, but the results had not been crowned with success. What opposed him was not only the direct opposition of the devil<sup>21</sup>, but also (and this Jesus increasingly understood) the religious institutions of Israel, so deeply permeated by Satan as to be dominated by him. Like the institutions (especially the Temple), national aspirations for independence, for glory, were not without sin, for they were not the result of a sincere love of God, but were often born of distorted desires, such as a lust for personal glory or for revenge against the rulers, and so on. Those who seemed most zealous, the Pharisees, were often tied to the mere observance of the precepts, to a rigour which substituted a system of external practices for the spirit of the Law. On these points Jesus had engaged in bitter controversy with the scribes and Pharisees<sup>22</sup>, but had only marginally succeeded in striking at their hearts. All around him he perceived opposition and stubborn resistance, and he perceived an attempt by the ruling classes to reduce him to silence and to eradicate his teaching.

His decision to "go to the end", to the point of giving himself up to the Jewish leaders, matured in this context. We cannot know, of course, what it was that enabled him to see, in his surrender to death, the will of the Father and the means for the establishment of the Kingdom in the world. From the historical point of view, he certainly had the necessary resources to reach this conclusion: certain texts of Scripture spoke of it<sup>23</sup>, the history of Israel bore witness to the suffering of the righteous, the fate of the prophets warned him of the possibility of having to give up his life, the fate of his kinsman John the Baptist was proof of it. But beyond all this, the action of the Holy Spirit enlightened him fully. Be that as it may, Jesus came to the conclusion that the love and glory of the Father demanded that he be delivered into the hands of sinners. In the Garden of Olives he saw the torment that lay before him not as a totally unavoidable necessity (for he knew that the Father's plan was mysterious, and that his *Abba* could spare him the cup)<sup>24</sup>, but as what was more peremptory, as what the situation demanded.

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<sup>20</sup> "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14): this is what Jesus preached. And when he addressed the cities that refused to convert, he warned: "Woe to you, Korah, woe to you, Bethsaida" (Mt 11:20). (Mt 11:20), sometimes even threatening that "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Lk 13:4).

<sup>21</sup> This is how John sums up the mission of Jesus in his first letter: "Jesus, the Son of God, has come to destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8). This is also confirmed by Mark in the passage of the demoniac (later cured) who, on seeing Jesus, cried out: "What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to ruin us? I know who you are, the holy man of God!" (Mk 1:24).

<sup>22</sup> "The scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat. Practice and observe all that they tell you, but do not act according to their deeds, for they say and do not do. For they bind burdens that are heavy and hard to bear (...). All their works they do to be admired by the people..." (Mt 23,2-4). (Mt 23,2-4). In reality, Jesus' exhortation is not far from that of the good Pharisees. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two, because Jesus did not allow discrimination between people, he did not divide them into pure and impure, righteous and sinners, etc., but addressed everyone: in a society where meals were of great social importance (cf. R. Bauckham, *Jesus*, pp. 44-49), he had no qualms about dining with or approaching the "imperfect" (lepers, publicans, prostitutes, demoniacs). He also relativised the prescriptions of the Law, concentrating instead on the fundamental provisions and major themes of the *Torah*, whereas the Pharisees often tended to identify righteousness with formal practices, which became a measure of self-righteousness to the detriment of love.

<sup>23</sup> The best known are undoubtedly the songs of the Servant of Deutero-Isaiah, but also some passages from the book of Daniel, the Psalms, etc.

<sup>24</sup> On these aspects, see our study *Sovranità divina e passione di Gesù*, *Annales Theologici* 32 (2018) 109-111.

At the hour of the Passion, Jesus saw before him the human resistance to God. He knew himself to be the one sent by the Father, he knew that he himself was the centre of that divine plan of salvation which the leaders of Israel were about to reject out of hand. He knew that in that hour the essence of sin, of the diabolical reality that he had fought against in his ministry, would be manifested. The giving of himself, therefore, was the act of faithfulness that radically opposed sin, the act destined to annihilate it, to defeat it with a final and definitive blow. If there is a "theological" difference between this (his surrender to death) and the other acts of Jesus' life, it is that now, before him, there was not something to redeem, purify or bring to birth, but before him was precisely sin in its most radical form: that of the direct rejection of the Father's love. At the hour of the Cross, the root of all true evil in the world was revealed: sin, the rejection of God, of his plan and of his love<sup>25</sup>. Though in continuity with all Christ's other acts, which were also redemptive, Jesus' self-giving to death "acted" at a more radical and profound level: at the level of what gives meaning to all creation. By offering himself as a gift to the Father, as an offer marked by the rejection of men, Jesus atoned for sin, brought it into intimate contact with the torrent of Love in his heart and removed it, deprived it of all space, showed who has true lordship over the world: not the devil, but the Father. The effect was the inauguration of a new creation, in which neither sin nor its consequences (suffering, death) have any reason to exist.

It is not the Cross, therefore, where the redeemed reality is born (which originates, instead, in the life of Jesus); what the Cross does by destroying the roots of sin is that redemption is *definitively* established, crosses the frontiers of temporality, transcends the transience of the world and gives way to the definitive Kingdom, of which Jesus' resurrection was the first fruits.

The Cross, in short, established the Kingdom, while the resurrection of Christ was the first fruits of the established Kingdom, of the new world, which arose from the elimination of sin. St. Paul affirms that, through the Cross, Jesus destroyed "in himself the enmity" (Eph 2,16), "in the body of his flesh" (Col 1,22), which means that he eliminated sin and all that condemns man before God. However, the place where this becomes evident is not in the mystery of the Cross, but in the mystery of the Resurrection, when the Risen One, by appearing in his immortal and glorious body, showed that neither death nor the other realities connected with it had any more dominion over creation. Sin, of which death is the "wages", suffering, which is its sign, and the Law, whose numerous precepts testified to man's injustice, were definitively cancelled by the Cross and were unable to affect the body of Christ, which was no longer a body of flesh in the Pauline sense of the term, i.e. destined for death, but *sōma pneumatikon*, a spiritual body, spiritualised and therefore impassible and immortal. The Risen One is the living image of the fact that human guilt has been erased, and has remained, along with its entourage of precarious realities, confined in a past incapable of progress. He is the symbol and embodiment, in creation, of God's eternal present, which does not admit misery, disintegration and expiry<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Some authors, among them, for example, Romano Guardini (cf.,) have spoken of the cross as a "second original sin"...

<sup>26</sup> Cf. M. Bordoni, *Jesus of Nazareth. Lord and Christ*, vol. III, pp. 492-493.

Easter is in continuity with the life of Jesus: its aim was the establishment of the sovereignty of God's love, revealed by his preaching and incarnated in his every act and word; with Easter the Kingdom was established in a definitive and transcendent way, annihilating all human resistance and all that is contrary to love. It made the filial content of Jesus' life perennial and universal, that is, the human, concrete and practical way of living in the Kingdom. After the resurrection, the sending of the Spirit gave humanity the possibility to participate in his filial life. With this sending, the mystery of Christ has been enlarged and extended: it has also become the mystery of the Church and of the Christian, a mystery in which every human being is called to participate.

#### ***4. Christ, Spirit, Redemption***

As the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* observes: "by the incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in a certain way with every human being". Different interpretations of this union can be (and indeed have been) given. Some Greek Fathers, referring to the Platonic idea of the archetype, affirmed that, by assuming an individual human nature, the Son of God was, in reality, united to all humanity. Jesus was the "concrete universal", representing the totality of humanity<sup>27</sup>. St. Thomas' position was somewhat different. According to him, the hypostatic union emphasised the capital position of Christ in relation to humanity: Jesus is the Head of humanity, because his perfect union with God made him the source of grace and regeneration for all<sup>28</sup>. Other authors, on the other hand, base Jesus' union with mankind on his love and the sacrifice of his life for them: he united himself to all, because he died for all. In fact, each explanation has its strong points. *Gaudium et Spes*, moreover, does not seem to opt for or offer a concrete explanation: it expresses itself in general terms and, when it speaks of "union", it does so along the lines of the "grace of union"<sup>29</sup>, that is, of the hypostatic union, by which Christ was and is united as Head also to the body of all mankind. Christ's union with mankind is therefore "mystical", "pneumatic", and partakes of the mysterious character of the hypostatic union.

Strictly speaking, however, the hypostatic union is not ontologically participatory. Christ assumed a concrete human nature and "personalised" it. He did not assume or "personalise" any other<sup>30</sup>. However, as a fruit of the hypostatic union there arose in the soul of Christ the universe of grace in which the redeemed reality was born, a reality which also embraces the everyday and practical dimensions of existence, which includes all that is truly human. The communication of Jesus' life to mankind is the transmission of this redeemed inner world. The Risen One communicates to us first of all the greatest good, his Passover, which cancels out sin, and then, on this basis, he communicates his life, the world of grace in his soul: filial piety towards the Father, the way of living every reality and situation in a

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. J. Galot, *Jesus the Liberator*, LEF, Florence 1978, p. 293; B. Sesboué *Histoire des dogmes*, vol. I: *Le Dieu du salut*, pp. 346-351.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 8., a. 3, and J. Galot, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. F.A. Castro Pérez, *Cristo y cada hombre. Hermenéutica y recepción de una enseñanza del Concilio Vaticano II*, Gregorian & Biblical Press, Rome 2011, p. 510. On this last statement we refer to this documented doctoral thesis.

<sup>30</sup> On this point, see F. Ocariz Braña - L.F. Mateo Seco - J.A. Riestra *El misterio de Jesucristo*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1991, pp. 168-174.

way that is holy and pleasing to God. When man opens himself to this communication and accepts it, he is justified and can sanctify his life.

This happens through the gift of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, who arouses in those who receive him "the same feelings that Christ Jesus had" (Phil 2,5), so that they share his life; not, of course, the life considered in the materiality of his story (the story of Jesus is always personal and unrepeatable), but his *life in the spirit*, that is, that spiritual attitude towards his Father (*Abba*) and towards the surrounding reality that determined his preaching, and was manifested in his works. As St. Paul affirms, by virtue of the Holy Spirit man can have "the mind of Christ", his way of seeing, which is the divine way of seeing, his "*mens*". In this identification flows the logic of the Incarnation, i.e. the fact that Christ assumed a concrete and historical human nature, and achieved salvation precisely by sanctifying what he assumed, i.e. by glorifying the Father in the many and varied circumstances of his life and mission. Taken up by Christ, incorporated and interiorised in his filial piety, these spheres of existence, these many and varied circumstances which the Lord lived in our favour and for our salvation, have opened up to a filial encounter with the Creator. They have become channels of God's friendship towards man, of a grace that communicates the redeemed reality that was in the heart of Jesus<sup>31</sup>, in order to liberate the believer and make him God's co-operator in the work of salvation.

Through the gift of the Spirit, Jesus' inner life has become a guiding light; his existence has become the grace of a new freedom, which allows the disciple to savour his condition as a child of God. And it is logical that this should be so, because man, created and redeemed in Christ, before all time and history was destined to live in the bosom of the blessed Trinity.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. A. Ducay, *Returning the World to the Father*, pp. 275-277.