

**Superina Paolo**

**MISCELLANEA**

**articles on various topics**



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**THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
AND  
THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNION**

**In the Name of the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ**



**As, at the beginning, there was perfect harmony between Yahweh and His whole creation, so it will be at the end, when all will live a new life of full spiritual communion with Yahweh and with each other**



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**THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNION**  
**In the Name of the Father**  
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**Prayers, studies, explanations and opinions**

**Superina Paolo**

**PERSONAL INTRODUCTION:** What follows is not intended and does not want to be a new or original study of the global message of Christianity, but simply a collection of articles (mostly taken from my other studies) related to what I have learned from the Bible and from many other history and science books.

**Note 1:** To God, His Name is given back: Yahweh.

**Note 2:** The word “love” (and its derivatives: to love, loved, etc.) is used in many situations and takes on many, even deeply different meanings. In this book it is used only in two cases: 1) In the man-woman relationship. 2) In the parents-children relationship. In all other cases, other words are used, depending on the context: affection, fondness, benevolence, goodwill, to be fond of, to cherish, to like, etc.

**Note 3:** For a proper comprehension of some New Testament passages and concepts which do not appear to be “Christian” or “Good News,” is important to remember that:

1) We usually don’t realize how near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism. All the first Christians were Jews and all their traditions would have convinced them to keep the Good News for themselves, excluding completely the Gentiles.

2) All New Testament writers viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ’s birth as “the last days.” They understood this period to be the “last” of the days because neither former prophecy nor new revelation concerning the history of salvation indicated the coming of another era before the return of Jesus Christ.

3) The actual meaning of what they wrote is still too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament ideas -it could not have been easy, for the writers of the New Testament Books, to detach themselves immediately and completely from the ideas they grew up with.

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**THE CREED**  
**of the universal communion**  
**Everybody's universal communion: the fundamental**  
**beliefs explained. Taken from: THOUGHTS**

**THE CREED**

I believe in Yahweh, the Only Eternal God, Creator Almighty of the Universe.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son of the human race, conceived by His Spirit and born of Mary on Earth;

Who preached, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried to pay the price of Everybody's ransom;

Who went to preach when dead to the Souls of the Dead;

Whom Yahweh resurrected, thus beginning His Kingdom;

Who is second only to the Father, Who gave him the task to improve the human physical and spiritual condition, and to administer Justice to the Living and the Dead thus making Everybody suitable to enter His Reign.

I believe in the Universal Church, composed of All Believers, which invites All Sinners to take part;

in the expiatory and corrective punishment of sins for Everybody's final access to the Reign of Yahweh;

in the Physical Resurrection at the end of time with the conservation of the Individual Personality;

in Everybody's Everlasting Life, made similar again to Yahweh.

## INTRODUCTION

A "Creed" is essentially a list of basic statements that try to contain and express the essence of the Christian faith and religion, of Christianity. Among the many versions already existing, there is one in particular -the Apostles' Creed- that expresses at best the universality of this essence. There are many slightly different forms of it, depending on the language and the Church, as different Churches usually give slightly different interpretations, tuned to the particularities of their belief. Nevertheless, all these versions are remarkably similar and have virtually the same meaning. We can really say that this Creed is good and acceptable for most Christians and that, as such, it has a general validity. However, just because of this, it cannot give complete satisfaction to a person who is looking for some better and deeper explanations. And it is exactly for this reason, to better express my own points of view and ideas, that I felt the necessity to write my own version.

When speaking about Christianity, it is essential to note that personal does not have to mean private; on the contrary, the spiritual experiences of a Christian have to be communicated to and shared with other people. To reach this target, it is not sufficient to write down a mere list of statements; it is necessary to give all the due and indispensable explanations in order to put a possible reader in condition to understand and, if he likes, to agree.

This Creed wants neither to be better nor more complete than the Apostles' one; that cannot be, as no Creed can be complete, and it is impossible to express properly and render the sense of Christianity by a brief list of short statements. In this version, I give more emphasis to some points that are particularly important to me and of which I have my personal interpretations. Similarly, other people, considering other points to be equally or even more important, will have their own version, one that can properly express their convictions and ideas.

**I BELIEVE IN YAHWEH, THE ONLY ETERNAL GOD,  
CREATOR ALMIGHTY OF THE UNIVERSE**

The first words are "I believe" -even if we should recognize that, in the case of a Christian Creed, it would be better to say "we believe," as the Christian faith is shared by all believers- and constitute a personal declaration: I am convinced, we are convinced, of the reality and truth of what follows; that there is only One God Who, furthermore, is the Creator of the universe. In this way we immediately point to our solution to the fundamental problem of the existence of the universe; of the two possible solutions, the theistic -with a God Creator of the universe, full of spiritual content- and the atheistic -with a universe existing on its own, void of any spiritual content- we opt for the theistic one.

To believe in a God, to believe in our Christian God, or not to believe at all, that is, to accept or to reject a religion, is only a matter of faith. For the believer, there is neither reason nor necessity to try and prove the existence of God; his faith makes it self-evident. The same is valid for the non-believer, the atheist, who has total faith in material and none in spiritual things; even though, in many cases, atheism is nothing more than an easy -and wrong- way to reject the religious hierarchy with its organization and rules.

Anyway, for the believer, the proof of God's existence is given by the existence of the universe, because God, for definition, is its Creator. It is also obvious that the universe, before coming into existence, surely did not have the capacity or the possibility of creating itself. It follows that everything and everybody, that is, the universe, the angels, and the human beings, were created by God Who, by having the power to create, is Almighty. Furthermore, to create, He had to exist before and independently of His creation; which means that He was never created, but always existed. Actually "time," as we intend it, does not have much of a meaning to Him who, therefore, is Eternal. By creating -the creation was and is His initiative- He is at the origin of all existing things and living beings; He is the Only God.

It is sufficient to look around with some care and attention to see that the universe is in continuous evolution and that it was purposely designed to produce certain effects and to give certain results by evolving; to produce exactly those particular forms of life it did produce. We can call it "guided evolution" because even what looks due to accident is, in reality, part of the general plan so much that, beyond the apparent disorder of the universe, we can clearly see the work of the mind of a God of infi-

nite power who does not neglect the smallest detail, and who has so designed life that lethargy brings disaster and even extinction, while activity of mind and body brings still greater life and gifts.

Once we have recognized the existence of God, what kind of God? If we use our reason, if we do not receive any help from faith, we can only reach the idea of a God of majesty and might, who leaves man completely separate and alien from Him. A God who does as He likes to a man who has no rights and to whom no explanations are given, left in the position of a slave without any hope. By reason we can only arrive at this picture of God; it requires more than reason, it requires revelation and faith, to see that God -Yahweh- is not only majesty and might, but that He is also fond of and takes care of all men, that His affection is inalienable and all-inclusive; nothing that man can do will ever alter it. That His affection is personalized, going in its fullness to each and every man. In effect, the essence and the center of the Christian conception of God is that Yahweh is fond of His creation and that, furthermore, He can never be completely satisfied until He is returned. Therefore, we may say that for Yahweh creation was and is a necessity; that He needs people whom He can be fond of and who will be fond of Him.

## **I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON OF THE HUMAN RACE, CONCEIVED BY HIS SPIRIT AND BORN OF MARY ON EARTH**

The second declaration of a Christian, after the fundamental belief in Yahweh the Creator, is his belief in Jesus Christ; he who is at the origin of the Christian religion. To believe in Jesus Christ means to believe in:

- a) The actual historical existence of a man called Jesus.
- b) The fact that this man was the Christ, the Messiah sent by Yahweh to change the human conditions and to open His Reign to all men.

Jesus Christ has a special and peculiar characteristic, one that belongs exclusively to him as the only Son of Yahweh and of the human race. He is not only "Son of Yahweh" -that in Hebrew means "similar to Yahweh" or "doing as Yahweh." He is not even only "a Son of Yahweh" -that means one among others. But he is "the only Son of Yahweh and of the human race." This means that there are no other human sons than him; Jesus Christ is the Only man who can truly call Yahweh "My Father." Being Son he is, as any son, equal in nature but subordinate in obedience to his Father. In the meantime he is, as any son, an independent person, different from his Father. Being the only Son of Yahweh, he enjoys a special relationship with his Father; a kind of relationship which is unique only to him.

- a) He has a special knowledge of his Father, at a level that no other human being can reach and equal.
- b) Yahweh gave to His Son a special revelation of His purposes and plans and made Jesus Christ the intermediary between Himself and men, with full responsibility and authority on the further evolution and the destiny of the human race. All this special knowledge and revelation, all this responsibility and authority were given to Jesus because he was always fully obedient to his Father; and, as a consequence, there is a very particular and strong link between Father and Son, almost a union, because of their reciprocal knowledge and mutual understanding or, in other terms, of their reciprocal love; where love is the bond that gives two independent beings the "unity" of acting and thinking in unison, of being in a very deep, fully spiritual, "communion."

Jesus Christ, the only Son of Yahweh and of the human race, had a woman as a mother. Physically, he was not created by Yahweh, but born of Mary, with the special and direct involvement of Yahweh; of His Spirit. Jesus' body and soul were generated, as for all men, by his parents' bodies and souls. For this reason he is a mixture of human and divine and,

as a consequence, he has a double nature; he is fully human and fully divine. To understand this double nature, it is important to remember that Adam and Eve, who are at the origin of the human race, were created by Yahweh to be like Him and to resemble Him. This means that there is "compatibility" between men's bodies and souls and Yahweh's Body and Spirit; they are of the same "nature."

Adam and Eve were fully human -mankind actually comes from them- even though they were created -in two totally different ways- by Yahweh. All the other men -who are their descendants- were, and are, generated by their parents, not created by Yahweh. Jesus Christ is fully human even if only his mother was human; one parent is enough to give the complete human nature. For the same reason, a girl born of parthenogenesis or a person originated by cell division, duplication, and evolution using a part taken from another man -a natural, biological, process that follows the instructions coded into the DNA and RNA- will be fully and totally human with all the characteristics of a human being: body, mind, and soul. In effect, it seems that Eve was originated by a similar biological process, with the further introduction of some genetic modifications to avoid having a clone of Adam and to change the sex from male to female.

For the same reason, having Yahweh as Father made Jesus fully divine, and he has both human and divine natures. The divine was limited by the human only during his life on earth; but, after resurrection, it is not limited any more, it is complemented. This is exactly what is happening and will happen, at a different level, to all men, whose bodies limit the activity of mind and soul during their life on earth. After resurrection, we will be freed from all these limits and constraints, even though we will keep our own -resurrected- body and our own personality.

Jesus Christ, having had a human mother, was conceived at a certain moment of "time," thus beginning his existence at that particular moment. Without a beginning he would have not been human, and the results of his "sacrifice" would not have been valid. Jesus Christ was and is Son of Yahweh, from whom he has inherited the divine nature, but he is not God; and he never said he was God. The main difference between the two of them is that Yahweh, Who never had a beginning, is eternal from ever in the past to ever in the future, while Jesus had a beginning and is eternal for ever in the future. Here, it is of fundamental importance not to confuse Yahweh -the Only Eternal God Creator Almighty- with His divine nature; Jesus has the full divine nature -he is a divine Being- even though he is not God. The only difficulty in understanding this con-

cept -and reality- is due to the fact that, actually, we do not know what the "divine nature" is and what its characteristics are. In other terms Yahweh can -He is Almighty- transfer His divine nature to other beings, as He did with His Son Jesus Christ; yet this does not make them "God."

Jesus was conceived and born of a woman on Earth; this woman, Mary, was not taken to Heaven to conceive and to give birth. This is to emphasize both the human nature of Jesus and his earthly mission. His sacrifice has full validity exactly for the fact that it was the sacrifice of a fully human being, and a human being has to be conceived and born on Earth -or, anyway, within the physical creation.

**WHO PREACHED, SUFFERED, WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED, AND WAS BURIED TO PAY THE PRICE OF EVERYBODY'S RANSOM**

During the first part of his life, from birth to adulthood, Jesus did mature -from a human point of view- and prepare for his mission, which began at the moment of his baptism when his Father entered in full spiritual communion with him.

The initial phase of Jesus' mission consisted of preaching to the multitudes and choosing and instructing some disciples. Preaching to the multitudes, to inform as many people as possible that the doors of the Reign of Yahweh were to be opened to everybody; to spread the Good News. Choosing and instructing some disciples, to prepare a group of people to be able to continue his mission of communicating and spreading the Good News to all people around the whole Earth. Jesus' preaching was not theoretical, and he did not leave any kind of formal rules on how to live in order to be able to enter the Reign of Yahweh; it was always applied to practical life and accompanied by "miracles" -healing and driving out demons- actions which demonstrated that even the human condition on Earth and its improvement is important and is part of the Good News. In fact human beings are composed of soul, mind, and body; the three of them are part of Yahweh's creation and are to be respected as they are important -even if not exactly to the same extent- for the present and the future life. It is essential to notice that Jesus was personally and totally involved in this activity; he was personally going around, speaking to all kinds of people, and spending his own energy -or power- to perform the miracles. He was not living in a luxurious palace and sending his subjects to act on his behalf; he personally traveled with his disciples, preparing them by practical example.

The second phase of Jesus' mission consisted of resisting Satan's final temptations through suffering, crucifixion, and death as final confirmation of his faith in Yahweh. His suffering, crucifixion, and death occurred under the Roman judicial system. The Gospels' references to Pilate, Erode, and the process are there to give proof of the actual reality of the facts described and, as a consequence, of the actual existence of the man Jesus Christ. The suffering was of two kinds, physical and psychological. Physical by the scourging and the crucifixion. Psychological by being arrested, judged, and condemned; by being rejected by everybody, mocked by the soldiers, and insulted by the people, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. In the ancient Roman world the crucifixion was



not only one of the most terrible ways to die, it was without any doubt the most humiliating and shameful because it was a penalty which could only be inflicted on slaves and non-Roman citizens. To conquer the human race -the world- for Yahweh, Jesus died on a cross demonstrating that from the lowest human level it is possible to rise straight to Yahweh.

After having being scourged and crucified, Jesus died and was buried. The Gospels focus very much on his having been actually dead and buried; it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to die, as all human beings have to go through death. If Jesus was truly and completely man, then he had to experience it. Furthermore, a rescue even a short moment before his death would have left open the doubt about the possibility of Jesus losing his battle against Satan's temptation exactly at that moment. Only his death canceled totally and completely any possibility of such a doubt.

By dying on the cross, Jesus "sacrificed" himself by a fully voluntary "sacrifice" as he was fully aware of all the sufferings he had to go through to accomplish his mission, which he always had all the freedom to reject by accepting Satan's proposals. With his "sacrifice," Jesus gave Yahweh the final and complete possibility -demonstrating to Satan that there was a man fully and totally faithful to Him- to open forever His Reign to all people. In other words we can say that, by suffering and dying, Jesus paid for the cost of releasing the whole human race from Satan's domination; he paid the price of Everybody's ransom.

**WHO WENT TO PREACH WHEN DEAD TO THE SOULS OF THE DEAD**

After Jesus' death his body lay in the tomb waiting for Resurrection, while his Spirit -his Soul- went to the "Land of the Dead" to preach to their souls. Traditionally, and wrongly, we are accustomed to say that Jesus, after his death, "descended into hell." This mistake is due to an improper translation of the words that appear in the original Greek versions. The word used in Greek is Hades, Sheol in Hebrew; and it did not represent hell, but the land of the dead, the place where men's souls were going after their physical death.

Before Jesus' Resurrection, the doors of the Reign of Yahweh were not yet opened to all men. As a consequence the souls of all the dead -with the exception of the few who had been chosen by Yahweh for some particular missions and for this reason were in personal spiritual communion with His Spirit- had to go to this Land of the Dead which, anyway, does not have any of the connotations of torture and punishment that the word hell includes; in this last case the word normally used by the New Testament writers was Gehenna, that is, the place of punishment of the wicked.

Jesus' Spirit did not only go to this land of the dead; he preached to them, to their souls, announcing his Gospel -the Good News- and declaring the remission of sins, which was received by those who believed in him, in the same way he did on Earth with the living. Jesus preached to all men who lived and died from the beginning of the human race and who never heard of him; not only to those who in every age and generation and in every race and nation lived rightly, but to all the souls of the dead who never had the opportunity to receive the Christian Gospel. From this moment on, it is always valid and true that, either in this life or in the life beyond physical death, all men are offered the Gospel of the Truth and Affection of Yahweh.

This means that there are no limits in space and time to the Grace of Yahweh which continues to operate in whatever other world and whatever other life there may be; that the whole universe in time and in eternity, here and after here, belongs to Yahweh; and that He has not only time, but also eternity to win all men to Himself. Therefore, the result of Jesus Christ's mission is destined to be complete and total because, in the end, not only all men will be saved, but even Lucifer will repent and will enter for ever -with all his angels- the Reign of Yahweh.

## **WHOM YAHWEH RESURRECTED, THUS BEGINNING HIS KINGDOM**

Jesus' body lay in the tomb, waiting for his physical resurrection, for the length of earthly time his Spirit preached to the souls of the dead. At the end of this time, "on the third day," he -his body- was resurrected by Yahweh and reunited with his spirit to give him the chance to demonstrate to all people on Earth of being truly the Son of Yahweh. To give this demonstration, and to be seen and recognized by his disciples, Jesus remained physically on Earth for "forty days" after resurrecting. During this period he, with his "resurrected" body, was fully independent of time, place, and space; in effect, while still in his earthly body, Jesus could not reach the minds and hearts and consciences of men everywhere, being confined by the limitations of place and time, the Risen Christ could come and go at will and, not any more subject to the previous limitations, he could appear when and how he wished to whom he wished. Nothing on Earth was a barrier or an obstacle to him.

Jesus' resurrection -and, as a consequence, men's resurrection- is at the center of the Christian beliefs as it is demonstrated by the fact of having been, from the very beginning of the Christian Church, at the center of the Apostles' faith and preaching. There never would have been a Christian Church had there never been the Resurrection of Jesus. During his earthly mission, Jesus was always fully aware not only of his imminent suffering and death but also of his forthcoming resurrection, which was clearly an act of Yahweh, Who raised him from the dead, entering actively and personally even in this phase of Jesus' "global life," as He already did in his birth and during his terrestrial life.

Before Jesus' resurrection, the doors of the Reign of Yahweh were not open to all men, but only to the good and faithful people supported by His Spirit -people "filled by the Spirit of Yahweh"- who were a minority even within the Jews; while, after Resurrection, these doors are fully open, ready to accept and allow in every person who believes in Jesus. The moment of his resurrection marks the "beginning" of the Reign of Yahweh; where "beginning" means open to everybody, not coming into existence at that moment.

In the meantime Yahweh gave Jesus the appropriate reward for his unshakable faith and for the suffering endured, holding the highest position, immediately after Yahweh, in His Reign. As his first action with his new responsibility, Jesus led, out of Hades into the Reign of Yahweh, all

those who had believed in him. These people freed from Hades entered the Reign of Yahweh with their souls -men have to wait for the "end of time" to be physically resurrected; whereas Jesus was, and is, there with his full Being; Spirit, Mind, and Body.

**WHO IS SECOND ONLY TO THE FATHER, WHO GAVE HIM THE TASK TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL CONDITION, AND TO ADMINISTER JUSTICE TO THE LIVING AND THE DEAD THUS MAKING EVERYBODY SUITABLE TO ENTER HIS REIGN**

"Forty days" after resurrecting, Jesus "ascended to Heaven," in such a way indicating the continuity between the end of his presence and mission on Earth, and the beginning of his presence and responsibility in the Reign of Yahweh.

By dying on the cross, Jesus opened to everybody the doors of the Reign; from that moment on, to all men is given the possibility -the grace- to live near Yahweh, to be in communion with Him.

By "ascending to Heaven," he -the Son of Yahweh- settled in His Reign holding the highest position, immediately after Yahweh Himself -"seated at the right hand of Yahweh," and, "all authority in Heaven and on Earth had been given to him"- and taking charge of the responsibilities that Yahweh assigned him -to be the "Lord of men" and "to judge the living and the dead." In other words, from the moment of his Ascension, Jesus has been second only to the Father, Who gave him full authority. This position of authority came as a consequence of what he did, following the will of his Father, for the redemption of the human race.

Jesus is the Savior of all men and, as such, was given two tasks:

a) To improve -as much as possible within the competition still existing between Yahweh and Satan which, as we know, will stop only after "the end of time" and of the world, and after the total conversion to Christianity of the last man- the human physical and spiritual condition on Earth by convincing more and more people of living a "Christian Life." It is necessary, at this point, to remember that there will never more be on Earth a perfect condition as it existed in the "Garden of Eden." This condition was lost for ever because of Adam and Eve, and the possibility to reinstate it is not part of Yahweh's plans about the destiny of the human race.

b) To make everybody suitable to enter His Reign by administering justice during life and after death. The Reign of Yahweh is the final destination of all the spiritual beings He has created; men and angels, and is the place where, at "the end of time," all men and angels will live together an everlasting life in full spiritual communion with Him and everybody else. Men are suitable to enter Yahweh's Reign only after having

satisfied His justice -the perfect justice possible only to the omniscience of Yahweh. This condition can be fulfilled during life -by the sufferings of life- and after death -by the sufferings of hell. At this point it is necessary to remember that not all the sufferings of life are for the administration of divine justice; part are tests people are subject to for making them even more suitable to the Reign, for allowing them to enter in a better and deeper communion with Yahweh. Part are for giving some people the occasion and possibility to express and demonstrate their Christian faith and piety by helping those who are in need. The administration of justice is a consequence of a judgment, and both the functions of judgment and of administration of justice belong to Jesus, to whom they were given by Yahweh. Now, if we consider that it is a matter of common experience to see that rewards and punishments -which are a consequence of the administration of justice- are only partially allocated in this life, it follows that Jesus' judgment and administration of justice, with the balance of rewards and punishments, have to take place after the end of each man's terrestrial life.

During this life and, if necessary, after death, each man is offered the grace of having faith in Jesus; grace that the man has the privilege to accept or the responsibility to refuse; in the second case even many times. To accept means to repent and, for this, to have the privilege of being received by Jesus and allowed to enter the Reign of Yahweh. To refuse means to go on carrying the full responsibility for all the sins -the "non-Christian" facts and aspects of a person's life. The refusal to repent makes necessary a judgment which at or after the end of life, carries the due punishment for not accepting the grace and the forgiveness offered. The place of such punishment is "hell," that is, the place where Yahweh is not, characterized by His total and absolute absence. Hell does not exist only for making possible the proper administration of Yahweh's justice; it exists mainly as a tool, an absolutely necessary tool, of Yahweh's grace. It is just through hell that Jesus can -by offering His grace many and many times- make everybody, even the worst man, suitable to enter his Father's Reign.

**I BELIEVE IN THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH, COMPOSED OF ALL BELIEVERS, WHICH INVITES ALL SINNERS TO TAKE PART**

The third declaration of a Christian, after the belief in Yahweh the Creator and in His Son Jesus Christ, is his belief in the existence of the "Christian Church" and, a point never to forget, in the Church's duty to invite ALL "Sinners" -that is, everybody, without even a single exception- to come and be part of it.

The Church is the togetherness, the unity, and the communion of all who believe in Yahweh and in Jesus Christ: the "Believers." Presently, the Church is divided between Earth and the Reign of Yahweh. On Earth, it is composed of living people, and so it is very far from perfect. In the Reign of Yahweh, it is composed of the souls of men waiting for their resurrection and of the few who were accepted directly with their bodies ("ascended to Heaven") by Yahweh. In the future, at the "end of time," and after the conversion and the consequent resurrection of the last man, the Church will be composed of all men who were ever born -all of them believers- and of all the angels of Yahweh -both the "good" ones who at the time of creation did not rebel, and the "bad" ones who did rebel but, later, at the end of time, will repent.

When living on Earth, Jesus Christ's teaching had the purpose of announcing the Good News that the Reign of Yahweh was open to all men; that the possibility to be in spiritual communion with Yahweh was given to all people, without limits and without exceptions. The Church, which has to go on with what Jesus began, is open to everybody, and is universal; "catholic," as it is expressed by the Greek word "katholikos" that means, precisely, universal. Intrinsic to Christianity is the invitation to take part in the Church, in the Community in which there are no barriers: "all people are one [Community of Believers] in Jesus Christ." This concept is perfectly expressed by the Greek word for Church: "Ekklesia;" an assembly of people having a strong common interest, in our case the Community of those who have accepted the invitation and the command of Yahweh, given by Jesus Christ, to come to Him. The Church, in its true essence, is a divine institution, not a human invention; when he was on Earth, Jesus gave more than enough evidence that he wanted to institute a Church and that this had to be open to everybody. In effect;

a) He did surround himself with a group of people -men and women- whom he had personally invited to follow him; the first "Believers."

b) He did expect from this group of people a clear and distinctive way of life which would differentiate them from others.

c) They were not a closed group; actually, exactly the opposite, because their task, duty, and function was to persuade as many people as possible to enter in relationship with Jesus, as they had already done. Their target was to gather all men into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, into the Community, into the Christian Church.

Unfortunately, as time was passing and the Church expanding, many different ecclesiastical structures developed from the original group of Jesus' followers. This situation constitutes the biggest of the many defects of the earthly Church which, because of its being earthly, does not have any possibility to be good and perfect as we would like it to be. Anyway, imperfect as it is, the Church is composed of ALL Believers; of ALL people who have faith in Jesus Christ.

To have faith means to be convinced that certain things are true and to behave accordingly. The fundamental Christian faith is in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of ALL men; all people sharing this fundamental belief in Jesus Christ are fully and totally Christian Believers and form the Christian Church. To be part of the Christian Church is not a matter of being "saint" or "sinner," as it is actually impossible not to be sinner, but of being a "believer." It does not matter, as well, the particular hierarchical organization, the denomination, and the physical place or building used for worship: the Church is composed by every one of its local congregations, by every group of people gathered together to listen to a message from Yahweh, to read the Scripture, and to pray. On Earth, the Church is an earthly necessity, and it is appropriate to remember that it was just within the Church that the story of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith were preserved during the past centuries. It is the Church, represented by all its members, that has to continue the mission assigned by Jesus to the first group of Believers; to carry his message to all people on Earth, to convince as many of them as possible to become Christian in this life. The Christian faith is not meant to detach and isolate men from each other, but to unite them all in fellowship. To be part of the Church means to share the common faith and to be part of a unity. Anyway, Christian unity does not mean and does not bring the obliteration of all the differences; it actually means the harmonization of all the possible differences in a wider unity, the concentration on He who unites rather than on the systems and theologies that divide. Unity means that there is only one Church; this is, indeed, obvious since there is, for everybody, only one Lord, one faith, and one God, Yahweh, the Father of all.



**IN THE EXPIATORY AND CORRECTIVE PUNISHMENT OF SINS FOR EVERYBODY'S FINAL ACCESS TO THE REIGN OF YAHWEH**

After his resurrection, Jesus was appointed by Yahweh "Lord" and "Savior" of the human race. As Lord, he is the Master of all people; all of them belong to him and have to recognize him as such, sooner or later. As Savior, he has to be sure that everybody will be part of the Christian community and will enter, at least at the end of time, the Reign of Yahweh. For this purpose, to make every single person suitable for the Reign of Yahweh, Jesus has to administer justice; the appropriate, perfect justice that only the omniscience of Yahweh makes possible. The administration of Yahweh's justice is possible both during earthly life -by the sufferings of life- and after death -by the sufferings of hell. It is important to remember that not all the sufferings of life are due to this reason, as it was and still is the Jews' point of view. Actually, most of the sufferings are tests people are subject to in order to make them even more suitable, to enter in a better and deeper spiritual communion with Yahweh. Anyway, immediately after death, each soul is brought in front of Yahweh for the personal judgment, when each person -good or bad, Christian or not- will be offered Yahweh's grace by Jesus Christ, who will ask him to repent -to feel deep sorrow and regret for his sins and omissions- and to become, fully and totally, a Christian. At this point, each soul is totally free and fully responsible for accepting or rejecting the offer of Yahweh's grace. By accepting, the person gives proof of being ready to enter the Reign of Yahweh; or by rejecting, of not being ready, and in this case is sent, for a certain period, to hell -the place where Yahweh is not. After this period, the possibility of accepting Yahweh's grace is offered again and again until it is, finally, accepted.

The purpose of hell -of the sufferings of hell- is the administration of Yahweh's justice to all men who have something for which they have not sufficiently atoned during their terrestrial lives. Hell, and the expiatory and corrective punishment it carries on, is not "eternal" in the sense of "without end," it cannot be because eternal punishment would leave an eternally divided universe, with part of Yahweh's creatures living in spiritual communion with Him and part totally separated from Him. Here, we have to remember that Yahweh is not only Justice, He is also and above all, Affection. As a consequence, a situation of eternal separation would leave Yahweh totally unsatisfied and full of sorrow; it would

actually leave the final demonstration, and the final victory, to Satan; not to Yahweh.

From the point of view of perfect justice, it would not be of any justice to impose, for the sins of a life-time, an eternal punishment; it would be a disproportionate penalty. It would be hard to recognize perfect justice in an infinite penalty for that which was done in the very short time of a human life. Eternal punishment would impose limits on the operation of the grace of Yahweh; instead, Jesus' descent to Hades is a demonstration that the offer of the grace of Yahweh extends to everybody and beyond time as we know it. Only the universal restoration of all people and angels can lead to a universe of perfect unity with each person in full spiritual communion with Yahweh and with everybody else.

After satisfying Yahweh's justice and becoming fully and totally a Christian -this process can take any time, from a very short to an immensely long one- hell is over; the person enters, passing through the final personal judgment, the Reign of Yahweh. During this judgment, Satan will point to all the bad actions of each one; Jesus will point to the good ones, to the person's tests and sufferings, and to the fact that he has acquired all people by his Death and Resurrection. As a result, at the end of time, all people will gain admittance to the Reign of Yahweh even if at different levels of communion with Him, because of their different individual capacity, which is a personal characteristic that depends on both the earthly life of each person and his attitude at the moment of the personal judgment. There is a substantial difference between entering the Reign of Yahweh immediately after death -as a result of a "Christian" life and of a prompt acceptance of the grace offered during the personal judgment- or after a bad life and a long period in hell: the "spiritual scars" left by a bad life and by the punishment in hell will always be evident and will constitute a limit to the maximum possible level of communion between this particular person and Yahweh.

It is, indeed, obvious that hell -the place where Yahweh is not- is temporary; at the end of the human race, after the conversion of the last man, it will be an empty place and, for that, the reason itself for its existence will end. At this point, having had the final demonstration that all people have accepted to live with and not against Yahweh, even Lucifer will be convinced of his mistakes, will repent, and will enter for ever -accompanied by all his angels- the Reign of Yahweh.

## **IN THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION AT THE END OF TIME WITH THE CONSERVATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY**

At the end of time, after the acceptance of Yahweh's grace by even the last man, and with everyone admitted to His Reign, there will be everybody's "Physical Resurrection;" the last step leading, with the universal restoration of all men and angels, to a universe of perfect unity and total communion. Yahweh has created man -to be like Him and to resemble Him- both materially and spiritually in body, mind, and soul; therefore, there is no part of man which is beyond Yahweh's grace; man can and has to live in the Reign of Yahweh as a whole. Man is a composite, material and spiritual, creature; body and mind alone are not man, soul alone is not man. Man is body, mind, and soul together. Yahweh calls man to eternal life; not a part of man, but the whole man. Then, to say that only the soul is immortal is to say that only a part of a man can accept Yahweh's grace and have eternal life. It is therefore necessary, in the very essence of Christianity, to believe in the resurrection of the body; in the "Physical Resurrection."

To believe in the Physical Resurrection means to believe that each man will have his own soul, mind, and body even when living his eternal life in the Reign of Yahweh. This does not mean that the resurrected bodies will be exactly as they were on Earth, where age, illnesses, and accidents are causing continuous changes; they will be resurrected by Yahweh as He did for Jesus'. The resurrected body will have different characteristics from the original earthly one; it will be a body made alive and vivified by the Spirit of Yahweh.

The real belief behind the idea of the resurrection of the body is that the individual survives as an individual, as a complete person. Christians, believing in the survival of the personal individual identity, believe that after death every man will be exactly, totally, and only he himself. Actually, it is not necessary to believe in the survival of the individual to believe in the immortality of the soul. The use of the word body in the original Gospels is due to the fact that the Greeks and the Hebrews had no better or proper word than "body" to describe "individual personality." They could not conceive a personality without a body because it is only through the body that the personality acts and expresses itself on Earth. So then, in modern words, when we affirm our belief in the resurrection of the body, the essence of what we are really saying is: 'I believe

in the survival of the individual personality. I believe that we will neither be obliterated into nothingness, nor absorbed in the divine.' In this way both the ancient and the modern man will express exactly the same idea and the same belief.

At the end of time all angels and men will live together an everlasting life in the Reign of Yahweh, in full spiritual communion with Him and everybody else, still conserving their individual personalities. To be in spiritual communion does not mean to be fused to, to become part of, or to be canceled as an entity. Communion is the highest level of relationship, due to their free choice and decision, that different, independent beings can reach, and leaves them totally unaltered and independent. Each man -and similarly, as far as applicable, each angel- will keep his individual personality as it was generated by his parents -inherited physical and mental characteristics-, shaped by his earthly life -acquired physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics- and molded by the possible spiritual life preceding his admission to the Reign of Yahweh -acquired spiritual characteristics.

**IN EVERYBODY'S EVERLASTING LIFE, MADE SIMILAR AGAIN TO YAHWEH**

The Resurrection of all men will mark the actual beginning of the New Life of communion between Yahweh and all His spiritual creatures. At the end of time, the final objective and target of the task that Yahweh assigned to His Son Jesus Christ will have been reached: after making everyone suitable, all men and angels -all Yahweh's spiritual creatures- will live a new everlasting life in His Reign.

The belief in the new life to come is a fundamental principle of the New Testament, which teaches how to live on Earth in preparation for another -better- life in another -better- world. To believe in this, and to behave accordingly, is again a matter of faith. Then, if we have faith in Yahweh, we are also aware of His perfect justice and total benevolence. Both His justice and benevolence demand another life as a necessary consequence of the reality of the present one on Earth. Necessary the justice, to compensate for the preponderant injustice of this world. He who suffered more and endured the highest injustice will receive the due compensation and reward by entering the Reign of Yahweh -as a soul-sooner than he who did not go through so much suffering and injustice in his earthly life. Necessary the benevolence, to allow each person to find a purpose for his life and to fully develop his gifts and character. It does not matter how short, incomplete, and limited the earthly life was; in the new one, each person will blossom to the full extent of his capacity.

Between death -the end of the earthly life- and final judgment and resurrection -the beginning of the new life- there will probably be a more or less long period of instruction, followed by the offering of Yahweh's grace, during which the souls of the dead will be properly prepared for the new life. This life will be everlasting, with a beginning but with no end. Being without end, it will be similar to the eternal life of Yahweh -which is, furthermore, even without beginning. After resurrection we will be -with our resurrected bodies- similar to Yahweh and, for this reason, able to live and share His kind of life. Surely, this eternal life will not be static, but there will be the possibility, actually the necessity, for an active life of growth and development, with the ever improving mutual knowledge and understanding leading to a deeper and deeper level of spiritual communion.



## **OUR FATHER**

**The Christians' fundamental prayer, taught by Jesus Christ himself.  
Taken from: THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST**

### **Jesus' teaching on prayer: Our Father**

[Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]

**(Lk11:1)**One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John has taught his disciples."

**(Lk11:2a)**He said to them, **(Mt6:5)**"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they like to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **(6)**But when you pray, go in your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **(7)**And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **(8)**Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

**(Mt6:9-13)(Lk11:2b-4)**This, then, is how you should pray:

**'Our Father in Heaven,  
hallowed be Your Name,  
Your Kingdom come;  
may Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And let us not fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'**

**(Mt6:14)**For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **(15)**But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

**Luke 11:1.**

*'One day'*: In Galilee, in the spring of the year 28, when Jesus was about 30 years old, between the first and the second preaching trip in Galilee.

*'Lord, teach us to pray'*: It was the regular custom for a Rabbi to teach his disciples a simple prayer which they might habitually use. John had done that for his disciples, and now Jesus' disciples -some of whom were previously with John- came asking him to do the same for them.

**Matthew 6:5-8.**

*'When you pray...'*: The Jews had a very high ideal of prayer, which was one of the three "acts of righteousness." But, exactly because of the great seriousness with which the prayer was taken, some faults occurred in the Jewish habit of prayer; faults of misguided devotion. Prayers tended to be formalized, in kind and timing -specific prayers had to be recited at a specific time of the day- and, inevitably, ran a high risk of becoming a vain repetition. The liturgy supplied stated prayers for all occasions, with the intention that every event of life should be brought before Yahweh. But just because the prayers were so meticulously prescribed and stated, the whole system ended in the formalism of a rigid and ritualistic timetable. Furthermore, there was a tendency to link prayers with certain places, especially the Temple and the synagogues, as if the prayers were more efficacious if offered there. This means to think of Yahweh as being confined to certain "holy places," forgetting that the whole Earth is His Temple. But what Jesus was actually condemning is the habit of praying to be seen by men. And the Jewish way of praying made ostentation very easy; they prayed standing, with hands stretched out, palms upwards, and with head bowed. Prayers had to be said at 9 am, 12 noon, and 3 pm wherever a man might be. And it was easy for a man to make sure that at these ours he was in a crowded place, so that all might see with what devotion he prayed.

*'Reward in full'*: Jesus said that, anyway, all prayers do always receive a reward. Actually, the phrase above should be more exactly translated "They have received their payment in full." The Greek word used here is "apechein," which was the commercial word used on receipted accounts, for receiving payment in full. What Jesus is saying is this: "If you pray in such a way to make a show of your devotion in the face of men, you will gain the reputation to be a really devout man -but that is all you'll ever get. That is your payment in full."

*'Pray to your Father...'*: Jesus declares that the most important point, when praying, is that all prayers must be offered to Yahweh, with no desire at all to be seen by other men in the act of praying.



*'Babbling like pagans'*: In a rigid, formalistic system, many times prayers slip out of the tongue with very little meaning, mostly as repetition of fixed formulas.

*'Your Father knows'*: Yahweh is everywhere and He knows the inner thoughts of everybody.

**Matthew 6:9-13. Luke 11:2-4.**

*'This is how to pray...'*: Before we begin to see the Lord's Prayer in detail, we must note the particular order of the petitions. First, before anything is asked for ourselves, comes Yahweh and the reverence due to Him. Only when we give Yahweh His place will other things take their proper place.

*'Our Father in Heaven'*: The word Father used of Yahweh is a compact summary of the Christian faith as it states the actual relationship Yahweh-man, a relationship of deep affection. Also, if we believe that Yahweh is our Father, we also believe that He is Father of all men who, as a consequence, are all brothers. But Yahweh is not only "Our Father," He is "Our Father in Heaven." In Heaven, to differentiate our universal spiritual Father from our individual carnal fathers.

*'Hallowed be Your Name'*: First, we have to understand the actual meaning of the words used here. The word which is translated "hallowed" comes from the Greek verb "hagiazesthai," which is connected to the adjective "hagios," which means "different" or "separate". This phrase of the Lord's Prayer means, "Let's God's Name, Yahweh, be treated differently from all other names." Furthermore, in Hebrew the "name" of a person has a wider meaning, which includes the whole nature, the character, and the personality of the person as he is known or revealed to us. Therefore, when we pray "Hallowed be Your Name," it means "Enable us to give You the unique place which Your nature and character deserve and demand." In other words, we have to give Yahweh all our reverence and respect.

*'Your Kingdom come...'*: It is evident that the Kingdom of Yahweh was central to the message of Jesus, and Jesus himself declared that he had to preach the Good News of the Kingdom because he was sent expressly for that reason.

*'Your will be done'*: We have already clearly seen that it is mostly important to obey Yahweh's will. The mental attitude, when accepting this "Your will be done," doesn't have to be of defeated resignation -because Yahweh his too strong for us- or of bitter resentment -feeling Yahweh as a strong enemy we can't resist- but of perfect affection and trust -Yahweh is as a loving Father in whose hands and wisdom we have to relay.

*'On Earth as it is in Heaven'*: Heaven is the place where Yahweh is fully present, is the society where His will is perfectly respected and followed. Earth, from this point of view, is quite imperfect. So, by this petition, we are asking Yahweh to make the situation on Earth as good as it is in Heaven; completely under His control.

*'Give us today our daily bread'*: This petition, simply, means: "Give us today the food and all the things we need for the present day." From this prayer it emerges that Yahweh cares about our bodies. And Jesus showed us that; he spent so much time healing men's diseases and satisfying their physical hunger. We have always to remember that Christian salvation is not simply the salvation of the soul, it is the salvation of the whole human being; of body, mind, and spirit. This petition teaches us to pray for the real necessities of the coming day, to live one day at a time, and not to worry and be anxious about the distant, unknown future. This petition gives Yahweh His proper place, as it is from Yahweh that we receive the food -all the things- that is necessary to support life.

*'Forgive us our debts'*: Here, we have first to understand what a debt or a sin is. (i)It can be corresponding to the Greek word "hamartia" which means "a missing of the target." In this case sin is the failure to be what we might have been and could have been. (ii)It can be "parabasis" which means "stepping across." Sin is the stepping across the line of separation between right and wrong. (iii)It can be "paraptoma" which means "slipping across." It is not so deliberate as parabasis, but it carries a very similar meaning. (iv)It can be "anomia" which means "lawlessness." It is the sin of the man who knows the right, and yet breaks the law. (v)It can be "opheilema" which means "debt." And this is the word used in the Lord's Prayer. In this case, the meaning is of a failure to pay that which is due, a failure in duty.

*'As we also have forgiven our debtors...'*: After realizing that we need Yahweh's forgiveness, we also need to realize that we are asking for a forgiveness proportional to our own. Jesus clearly says that if we forgive others, Yahweh will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, Yahweh will refuse to forgive us. It is, therefore, quite clear that, if we pray this petition with some unsettled quarrel in our lives, we are deliberately asking Yahweh NOT to forgive us. Human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are inextricably intercombined, and they cannot be separated. If a man has not put things right with his fellow-men, he cannot put things right with Yahweh. It is evident that, to be able to apply this Christian forgiveness to our lives, we need to be open-minded and to understand which are other people's reasons for doing something apparently against

us. But, most of all, we need to forget because, without forgetting, nobody can forgive.

*'Let us not fall into temptation'*: To the modern readers the word "tempt" is always a bad word; it always means "to seek to seduce into doing evil." The Greek text uses the verb "peirazein" which is often also translated by the word "test" than by the word "tempt." The actual meaning is to test a person's strength, his loyalty and his ability for service. Temptation -actually, testing- is not designed to make us fall, but to make us stronger and better. A man has to be tested before Yahweh can use him in His service.

*'But deliver us from evil'*: But there is also the power of evil in this world, the true temptation. So the petition is also to be protected from Satan, who is always working in opposition to Yahweh.

**Matthew 6:14-15.** *'For if you forgive... But if you do not...'*: In these verses Jesus Christ himself gives a clear explanation of how Yahweh's forgiveness works.



**MORNING PRAYER**  
**A personal prayer**

**MORNING PRAYER**

(climbing up a mountain on foot at sunrise)

Thank You Yahweh, my Lord, for this new day, thank You for all this immensity You allow me to enjoy, and of which I am absolutely not worthy. Thank You.

I beg You, forgive me for all the wrong I have done, said or thought, and for all the good I have not done, said or thought. Thank You.

I beg You, help me to be a decent person, to behave decently and do something helpful for others. Thank You. Or, better, I beg You, make me do something helpful for others. Thank You.

I beg You, help (*name*) and (*name*). Thank you. Help those who are in need, that is, everybody. Thank You.

But, above all, I beg You, forgive all and accept all in spiritual communion with You and everybody else, that is, in Heaven, with Your timing; included at the end also Satan and all fallen angels. Thank You.

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name, Your Kingdom come; may Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And let us not fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
Thank You.

Note: For the comprehension of the implications of this prayer, refer to "Miscellanea: Our father".



Sciarborasca. October 2012

**What does it mean to be Christian?**

**Which laws/rules do we have to follow to be Christian?**

It is clear that to be Christian means to be a follower of Jesus Christ's teachings (besides believing in his human/divine origin and in the action of universal spiritual salvation he brought as Yahweh's Messiah).

Now, from this point of view, who was Jesus Christ, how did he behave? Jesus was a Jew, and he followed the true Law of Yahweh, not the thousand and thousand rules dictated by human tradition (both those written in the Old Testament and those of the various written and oral interpretations/traditions). Those rules (essentially physical/material) have stifled, making it practically invisible and unintelligible, the true Law of Yahweh, which is totally moral/spiritual, never physical/material.

We also need to be well aware that, taking into account the history of the Christian Church (in all its variants and denominations) from its beginning to today, Jesus Christ was never "Christian" and that, if he had to come back on Earth, he would be rejected by all Churches, big and small, because all are founded on a hierarchical organization and on their particular interpretations and traditions. Jesus would be, for all of them, heretic and, for the Churches which have invented the dogmas, even schismatic.

In the New Testament, the true Law of Yahweh (a "Law" of principles, not of rules) appears much clearly than in the Old Testament, even if it is still too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament ideas (it could not have been easy, for the writers of the New Testament Books, to detach themselves immediately and completely from the ideas they grew up with).

In all of his preaching Jesus has left principles of moral behavior, not laws. To transform those principles in laws means not to understand him absolutely, means to fall into legalism, and Jesus was just fighting legalism. It is extremely difficult that the legalistic application of rules and laws could be called Christian. Jesus has never condemned legalistically, on the contrary, he has always made everything possible to solve all cases with more empathy and less judgment, that is, with plenty of comprehension and compassion.

Anyway in the Gospels, which refer what some people (the Evangelists) considered useful to hand down of what they remembered (Matthew and John) or had learned (Mark and Luke) of Jesus' life and preaching, the true Law of Yahweh is stated with total clarity:

*You'll be fond of [Yahweh] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and you'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself* (Luke 10:27).

*The [first and] most important [commandment of the Law] is...: [Yahweh], the Lord our God, the Lord is One. You'll be fond of [Yahweh] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength* (Mark 12:29-30, Matthew 22:37). *The second is like it: You'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself. There is no commandment greater than these* (Mark 12:31 and Matthew 22:39). *All the [Books of the] Law and the [Books of the] Prophets hang on these two commandments* (Matthew 22:40).

*To be fond of your neighbor as of yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices* (Mark 12:33).

*I [Yahweh] desire mercy, not sacrifice* (Matthew 12:7, quoting from Hosea 6:6, that is, from the Book of the Old Testament prophet Hosea).

Further, there are some clear indications on how to apply the true Law of Yahweh:

*If your brother... sins against you seven times in a day... forgive him* (Luke 17:3-4).

*In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you* (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31).

*Be fond of your enemies, do good to those who... mistreat and persecute you* (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-28)... *Be fond of your enemies, do good to them...* (Luke 6:35).

*Do not judge... Do not condemn... Forgive... Give...* (Matthew 7:1-2, Luke 6:37-38).

*When you give to the needy... that your giving may be in secret* (Matthew 6:3-4).



The Gospels refer a remarkable number of cases of practical application of these principles, so many that it would be too long to quote them (better to read the Gospels from the point of view of the true Law of Yahweh).

The true essence of Christianity is: To be fond of Yahweh and to be fond of all men.

Nothing else is needed (in terms of laws and rules).

Note: Quotations from "The Gospel of Jesus Christ. A unified Gospel, according to Mark, Matthew, Luke and John."



Sciarborasca, November 2013

## **THE CROSSING OF THE "SEA"**

### **Old Testament. Book of Exodus Escape from Egypt**

#### **Introduction**

The real history of the people of Israel begins in the early thirteen century BC with the people's escape from Egypt -the Exodus- under the leadership of Moses. The present form of the Book of Exodus contains several versions of the crossing of the Sea, as it is actually possible to discern three different descriptions of the event.

The major problem we face in trying to understand which one is the right one is due to the fact that the biblical writers did not share our modern preoccupation with objective description of past events. Much more important than the precise details was the significance of the events as a sign of Yahweh's presence to His people.

Most of the Bible is composed of the oral traditions that one generation passed on to the next and which, little by little, with the passing of time, were subject to more or less important modifications, until they were codified in their present written form.

It is now recognized -based on distinctive literary characteristics, such as language and style, and even distinct theological points of view- that many parts of the Bible "grew" over long periods of time, with the older books incorporating most of the modifications.

In the Book of Exodus, the story of the crossing of the Sea appears in vv. 14:1-31 and 15:1-12 (and finds its completion in Psalm 77:16-19).

In Ex 14:1-31: When the typical Priestly vocabulary and concerns are taken into account and separated out, it becomes clear that Ex 14:1-31 is composed by two easily recognizable accounts. In the first account, Yahweh gives Moses three commands (vv. 14:1-4; 15:18; 26) which are carried out (vv. 14:8-9; 21a,21c,22a,b-23; 27a,28-29). In the second account (vv. 14:5-7, 10-14, 19-20, 21b, 22a, 24-25, 27b, 30-31), no orders are given, and the conversation is between Moses and the people, not between Yahweh and Moses. The language of these two accounts marks them as written in the eighth century BC.

In Ex 15:1-12: In the third account, the particular language and the poetic form of this poem, celebrating Yahweh's victory over the Egyptians, mark it as much older than the other two, actually as one of the oldest compositions of the Old Testament -written in the twelfth or the eleventh century BC.

### **Texts from the Book of Exodus:**

#### **Tactical decisions**

(Ex 12:37) The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth...

(Ex 13:17) When Pharaoh let the people go, Yahweh did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For Yahweh said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt. (18) So Yahweh led the people around by the desert road toward the Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

(20) After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. (21) By day Yahweh went ahead of them with a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. (22) Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

#### **First account**

*Order 1:* (Ex 14:1) Yahweh said to Moses, (2) "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the Sea. They are to encamp by the Sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. (3) Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert'. (4) And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh." So the Israelites did this.

*Execution of order 1:* (8) Yahweh hardened the heart of the Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. (9) The Egyptians -all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops- pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the Sea near Pi Hahiroth. opposite Baal Zephon.

*Order 2:* (15) Yahweh said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. (16) Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the Sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the Sea on dry ground. (17) I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so

that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through the Pharaoh and his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. (18) The Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I gain glory through the Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.

*Execution of order 2:* (21a) Then Moses stretched out his hand over the Sea. (21c) The waters were divided, (22a) and all the Israelites went through the Sea on dry ground, (22b) with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (23) The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the Sea.

*Order 3:* (26) Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the Sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen."

*Execution of order 3:* (27a) Moses stretched out his hand over the Sea, and at daybreak the Sea went back to its place. (28) The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen -the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the Sea. Not one of them survived. (29) But the Israelites had gone through the Sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

### **Second account**

(Ex 14:5) When the king of Egypt was told that the [Israelite] people had left, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" (6) So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. (7) He took six hundred of the best chariots, with officers over all them, along with all the other chariots of Egypt.

(10) As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to Yahweh. (11) They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? (12) Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (13) Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance Yahweh will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. (14) Yahweh will fight for you; you need only be still."

(19) Then the angel of Yahweh, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, (20) coming between the

armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

(21b) And all that night Yahweh drove the Sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land, (22a) and all the Israelites went through the Sea on dry ground.

(24) During the last watch of the night Yahweh looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.

(25) He clogged the wheels of the chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! Yahweh is fighting for them against Egypt."

(27b) The Egyptians were fleeing, and Yahweh swept them into the Sea.

(30) That day Yahweh saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. (31) And when the Israelites saw the great power of Yahweh displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared Yahweh and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.

### **Third account**

(Ex 15:1) Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh:  
 "I will sing to Yahweh, for He is highly exalted. The horse and his rider He has hurled into the Sea. (2) Yahweh is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him. (3) Yahweh is a warrior, Yahweh is His name. (4) Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has hurled into the Sea. The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Sea. (5) The deep waters have covered them: they sank to the depth like a stone. (6) Your right hand, O Yahweh, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Yahweh, shattered the enemy. (7) In the greatness of Your majesty You threw down those who opposed You. You unleashed Your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. (8) By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. (9) The enemy boasted, 'I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils. I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.' (10) But You blew with Your breath, and the Sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. (11) Who among the gods is like You, O Yahweh? Who is like You -majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (12) You stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them."

(19) When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the Sea, Yahweh brought the waters of the Sea back over them, but the Israelites had walked through the Sea on dry ground. (20) Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. (21) Miriam sang to them: "Sing to Yahweh, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the Sea."

### **Analysis of the texts**

#### *Tactical decisions:*

- From Rameses to Succoth: The first stage of the escape, leaving the Nylus Delta and traveling eastward.
- Road through the Philistine country: The main road from Egypt to Asia through Palestine run almost parallel to the Mediterranean Sea and was heavily guarded by a string of Egyptian fortresses. The shortest route to the land of Canaan was through the territory of the Philistines in the direction of Beersheba and the Negeb. It run along the Mediterranean Sea and was the military and commercial road of the Egyptians. But the route chosen by Yahweh was southeastward toward the Sinai, to avoid possible military confrontations with the Egyptian guards who might try to push back the Israelites to Egypt.
- Desert Road: Leading south along the west coast of the Sinai Peninsula.
- Sea: In Hebrew "Yam Suph," traditionally translated "Red Sea," actually means "Sea of Reeds," that is, a marshy place full of papyrus reeds.
- Pillar of cloud... pillar of fire: A natural phenomena (even if probably a not very usual one) used by Yahweh to work out His plans. Perhaps it was a sandstorm with a whirlwind, lasting few days, which was blinding those coming against the wind and which, because of the electrostatic charges generated by the friction of the grains of sand, was generating intense glow and light flashes visible by the other side (v. 14:20).

#### *First account:*

According to this story, Yahweh instructed Moses to have the people camp "by the Sea" and then inspired Pharaoh to pursue them. Then Yahweh told Moses to divide the waters by lifting up his rod. When the waters were divided, the Israelites passed over between to walls of water. Finally Moses was instructed to stretch out his hand over the Sea and bring the waters over the Egyptians. This is the spectacular account we are accustomed to.

*Second account:*

According to this story, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting the Israelites go (in the first one Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart). Here the conversation is between Moses and the people, not between Yahweh and Moses. The crossing over was made possible by a strong east wind blowing during the night that dried up the water and the ground of the marsh (vv. 14:21b,22a). Then the Egyptians were halted by getting their chariots caught up in the ground that had become marshy again, and then destroyed. The event is presented as proof that Yahweh has been with Moses all along and that He will continue to bless his leadership.

*Third account:*

The many parallelisms, the meter, the rich imagery and the emotional tone indicate that it is a song. It praises Yahweh as a warrior who has shown His power in defeating Israel's enemies and it contrasts the real power of Yahweh with the arrogance of the Egyptians. Thus the oldest account of the crossing of the Sea is more concerned with the superiority of Yahweh (who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?) than in giving a precise description of the events at the Sea.

**Considerations**

At the end, we have one event, and three accounts. The event took place in the thirteenth century BC. The earliest account of it (*third account*) is found in a poem from the twelfth or eleventh century BC. Then there is what appears to be a prose presentation of the poem (*first account*) written in the eighth century BC. Last, there is a quite different prose version (*second account*) written as well in the eighth century BC, and which was later mixed with the other prose version, giving rise to the account of Ex 14:1-31.

None of these accounts is really concerned with the actual details of the event. Their primary concern is the celebration of Yahweh's power as a warrior (*third account*), pointing to the crossing as a sign of Yahweh's ability to fulfill what He commands (*first account*) and of Yahweh's continuous presence to his people (*second account*).

Modern readers would like to know more of the particulars, but the sources available are what they are. To try and determine what really happened is very difficult, mainly because the authors of the documents were more interested in pointing out the religious significance of the events than in providing their actual record.



Now, to try and find which one of these three accounts is the nearest to what really happened, let us consider few points:

The Sea called Red Sea (Yam Suph) is literally the Sea of [Papyrus] Reeds. Several reasons indicate that its location was further north than the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez (the northwestern tip of the Red Sea between Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula): The Gulf of Suez has no reeds, the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez is much further south than Pi Hahiroth and Migdol, the area where the Israelites camped was marshy -and this is not true of the land west of the Gulf of Suez- and from the "Sea" the Israelites went east or southeast into the desert of Shur (Ex 15:22), also called desert of Etham (Num 33:8), in the northwestern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Then, most probably, the Sea they crossed when dried was the southern tip of Lake Balah or Menzaleh.

A further confirmation that the Sea was Lake Menzaleh comes from the account of the Plague of the Locusts, where hordes of migratory locusts are carried by the winds from and back to the Sea of Reeds (Ex 10:13 and 10:19).

Before the construction of the Suez Canal, going northwest from the main body of the Red Sea we had: Gulf of Suez, Bitter Lakes (in partial communication with the Gulf of Suez), Lake Timsah, Lake Ballah or Menzaleh (which was part of the Nylus Delta), and finally the Mediterranean Sea.

An Egyptian papyrus locates Baal Zephon (cited in Ex 14:2) near Lake Menzaleh, about 20 miles east of the town of Rameses.

Even if Yahweh's direct intervention does not fit well with the mentality of modern readers, there are no doubt times when the Creator of the universe decides to intervene. Yet, to work out His plans, Yahweh does not need to perform spectacular miracles (like splitting and then closing the waters). Very often, if not always, His interventions happen in the form of "natural phenomena" which, anyway, are under His total control.

### **Conclusion**

From all these considerations, it is evident that the second account looks the more realistic one. Furthermore, it can be even better understood if we complete it with what Psalm 77 says about the crossing of the Sea:

(Ps 77:16) The waters saw You, O Yahweh, the waters saw You and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. (17) The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrow flashed back and forth. (18) Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, Your lighting lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. (19) Your path led through the Sea, your way through the mighty waters, though Your footprints were not seen.

And this clearly is the poetical description of the heavy thunderstorm that followed the drying wind of verse Ex 14:21b (the wind which dried the marsh allowing for the Israelites' crossing). A particularly strong thunderstorm accompanied by torrential rain that, first, made the ground muddy, so the wheels of the Egyptian chariots (and the horses' feet as well) were caught in and, then, quickly filled the marsh with water. It is evident that, in such a situation, the Egyptian soldiers did try to retreat to dry land and that, in the panicky and chaotic situation that followed, plenty of chariots, horses and soldiers went lost.

Sciarborasca, June 2012

**Example, Gospel - Unified Gospel** (Sunday 17-06-2012)

(Note: The Sunday Gospel is always taken from one Evangelist only. But when the episode taken into account is reported by more than one evangelist, this generally leads to a limited view and a partial understanding of the topic under consideration.)

**Sunday Gospel** [Mk 4:26-34]

**The parable of the growing seed** [Mark 4:26-29]

**(Mk4:26)**He [Jesus] also said, "This is what the Kingdom of Yahweh is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. (27)Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (28)All by itself the soil produces grain -first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. (29)As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

**The parable of the mustard seed** [Mark 4:30-34]

**(Mk4:30)**Again he [Jesus] said, "What shall we say the Kingdom of Yahweh is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? (31)It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. (32)Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

**(33)**With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. **(34)**He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

**Corresponding Unified Gospel:**

**The parable of the growing seed** [Mark 4:26-29]

**(Mk4:26)***He [Jesus] also said, "This is what the Kingdom of Yahweh is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. (27)Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (28)All by itself the soil produces grain -first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. (29)As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."*

**The parable of the mustard seed and the yeast**

[Mark 4:30-34 Matthew 13:31-35 Luke 13:18-21]

**(Mk4:30-32)(Mt13:31-32)(Lk13:18-19)** Then, again Jesus told them another parable and asked, "What shall we say the Kingdom of Yahweh is like? What shall I compare it to? Or what parable shall we use to describe it? The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all the seeds you plant in the ground, yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants and becomes a tree, with such big branches that the birds of the air can come and perch in its shade."

**(Mt13:33)(Lk13:20-21)** Again he [Jesus] told them still another parable and asked, "What shall I compare the Kingdom of Yahweh to? The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

**(Mk13:33-34)(Mt13:34)** Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd; and with many similar parables Jesus spoke the Word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. **(Mt13:35)** So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet, 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.'

**Mk 4:26-29.** 'This is what...': This parable is one of those giving us some information about the Kingdom of Yahweh. Here, as well as in a number of other occasions, Jesus uses some illustrations taken from the growth of nature to describe the evolution of the Kingdom. Nature's growth is often imperceptible. If we see a plant every day we cannot see its growth taking place. It is only when we see it after an interval of time that we notice the difference. It is so with the Kingdom. Nature's growth is constant. Night and day, while man sleeps, growth goes on. As well the work of Yahweh goes on quietly, unfolding Yahweh's plans. Nature's growth is inevitable. There is nothing so powerful as growth. Nothing can stop it. It is so with the Kingdom. In spite of men's rebellion and disobedience, Yahweh's work goes on; and nothing in the end can stop His purposes. 'Kingdom of Yahweh': The Kingdom of Yahweh, which began as a little seed, will grow, and will become fully grown the day when Yahweh's will will be done as perfectly on Earth as it is in Heaven. 'A man... doesn't know': This parable tells us of man's total lack of power. The

farmer does not make the seed grow. He does not even understand how it grows. *'All by itself...'*: The seed has the secret of life and of growth within itself. No man has ever possessed the secret of life; no man has ever created anything in the full sense of the term. Man can discover things; can rearrange them; but cannot create them. Behind all things there is Yahweh and His power and His will. *'As soon as...'*: Here, the parable tells us that there will be a conclusion, an end; that there will be a day when the Kingdom of Yahweh will actually reach full maturation. On that day all people will be gathered together, in spiritual communion with Yahweh.

**Mk 4:30-32. Mt 13:31-32. Lk 13:18-19.** *'The Kingdom of Yahweh is like... A mustard seed... Becomes a tree'*: In this parable there are two pictures which every Jew would readily recognize. First; the mustard plant of Palestine -which was very different from today's European plant. Second, in the Old Testament one of the commonest ways to describe a great empire was as a tree, and the tributary nations within it as birds finding shelter within the shadow of its branches. *'The smallest... The largest'*: The mustard seed was one of the smallest seed used by Palestinian farmers and gardeners, but under favorable conditions the plant could reach some ten feet (3 meters) in height. To be strictly accurate the mustard seed was not the smallest of seeds; but in the east it was proverbial for smallness. *'A tree... Its branches'*: This mustard seed did in fact grow into something very like a tree. The birds were very fond of the little black seeds of the tree and a cloud of birds over a mustard plant was a common sight. As well, all kinds of people, of every nation, will find shelter in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Actually, this parable says, "Never be discouraged by small beginnings." It may seem that at the beginning the effect is very small; but if this small effect is repeated many times, it will become quite great. Everything must have a beginning, nothing emerges fully grown. When Jesus said that the Kingdom is like the mustard seed and that it will grow into a tree, the point is very clear. The Kingdom of Heaven, which started from the smallest beginnings, in the end will grow so big that all nations will be gathered within it. In other words, in this parable Jesus is saying to his disciples, and to all his followers in future times, that there must be no discouragement, that they must serve each in his place, that each one must be the small beginning from which the Kingdom of the Earth finally becomes the Kingdom of Yahweh.

This also means that: i) There is room in the Kingdom for a wide variety of beliefs. No man and no church has a monopoly of all truth. So long as all men's beliefs are focused in Jesus Christ they are all facets of Yahweh's truth. ii) There is room in the Kingdom for a wide variety of experiences. Not all men must come to Jesus Christ in the same way. But all kind of experiences come from Yahweh and all men belong to Yahweh. iii) There is room in the Kingdom for a wide variety of ways of worship. One man finds in touch with Yahweh in an elaborated ritual and a splendid liturgy; another finds Him in the bare simplicity. There is no right or wrong here.

**Mt 13:33. Lk 13:20-21.** *'The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast...':*

Here we have another parable based on the activities of everyday's life, as in Palestine bread was baked at home. *'Yeast'*: It is a little piece of dough kept over from a previous baking, which had fermented in the keeping. Here it is a symbol of growth indicating that, as the yeast permeates and changes a batch of dough, so the Kingdom of Heaven spreads through and changes a person's life. As well, it signifies the growth of the Kingdom by the inner working of the Spirit of Yahweh. Now, it is interesting to note that, in the Bible and in Jewish language and thought, yeast usually symbolizes what is evil and unclean, because the Jews connected fermentation with putrefaction. Surely Jesus chose this illustration of the Kingdom deliberately. There would be a certain shock in hearing the Kingdom of Yahweh compared to yeast; and the shock would arouse interest and obtain attention, as an unexpected illustration always does. The lesson of this parable is that the Kingdom works unseen. We cannot see the yeast working in the dough, but its work is always going on. Just so we cannot see the work of the Kingdom, which is anyway always working and drawing men and the world nearer to Yahweh. With Jesus Christ and his Gospel a new force has been let loose in the world, and this force is working, silently but inevitably.

**Mk 4:33-34. Mt 13:34.** *'He did not say anything to them without using a parable'*: The people in general were not ready for the full truth of the Gospel, so Jesus used parables to illustrate truths, stimulate thinking and awaken spiritual perception. When alone with his disciples Jesus taught more specifically, but even they usually needed to have things explained. This passage gives us also a picture of an inner circle to whom Jesus

could really and fully explain all things. After Jesus had spoken the crowds dispersed; but there was a little company that stayed with him and did not want to leave him. It was to them that he explained the meaning of everything.

**Mt 13:35.** *'So was fulfilled...'*: A citation from Psalm 78:2. Matthew's Gospel was written for the Jewish Christian community in Syrian Antioch. It was written particularly to demonstrate to the Jews that all the prophecies of the Old Testament were actually fulfilled in Jesus and that, therefore, he must be the promised Messiah.





Sciarborasca, January 2013

## **NOAH'S DELUGE**

### **Old Testament. Book of Genesis The Universal Flood**

#### **Text from the Book of Genesis:**

*(Genesis 6:17) I [Yahweh] am going to bring floodwaters on the land [of Mesopotamia] to destroy...*

*(7:4) ...I [Yahweh] will send rain on the land [of Mesopotamia] for forty days and forty nights and I will wipe from the face of the land [of Mesopotamia]...*

*(7:11) In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month -on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. (12) And rain fell on the land [of Mesopotamia] for forty days and forty nights. (17) For forty days the flood kept coming on the land [of Mesopotamia], and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the land [of Mesopotamia]. (18) The waters rose and increased greatly on the land [of Mesopotamia]... (19) ...and covered the mountains till a depth of more than twenty feet. (24) And the high waters flooded the land [of Mesopotamia] for a hundred and fifty days.*

*(8:1) Then Yahweh... sent a wind over the land [of Mesopotamia], and the waters receded. (2) The springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. (3) And the waters receded steadily from the land [of Mesopotamia]. (4) After one hundred and fifty days of the waters going down, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest... (5) The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the mountains became entirely visible.*

*(13) By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the waters had receded from the land [of Mesopotamia]... (14) By the twenty seventh day of the second month the land [of Mesopotamia] was completely dry.*

First of all, it is important to understand that Noah's Flood was clearly an intervention of Yahweh, through a natural phenomena (even if not a very common one) used by Yahweh to work out His plans.

Second, even if some believe that Noah's deluge was worldwide, partly because of the apparently universal terms of the text, it is clear that we have to understand the flood as having been regional -one that destroyed everything in its wake, but that was of relatively limited scope and effect; universal only from the stand-point of view of the geographical knowledge of Moses' time.

In effect, the Hebrew words "eretz" (meaning earth, land or soil) and "adamah" (soil) were both always translated in the Latin "terra", considered as the name of the planet Earth. But in Latin terra generally means land or soil; it does not typically imply the whole planet. And this gives clear support -straight from the Bible itself- to the view that Noah's Flood was an important, yet local event. To note that in many other passages eretz is translated as ground or land when it clearly refers to a region as the land of Israel or Canaan.

Since the purpose of the deluge was to destroy sinful mankind, and since the writer clearly had in mind only the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, the flood did not have to be worldwide to destroy all of them.

Starting in 1922 with Leonard Woolley, many archaeologists began excavations in Mesopotamia looking for the remains of biblical ancient cities and for evidence of a civilization-ending flood. With everybody's surprise, their excavations brought to light the deposits left by a number of different floods, none of them "universal." Although there was no consensus among the archaeologists as to which, if any, of these deposits was from Noah's Flood, when the Tigris River flooded in 1954 and submerged the floodplain for hundred of miles around Baghdad, everybody realized that enormous floods could actually submerge the area. And the story of a particularly great flood that submerged the world (actually, Mesopotamia) leaving few survivors (men and their animals) gained credibility. This means that the narrative of the Flood records some terrible but local cataclysm which devastated the original seat of the Semitic race.

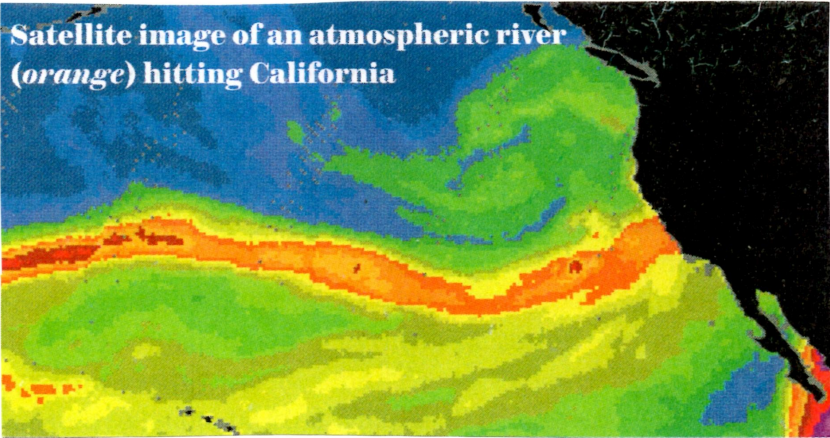
Anyway, from the excavations in the area, it appears evident that a major flood hit Mesopotamia more than 4,000 years before Christ, covering an area 350 miles long and 100 miles wide. To note that, at the time, the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers flew separately into the Persian Gulf, about 80 miles north-east of the present, common estuary.

A highly possible explanation for Noah's Flood involves both the well known and devastating effect of a Tsunami [*the springs of the great deep bust forth*] coming from the ocean through the Persian Gulf and of the recently discovered "atmospheric rivers" [*the floodgates of the heavens were opened*] (see "The coming Megafloods" -Scientific American, January 2013, pages 58-65). To note that geologic evidence shows that truly massive floods, caused by rainfall alone, are a recurrence all around the Earth.

An atmospheric river is a long stream of concentrated water vapor (200 - 250 miles wide) about a mile above the ocean and that extend for thousands of miles. Strong winds within the river bring very humid air from the tropics and the river also pulls in atmospheric moisture along its path. When the river strikes a coast or a mountain range, the warm, moist air rises up; as it does, the air cools and the moisture condenses into abundant rain or snow. To note that these rivers of vapor can carry as much water as 10 to 15 Mississippi River.

A recent and well documented example of a flood due to the Atmospheric River phenomena is the Megaflood that hit California on Christmas Eve of 1861 and continued without interruption for 43 days. The deluge quickly transformed the rivers running down from the Sierra Nevada mountains into raging torrents that swept away entire communities and mining settlements, turning the Central Valley into an inland sea 300 miles long and 20 miles wide, and causing the death of thousands of people. And the town of Sacramento was submerged for six months under 10 feet of muddy water.

A satellite image of an atmospheric river hitting California can be seen next page (from "Before the deluge" -Scientific American, March 2013, page 12).



Sciarborasca, February 2013

## **YAHWEH's WISDOM "PERSONIFICATION"**

### **Old Testament. Book of Proverbs**

#### **Introduction**

The Hebrew word translated "proverb" is also translated "taunt" (Isaiah 14:4), "oracle" (Numbers 23:7,18), and "parable" (Ezekiel 17:2); so its meaning is considerably broader than the English term. A common feature of all these proverbs is the use of figurative language. Although the Book of Proverbs is more practical than theological, Yahweh's work as Creator is especially highlighted. The role of Wisdom in creation is the subject of Pv 8:22-31, where Wisdom as an attribute of Yahweh is personified.

The first nine chapters of the book contain a series of discourses that contrast the way and benefits of wisdom with the way of the fool. We find Wisdom personification in Pv 1:20-33; 3:13-18; 4:6-9; 8:1-21; 9:1-5; 14:33 -where there is no actual distinction between Wisdom personified and Yahweh's words- and also, much more interestingly, in Pv 8:22-31 -where the subject is the role of Wisdom in creation, and Wisdom -personified as a woman- is seen as an attribute of Yahweh.

#### **Texts from the Book of Proverbs:**

*(Pv 1:20) Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; (21) at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: (22) "How long will you... (23) ...my rebuke... I would have... my heart... my thoughts. (24) ...you rejected me when I called... when I stretched out my hand, (25) ...you ignored my advice... my rebuke, (26-27) I in turn will laugh... I will mock... (28) ...they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. (29) ...they... did not choose to fear the Lord [Yahweh], (30-32) ...they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke... (33) ...whoever listens to me..."*

*(Pv 3:13) ...wisdom... (14) ...she is... and yields... (15) She is... (16) Long life is in her right hand; in her left are... (17) Her ways are... all her paths are... (18) She is...*

**(Pv 4:6)** ...wisdom... she will protect you; ...she will watch over you. (7-8) Wisdom ...she will exalt you; ...she will honor you. (9) She will set a garland ...and present you...

**(Pv 8:1-2)** ...wisdom ...takes her stand; (3) ...she cries aloud: (4-5) "...I call out; I raise my voice... (6) ...I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak... (7) My mouth speaks ...my lips... (8-11) ...the words of my mouth... (12) I, wisdom ...possess knowledge and discretion. (13) I hate pride and arrogance... (14) ...I have understanding and power. (15-16) By me kings reign... (17) I like those who... (18) With me are riches and honor... (19) My fruit is better than... (20-21) I walk in the way of righteousness..."

**(Pv 9:1-2)** Wisdom has built... has prepared... set her table... (3) ...she calls... (4) ...she says... (5) Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.

**(Pv14:33)** Wisdom... lets herself be known.

**(Pv 8:22)** The Lord [Yahweh] brought me [wisdom] forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old; (23) I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. (24) When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; (25) before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, (26) before He made the Earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. (27) I was there when He settled the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, (28) when He established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, (29) when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His commands, and when He marked out the foundations of the Earth. (30) Then I was the craftsman at His side, I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, (31) rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind.

### **Now, why this personification of Yahweh's wisdom?**

One of the possible reasons is that it is a poetical answer to people like, as an example, Jack Miles (a former Jesuit, formed at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, holding a doctorate in Near Eastern Languages from Harvard University) who, in his book "GOD, a biography," asserts that at the time of creation

(of the Earth, not even of the universe!) Yahweh was an unexperienced and unskilled creator and that His behavior and character changed continuously from the moment of man creation onwards. And, to support this idea, the book analyses the Old Testament (in the Hebrew version) from a literary point of view, showing what, for its author, are the proofs of Yahweh's continuous changes.

To understand the reality, we have to consider that the Hebrew word "hokmah" usually translated "wisdom" is also normally used for a man's working skill (craftsmen, sailors, administrators, counselors, etc.) Therefore, a man skillful in his trade is "wise" and his "wisdom" is his "skillfulness."

Now, Pv 8:23 says that Wisdom existed before Yahweh created the world and Pv 8:30-31 that Wisdom had been a "skilled craftsman" at Yahweh's side when He created the world. This attribute of Yahweh, personified as an assistant in His creative work, poetically indicates that Yahweh was "wise" or "skillful" from the beginning in what He created. The meaning is that His Creation was -at the beginning, before Satan's rebellion- perfect because Yahweh's "skill" in creating was perfect.

And this is confirmed by Pv 3:19-20:

*(Pv 3:19-20) By [His] wisdom the Lord [Yahweh] laid the Earth's foundations, by [His] understanding He set the heavens in place; by His knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.*





Sciarborasca, March-April 2013

### **The Old Testament:**

#### **What does it represent? Which is its true meaning?**

##### Foreword

The main obstacle we encounter to clarify the basic concepts of the Old Testament is the nature itself of it, as it includes a wide variety of literary forms: narratives, poems, wisdom sayings, prophetic oracles, etc. It is a collection of writings, not a coherently organized theological treatise. Furthermore, the growth of this collection into the present-day canon was a long, complicated process, with plenty of successive accretions.

The whole Bible, Old and New Testament, is in essence the history of Yahweh's interventions in the development of the human race. Interventions assuming forms and giving results deeply different in the period of the single nation (Israel - Old Testament) than in the period of the whole mankind (Christianity - New Testament).

By reading the Bible we have clear indications that Yahweh's personal intervention is the rare exception, not the normality. Furthermore, when He, the Creator of the Universe, intervenes in the matters of the world, His interventions are almost never direct and personal. Usually, behind His interventions there are some natural phenomena or events used by Yahweh to accomplish His plans. Yet sometime (a minimum number of times) He intervenes directly as, for example, when creating the human race; when choosing a particular population and some of its leaders and prophets; when conceiving His Son Jesus Christ; etc.

##### Fundamental differences between Old and New Testament

The Old Testament is the history first, of the Creation and then, of the vicissitudes of Israel, Yahweh's chosen people. It actually is -as also demonstrated by plenty of archaeological findings- a collection of books of biased history written in a way, the way of ancient times, which does not appear "historical" to modern readers. Anyway, the Bible speaks of Yahweh's influence on the life and behavior of a small population over a period of few millennia; life and behavior absolutely "terrestrial," that is, quite far from what they should have been.

In the New Testament Yahweh's direct intervention is referred to in what concerns the procreation, the baptism, the confirmation (at the Transfiguration) and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son and His Messiah. In everything else, the narration of the New Testament is conceptually different from the global narration of the Old Testament because, even if it refers -in the four Gospels- the history of Jesus Christ's preaching, it does so with a purely moral intent. Only the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul are a kind of "historical" narrations of the first Christians' vicissitudes.

The great difference is the fact that Christianity -the New Testament- applies to the whole world, without any distinction of country and race, while the Old Testament is only concerned with the -practical- history of a small population: Israel.

To note that the spiritual and moral concepts and principles introduced by Jesus Christ -in effect, only made clear and not "militarily" compulsory- are nothing else than those already present in the Old Testament where they are obscured -or made non understandable- by the structure of the human "traditions" developed around the True Law of Yahweh with the passing of time.

A consideration: To be comparable to the Old Testament, nowadays the "New Testament" would have to be a collection of books which, in this case, would have to include: 1) All the already existing New Testament's books. 2) A series of history books with the biased accounts of the expansion and the development of Christianity in the world, along with the vicissitudes of many populations, of their leaders and of their saints -the last ones corresponding to the Old Testament's prophets. 3) Some catechism books with all the rules, laws (dogmas, doctrines, etc.), traditions and liturgies developed in the last two millennia. This hypothetical collection of books would show how much "terrestrial" was and still is the Christians' behavior, in spite of the New Testament's moral teaching, and would make much easier to understand the true moral meaning of the Old Testament.

### The Old Testament: Israel's history

Reading the Old Testament, it is quite often hard to retrieve and understand what really happened as, even in the so-called "historical books" (such as 1 and 2 Kings or Ezra) the writers were mainly concerned with their religious and theological significance and have descri-

bed the various characters according to their conformity to religious stance. In the Old Testament, the events are always "interpreted," never rendered with photographic accuracy.

Israel's history can be divided in two fundamental periods: The Period of the Ancestors (from Abraham to the end of slavery in Egypt) and the Period of Life as a Nation (from the escape out of Egypt to the completion of the reconstruction of the Temple after the end of the Babylonian Captivity).

Period of the Ancestors: The stories about the great ancestors of Israel -the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob- give an idea of Near Eastern life in the second millennium BC. The Patriarchs have been historical persons, and the accounts about them contain names, legal customs and other informations that are confirmed by contemporary extra-biblical documents and archeological findings. But the narratives about the Patriarchs are not the kind of solid factual writings from which modern historians could develop a coherent history of Israel's beginning.

Period of Life as a Nation: The real history of Israel begins in the early thirteen century BC with the people's escape from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. And it is clear that it would be difficult to explain Israel's history and religion without recognizing the historical reality of the exodus and of the leadership of Moses. The forty years of wandering in the desert are easily explained considering that a population accustomed to slavery could not have been in condition to military conquer a country suitable for their future existence. They had to wait for a new, free generation psychologically able to fight. And, in the meantime, their religion was taking shape, including even catastrophic events seen as directly sent by Yahweh. The entrance in the land of Canaan took place in the late thirteen century BC and is symbolically depicted in the biblical account. In effect, Israel did not gain complete control of the land until the time of King David. In the meantime, not only many Canaanite cities did remain unconquered, but also there were invasions by the Philistines, Moabites, Midianites and Ammonites. And all the events of this period, the period of the Judges, are depicted in the Old Testament as direct results of the people's obedience/disobedience to Yahweh. Then the period of the Kings Saul, David and Solomon (1010 - 930 BC) was marked by military and political success and, as a consequence, it is referred to as a period of obedience to Yahweh, a period gifted by His benevolence. During this period, King David brought political and

religious unity to Israel by making Jerusalem its capital. The sagas of the Patriarchs, the Books of Exodus and Judges were revised, collected and put in written form at that time. King Solomon built Jerusalem Temple making it for ever the center of Israel's religion. The political and social disasters following Solomon's death (the split of Israel in two kingdoms and their further vicissitudes) were attributed to Solomon and his successors' sins. Anyway, all the relevant accounts are true relations of historical facts, even if always seen through the religious optic of people's obedience-disobedience / Yahweh's benevolence-punishment. The same considerations apply to the following periods, till the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the people's deportation, followed by the return in Israel and the restoration of Jerusalem Temple and City (even if always under Persian domination). And the Bible's account stops there, and does not refer the fact that Israel was never more free (Persian, Hellenistic -with Alexander the Great-, Ptolemaic -Egypt-, Seleucidic -Syria-, Hasmo-nean, and finally Roman domination).

### Conclusions

From what said above, it clearly results that the Old Testament represents the political history of the people of Israel intertwined with the history of the development of its religion. And it is also clear that, to understand its true religious and moral meaning we have to use the "lens" of the New Testament, as only in this way we can separate the True Law of Yahweh from the Old testament's imposing superstructure of human rules and traditions. [In the New Testament, the True Law of Yahweh (a "Law" of moral principles, not of rules) appears much clearly than in the Old Testament, even if it is still too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament's ideas and has to be purged of the New Testament's own superstructure of human rules and traditions developed during the last two millennia].

### The True Law of Yahweh

In the Gospels the True Law of Yahweh is stated with total clarity:

*You'll be fond of [Yahweh] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and you'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.* (Mark 12:29-31; Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:27)

Furthermore, the Gospels clarify the relation of Jesus Christ's teaching with the Old Testament:

*All the [Books of the] Law and the [Books of the] Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:40)*

*To be fond of your neighbor as of yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33)*

*I [Yahweh] desire mercy, not sacrifice. (Matthew 12:7, quoting from Hosea 6:6, that is, from the Book of the Old Testament prophet Hosea)*



Sciarborasca, May 2013

**Miraculous healing: is it possible to reconcile faith and science?**

For as far as we know, men of any age, race and religion have always believed in miraculous events and facts and in the capacity of some men to perform miraculous facts (in the medical field, the "healers"). So, before to begin this discussion, it is necessary to understand and define -from a general point of view- what a miraculous fact is. A miraculous fact is any kind of accomplishment which is totally alien to the human knowledge and capability of the time. Many miraculous facts of the past would not be considered as such with today's technical capacity, knowledge or foreseeable future developments; nevertheless, at their time, they were, without any doubt, miraculous. And the same concept will be valid even in the future: surely some facts, presently officially recognized as miraculous, will be explained by a future, better knowledge. So when, at a given temporal moment, we consider cases of exceptional healing -cases not only totally beyond the medical capacity of the moment but also beyond a future hypothetical scientific comprehension- are we in presence of miracles or not?

It is essential to point to the fact that the only true miracles, which the human science will never be able to explain and reproduce, are the existence itself of the universe and the development of life -vegetal, animal and spiritual- in it.

Now, overlooking these points which, anyway, are absolutely beyond our capacity of scientific explanation -but are only a matter of faith-, let us limit ourselves to the healing -normal, exceptional or supposedly miraculous- concerning the human body. Human bodies are made up of more than 60,000 billion cells that work with each other in immensely complex ways to sustain life. These relationships are the "vital actions" that enable life, with individual entities interacting with multiple entities, and with multiple entities relating with many others. In the human body, the cells are held together by an extracellular matrix which not only provides the biological scaffolding necessary to keep tissues and organs from dissolving into a soft and sticky mess, but also releases molecular signals that, among other things, help the body heal itself. And the cells composing each organ interact among themselves (and with the surroun-

ding environment) by means of electro-magneto-chemical interactions which -at present- are practically unknown, even if it is clear that they are essentially a transfer-exchange of various types of energy. On the other hand we know very well -by personal experience- that the human body has the capacity to recover from even important damages, but never completely (it's enough to think about the scars left by an injury or a surgical intervention).

A very interesting point is the fact that different organs of the human body have even dramatically different capacities of recovery from illness or injury. To make few examples:

1) The liver. This is the only one, among the human body's larger organs, having the ability to recover completely even from heavy injury. A man can lose a big portion of his liver -by accident or some surgery- but as long as one third of the organ remains intact and free of scars, it can re-grow and regain its full size and function. Unfortunately, no other human organ has this level of self-regenerating capacity.

2) The heart. Until recently scientists believed the adult heart incapable of regenerating its cells. Recently they discovered that even adult heart cells divide and that the adult heart replaces its cells throughout life, although in very modest quantities. They estimate that the heart replaces about 1 percent of its four to five billion muscle cells each year. And that the new cells arise from duplication of mature heart cells as well as from stem cells embedded in the heart. These native stem cells allow the heart to repair itself, but only in very limited ways, absolutely not enough to replace the huge quantity of cells lost in a typical heart attack, which leaves a large area of inflexible scar tissue.

3) The brain. Inside the human brain, branching neurons grow all around and on top of one another, making a three-dimensional web of mutual interconnections. Scientists now know that the adult brain has small quantities of stem cells that can turn into new mature neurons replacing those lost from injury or disease. But the brain's neural stem cells can help the organ heal itself only in modest ways, absolutely not adequate to replace the millions of neurons lost to stroke, traumatic injury or neuro-degenerative diseases.

4) Skin and muscle. The human body easily heals small injuries but protects itself from large wounds by covering them with scar tissue. In case of severe injuries, the injury exceeds the body's ability to regenerate the



tissue and the gap gets filled with dense scar tissue, thereby connecting the remaining tissue parts but also leading to a loss of function.

So, if we have a case of heart, or brain, or skin, or muscle's recovery of a level similar to that of the liver, would we speak of exceptional recovery or of miracle? Why do we have to consider as normal a liver's full recovery and as a miracle another organ's full recovery? Only because how another organ's full recovery can be possible is not known and not understood? But we don't even know and understand how a liver's full recovery is possible!

Let us now consider medical science. This, from the beginning of humankind, is actually trying to help the human body heal itself from injuries and illnesses. And, as today, classical medicine essentially employs two kinds of intervention:

- 1) Mechanical = surgical interventions.
- 2) Chemical = medicines.

What is almost totally missing is an electro-magnetic medicine, a medicine going deep down to the interactions among cells and to the cells themselves (to note that present applications of electro-magnetic physiotherapy are absolutely rudimentary). This third option -which, from a technical point of view is moving its first timid steps- is presently limited to the analysis of the electro-magnetic activity of various organs by using equipment as CT Scans and Magnetic Resonance, which are only capable of reading (in an extremely rudimentary way, yet subject to continuous improvements) the electro-magnetic overall external result of the electro-magneto-chemical interactions among the various cells of the organ under investigation.

The key problem (remembering that the body is composed by cells which interact among themselves and with the surrounding environment by means of electro-magneto-chemical interactions that actually are a transfer-exchange of various types of energy) is to boost the human body's own and natural healing powers by delivering the proper kind of energy in the proper point at the proper time and in the proper way. This extra help would allow the body to regrow tissues of the types or in the amounts that it normally could not do by itself. And this help can be given both physically and energetically in various -known and mostly still unknown- ways:

1) Physically. One example only: An emerging field of modern medicine -called Regenerative Medicine- is trying to find methods for boosting the various organs' natural healing and regenerative capacity. The presently most spoken about of these methods is based on the use of stem cells -progenitor cells that, during the initial development of the body, can give rise to a variety of tissues. And medical scientists are learning how to prepare a mixture of various proteins, sugar molecules and fibers or cells to create an environment in which the semi-specialized stem cells that are always present even in the adult human body can develop into the needed tissue.

2) Energetically. It could be done by the appropriate equipment which, in the future -after acquiring the necessary knowledge- will be in condition to deliver the proper kind of energy in the proper point for boosting the various organs' natural healing and regenerative capacity. But it could even be done by a person having the capacity to transmit some kind of physical electro-magnetic energy (a "healer"). And it should be dramatically important to study people who show to have even some rudimentary capacity of this kind, in the hope to understand, improve and make good use of it.

The conclusion is that, as already told at the beginning of this discussion, the true miracles are not the different kinds of healing -either self-healing, medical-healing or healer-healing- but, from a general point of view, the existence itself of the universe and the development of so many different life-forms in it.

Note: The existence of "healers," that is, people having the capacity to transmit some kind of physical electro-magnetic energy beneficial to other people doesn't have to be refuted a priori. Every single individual is surrounded by a measurable electro-magnetic -and thermal- field generated by all of his cells. And, even if for the vast majority of people this field is quite tenuous, there is a serious chance that few individuals could have a stronger one, sufficient to interact with the internal fields of other people.

And something similar could happen when there are particular concentration of people (as in sanctuaries) having faith in miraculous healing: their overall energetic field could have an effect resulting in physical or psychological recovery.

A very important consideration coming from all documented cases of extraordinary or miraculous healing is that it is essential that the sick and the healer believe it can be done, that is, that their energetic fields are "on tune", that they have "faith."

Furthermore, it is well known that a strong willingness to recover, or to live (or also not to recover, or to die) has often a strong and evident effect.

Interesting to note what the evangelists report in "A sick woman subject to bleeding" (Mk 5:25-34; Mt 9:20-22; Lk 8:43-48) and how it is described, by Jesus himself, his capacity to perform miraculous healing: "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him" (Mk 5:30) "Jesus... said, '**Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me**'" (Lk 8:46)



Sciarborasca, March 2014

### **RELIGIOUS SELF-INFLICTED PHYSICAL SUFFERING**

Is it consistent with what Jesus Christ asks to the Christians?

The most notorious forms of religious self-inflicted suffering are the cilice and the flagellation followed, luckily only in the Philippines, by the ritual Easter crucifixion.

What does the New Testament tell us on this matter? It clearly tells that none of Jesus' followers did practice any form of self-lesionism. And, even if Jesus did fast and pray, yet he did never self-procure physical suffering, nor he ever asked his followers anything of this kind.

There is not a single word, in the New Testament, asking people to self-inflict physical pain. Jesus taught to accept whatever pain would come ("take up his cross" Mk 8:34, Mt 16:24, Lk 9:23) but he never asked anybody to procure his own suffering. On the contrary, as the Gospels clearly show, Jesus spent a lot of time and energy healing physically (from diseases and deformities) and psychically (from mental disorders and demon possessions) countless people.

The four Evangelist have given much emphasis to the healing activity carried out by Jesus Christ in parallel to his preaching. Furthermore, they have clearly shown that, before to preach, it is necessary to provide for the people's physical and psychical health. Only then the true value of the Christian message can be received and understood in its fullness.

It is, therefore, clear and evident that whatever form of self-inflicted pain is actually a sin; a sin against Jesus Christ's true teaching.

Paul, in his letters, often speaks of the "gifts" -that is, of the specific capabilities of each person- received by Yahweh and of the necessity of using them for the good of the Christian people. Among all the "gifts" considered in his letters, it never existed a gift "self-inflicted physical pain." And, even for Paul, whatever physical pain suffered -in his case, very strong headaches, his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Co 12:7)- has to be endured as his own "cross."

Jesus Christ's healing activity -on the body and on the mind, on single individuals or on groups of people- is referred to in the following passages of the four Gospels:

-Gospel of Mark: 1:23,25-26. 1:30-31. 1:32,34. 1:39. 1:40-42. 2:3,4-5. 3:1,5. 3:10. 5:2,8. 5:23,41-42. 5:25,29,34. 6:5. 6:13. 6:55-56. 7:25,29-30. 7:32,34-35. 8:22,25. 9:17-18,26-27. 10:46,52.

-Gospel of Matthew: 4:23. 4:24-25. 8:2-3. 8:5-6,13. 8:14-15. 8:16. 8:28, 32. 9:2,6-7. 9:18,25. 9:20,22. 9:27,30. 9:32-33. 9:35. 9:36. 10:1. 10:7-8. 11:5. 12:10,13. 12:15. 12:22. 13:58. 14:14. 14:35-36. 15:30-31. 17:15, 18. 19:2. 20:30,34. 21:14.

-Gospel of Luke: 4:33,35. 4:38-39. 4:40. 4:41. 5:12-13. 5:17. 5:18,24-25. 6:6,10. 6:17-19. 7:2,9-10. 7:12,14-15. 7:21-22. 8:27,35-36. 8:41,54-55. 8:43-44,48. 9:1-2,6. 9:11. 9:38-39,42. 11:14. 13:11-13. 14:2,4. 17:12,14. 18:35,42-43.

-Gospel of John: 4:46-47,50-53. 5:5,8-9. 6:2. 9:1,7. 11:1,14,43-44.

And these cases are only some examples of Jesus Christ's healing activity, as declared in John's Gospel:

-"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Yahweh, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:30-31)

-"Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25)

Then, why so many people did persist, and still do persist, to self-inflict some -often heavy- suffering without understanding that it is at the opposite of the example given by Jesus Christ? And why the ecclesiastical hierarchies -accustomed to impose ex-cathedra orders and dogmas- leave them alone with no practical interference, on the contrary, often encouraging them?

Let's now give a look to the above mentioned most notorious forms of self-inflicted suffering: Cilice, Flagellation and Ritual Easter Crucifixion.

### **Cilice**

Originally, in ancient times, a cilice was a garment or undergarment made of coarse cloth or animal hair worn close to the skin, so it would irritate it. It was used in some religious traditions to induce discomfort or pain as a sign of mourning, penance and atonement. Later, other features were added -such as thin wires, twigs or inserts with inwardly-pointing spikes- to make the cilice even more uncomfortable. In recent history and presently the term cilice simply means any device worn for that purpose.

The cilice was in common usage -endorsed by many popes as a way of following the example of Jesus Christ' sacrifice on the cross- in monasteries and convents well in the twentieth century and is still used by some particularly "devout" persons as a form of "corporal mortification."

Over time, the cilice underwent a substantial transformation, moving from the bulky initial garment to the more practical hooked belt or to the rough rope full of knots to wear to the waist or thigh, which assure greater discretion when worn.

### **Flagellation**

Flagellation was quite a common practice among the most fervent followers of many ancient religions. They practiced an extreme form of mortification of their own body by whipping it with various instruments. In Christian times, at first flagellation became a form of penance, especially in ascetic monastic orders. The distinction of the Christian Flagellants was to take this self-mortification from the temples into the cities and other public spaces as a demonstration of piety. Processions became ritual, with hymns, distinct gestures, uniforms and discipline.

The movement -which was not the result of a centralized doctrine, but of popular passion- occurred all over Europe in separate outbreaks. The first recorded incident was in Perugia in 1259, following the outbreak of an epidemic (thousands of citizens gathered in great processions, singing and marching with crosses and banners throughout the city whipping themselves in reparation for the sins of the world and the Church.) The movement spread from there to Northern Italy and then to Austria and Germany. The peak of activity was during the Black Death (bubonic plague), which begun around 1347 and devastated Europe for the next two years, when the flagellant movement rapidly spread to all European countries.

Initially, the Catholic Church tolerated the Flagellants and individual monks and priests joined in the early movements. But by the 14th century the Church, alarmed by the rapid spread of the now organized and getting powerful movement, became less tolerant. As a result, at the end of the century the Flagellants organizations were officially considered heretical groups. In the 15th century, the Inquisition was active against a revival of the movement in Germany, burning at the stake hundreds of Flagellants. Yet, the practice of flagellation continued in the Catholic Church as an accepted form of penance.

As of today, processions of hooded Flagellants still exist in some Southern Mediterranean Catholic countries and some Catholic former colonies in Asia and South America, usually during Lent. Stripped to the waist and with covered faces, the Flagellants scourge themselves with leathern thongs till the blood ran, chanting hymns and canticles of the Passion of Jesus Christ.

### **Ritual Easter Crucifixion in the Philippines**

Ever year on Good Friday some Roman Catholic Filipino devotees commemorate Jesus Christ's crucifixion taking part in a well-rehearsed Passion Play -reenacting the arrest, flogging, sentencing and death of Jesus Christ- and, after whipping their backs, have themselves nailed to the cross in a grisly Easter ritual that persists despite official Church disapproval; disapproved by the central ecclesiastical authorities, but deeply felt by the faithful Filipinos, inclusive of many local priests and bishops.

Scores of "penitents" -hooked men and women- march with the processions bearing the crosses to the site of crucifixion, all the while flogging their bleeding backs with rope and bamboo whips as a sign of penance for their sins.

While nearby hundreds of men and women flagellate themselves, dozens of people are nailed for few minutes on wooden crosses as a sign of penance and devotion. The "assistants" to the ritual, dressed as Roman soldiers, hammer five-inch long aluminum nails -kept during the year in alcohol- into the hands and feet of the faithful, being careful not to damage the bone. The crosses are raised and the men hang there for few minutes, then are taken down and the nails pulled out.

Devotees undergo the hardship in the belief that such extreme sacrifice is a way to atone for their sins, attain miracle cures for illnesses or give thanks to Yahweh. Many had undergone crucifixion more than once, a number of them ten or even more times.

These events boost tourism as plenty of foreign and local tourists -and a number of reporters- come to see the annual spectacle were a Christian "Passion Play" is taken to its blood-soaked extreme. The locations of the crucifixions -usually under the hot sun in vacant plots outside town- are conveniently listed and scheduled on tourism websites, complete with maps so visitors can easily come and follow the action.

Now, which is the true meaning of these crucifixions and the accompanying whipping?



The whole thing is made to pass as an act of great faith, believing to suffer just as Jesus did (see note). Instead, it is exactly the contrary, it is an act of the devil.

Jesus, by suffering and dying on the cross, has sacrificed himself for the spiritual salvation of mankind, act having an immense moral-spiritual value.

Now, if a man subjects himself (even several times) to the suffering of the flagellation and crucifixion, and believes to have suffered like Jesus, the only result that follows is to belittle Jesus' suffering: if others can endure it, and even repeatedly, this means that Jesus has done nothing so exceptional. And, if it was not exceptional, it cannot even have the immense value it instead has.

So the Easter flagellation-crucifixion is an act of denigration, negative and against Yahweh, that can be originated only from Satan, who can thus enjoy the stupidity and the credulity of the people, bringing them back to typically pagan acts of self-lesionism.

-Note. In the case of Jesus, the suffering was both psychological and physical. Psychological by being arrested, judged, and condemned; by being rejected by everybody, mocked by the soldiers, and insulted by the people, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. Physical by the beating, the scourging and the crucifixion. In the case of Easter crucifixions, at the opposite of Jesus, these men have all the support, comprehension, sympathy and enthusiasm of the surrounding crowd. So, not suffering, but psychological charge. Regarding the flagellation, Roman flogging was extremely heavier than the self-inflicted flagellation. Regarding the crucifixion, the Filipino one is a "light" form of it: Jesus was hanged to the cross with three nails only. The Filipinos have their arms tied to the cross near their shoulders and hands (thus avoiding the possibility of the nails tearing their hands) and their feet resting on a stand, supporting the weight of the body (thus allowing them to breathe normally -the two thieves, after their legs were broken, died of suffocation). They also stay on the cross for few minutes, under strict medical supervision, while Jesus, after six hours, died on it.

A personal note. The draft of the conclusion of this article was written on July 1993. And the article came out almost 21 years later; always thought of, never materialized (there is a proper time for everything).



Sciarborasca, April 2014

## **THE "SECRET" IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONFESSION**

Is it justified by the Christian morality?

In the Roman Catholic Church the Secret in the Confession is the absolute duty of confessor priests not to disclose anything that they learn from penitents during the course of the sacrament of confession (to note that for several centuries the confession was not considered a sacrament, has not been done in private, and when it had been, the confessor had not secrecy constraints).

Now, coming back to present times, even starting from the acceptance of the priests' power of judgment (that is, to absolve or not) in confession, is it always morally correct and acceptable that the confessor should keep the "secret" also when so doing doesn't generate some good or, furthermore, causes some evil? (It is obvious that any "confessor," religious or not, has the duty of confidentiality on what he has learned in confidence, but this confidentiality doesn't have to go as far as absolute secrecy at all costs).

To make an example, can really a priest confessor get to leave condemn and send an innocent to prison, ruining his and his family's lives, even if the true culprit, who has "confessed" his fault, refuses to assume his responsibilities? How can the priest absolve -and feel obliged to the "secret"- he who has such an attitude?

If not taking responsibility for the wrong done means to further damage other people, it also means that the "penitent" is not truly repentant of his actions, because he doesn't want to accept the consequences. And, what's more, he accepts that, for his convenience, someone else will suffer or even be punished in his place. The focal point of the confession is that the one who confesses is truly repentant of his actions (which implies accepting the consequences). If not, he cannot be absolved. And, if he is not absolved, he cannot be covered by the "secret").

Anyway, it is enough to read even only once the New Testament to realize that neither the Gospels nor all the other books ever speak of the "secret" in the confession. On the contrary, reading them properly, we must recognize that they don't even justify the confession itself. This one, in practice, has been, and for many still is, one of the expressions of the temporal power (disguised as spiritual) of the ecclesiastical organization (self-proclaimed THE CHURCH): it gives the individual priest and

the whole organization the power to judge and to condemn or acquit (too often unfairly) even not having -obviously- neither the individual priest nor the Church itself -as an ecclesiastical organization- the possibility of judging with absolute justice (prerogative of Yahweh and Jesus Christ only).

The fact to hold a power always leads the class holding that power to use it to commit abuses. And, almost always, also the single individual belonging to that class. And why ever Jesus would have assigned such a power (to forgive sins upon confession) to an organization (the Church) and to a class of men (the priests) knowing that it would have been a source of heavy abuses?

So, what teaching can we get from the Gospels in this regard? And, more generally, from the New Testament?

The teaching, in general, is that we must do good to others, never some evil. Thus, the keeping of the "secret" makes sense only if, surely and absolutely (and who can ever be absolutely sure of his judgment?) it doesn't generate evil, but generates good.

And here he who has to decide (that is, to judge and issue a verdict) is the confessor priest. But who can ever decide with total confidence of being right? No one! As such, it is the concept itself of "secret" that has no reason to exist and that doesn't have to. And the confession itself must be seen as making a confidence to someone who knows how to listen and give help, but who doesn't have the power to decide if to "absolve" or not; someone who can ensure the penitent that, if he is really repentant, he is surely forgiven by Jesus and Yahweh, but, if he is not, he cannot obtain forgiveness.

Moreover, the "confession", understood as the power to judge and absolve or not from sins, has no reason to exist. In fact, going back to the source -that is, the Gospels- we can clearly see that Jesus, by his example and words, has never intended to give such a power to his disciples. In fact, quite the opposite.

Let's now see which is the true Gospels' teaching.

-From: ***Judging others*** (*Matthew 7:1 Luke 6:37*)

***"Consider carefully what you hear," Jesus said. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.***

*Do not judge... do not condemn:* Nobody should judge another person because nobody can ever know the whole person or the whole facts; and nobody can know the strength of another person's temptations. Further-

more, it is almost impossible for any person to be strictly impartial in his judgment. Only a completely impartial person has the right to judge, and it is not in the human nature to be completely impartial. Consequently, only Yahweh -who has the complete knowledge, and who is absolutely impartial- and Jesus Christ -to whom Yahweh has given the task of administering His justice to the living and the dead- can judge. Practically, here Jesus states that "No one is good enough to judge anybody else."

As such, it is clear that the confession to a priest, giving him the right to judge and absolve or condemn in spite of the human incapacity to judge properly, has no moral justification at all.

-From : ***Peter's confession of Christ*** (Matthew 16:18-19)

***Jesus said, "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church... I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven."***

-From: ***A brother who sins against you*** (Matthew 18:18)

***I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven.***

These passages are a crucial point, a source of great discord, of the New Testament. And it is difficult to read them without prejudice, because to the Roman Catholic Church they represent the justification for the position of the Pope, of the Catholic Church and of their power, both spiritual and temporal. They are taken by the Catholic Church to mean that Peter was given the power to admit or exclude men from Heaven, absolving them or not from their sins. It is further argued that, after Peter became the bishop of Rome (fact historically never occurred), this power descended to all the bishops of Rome and then to the Pope, who is the head of the Catholic Church and the bishop of Rome. As this "supremacy" of the Pope is not shared by any other Christian Church, it is appropriate and necessary to try and understand the true meaning of Jesus' words.

*You are Peter...*: Jesus called him the foundation "rock" of his Church. The same word was applied by the Rabbis to Abraham, who was the "rock" on which the Jewish people and nation were founded. It is then clear that to call a person "rock" was a really great compliment. The explanation of this phrase is that Peter, who had been the first man to really understand who Jesus really was, to see that he was the Son of Yahweh, was the first stone, the first brick, of the whole Church. In other terms, Peter was the first member of the Christian Church and, in that sense, the

whole Church is built on him. And everyone who makes the same discovery as Peter, in any place and in any time, is another stone, another brick, added to the Church of Christ. The Church which began with Peter was and is THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, not a sectarian Church limited by an ecclesiastical denomination; it is the fellowship of ALL believers in Jesus Christ. And this CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST is nothing else but THE KINGDOM OF YAHWEH, embracing both Heaven and Earth.

*I will give you the keys of the Kingdom:* "To give the keys" is a phrase which always means the giving of some kind of very special power, as in the case of Eliakim, who was given the keys of the house of David, and who alone could open and shut its doors. Now the duty of Eliakim was to be the faithful steward of the house. It was the steward who carried the keys of the house, who in the morning opened the doors, and through whom the visitors gained access to the royal presence. So Jesus was telling Peter that in the near future he will be the first steward of the Church, through whom the doors of the Kingdom of Yahweh would be opened to all people. So, it is not only Peter who has the keys of the Kingdom; every Christian who opens the doors of the Kingdom to some other person has them as well.

*Whatever you bind...:* "To bind" and "To loose" were very common phrases, used especially for taking decisions in regards to the law by the great teachers and the great Rabbis. Their regular sense, which any Jew would have immediately recognized, was "to forbid" and "to allow." To bind something was to declare it forbidden; to loose something was to declare it allowed. That is the only meaning of these phrases in this context. Jesus was actually saying to Peter: "Peter, you are going to have heavy responsibilities laid upon you. You are going to have to take decisions which will affect the welfare of the whole Church. You will have to be the guide and the support of the infant Church." The power or, better, the duty of binding and loosing meant that Peter would have to take decisions about the life and the practical management of the Church which would have far-reaching consequences on its development. And, as it results from the first chapters of Acts, this is exactly what Peter did in Jerusalem. Peter was given a great privilege and a great responsibility, and it is evident that the great privilege and the great responsibility had been given to him only; surely nothing he could hand down to other people.

*Whatever you bind...*: This saying about binding and loosing does not mean that the Church -a human organization- can forgive or not sins, and so settle a man's destiny in time or in eternity as the right of judgment -of perfect judgment- belongs only to Yahweh and to Jesus Christ.

And all this takes away any justification for the possibility that the confessor priest may have the power to judge and absolve or condemn.

In the Gospels is also clearly stated which is the real duty of the clergy:

-From: ***The great commission*** (Mark 16:15 Matthew 28:19-20)

***Jesus said, "Go into all the world, preach the Good News to all Creation, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them, in the name of the Father and of the Son, by the Spirit of Yahweh, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.***

*Go... preach... make disciples...*: Jesus gave his disciples these perfectly clear instructions, sending them out in the world to make all men his disciples. He had come on Earth with a message for all men and now he was going to his Father. So, from that moment onwards, his message had to be taken to all men by his disciples -by the Church.

*Baptizing... and teaching...*: The great interest of this passage is the picture of the preaching and healing duty of the Church. It is the duty of the Church -and so of every Christian- to tell the story of Jesus and of his Good News to those who have never heard them. Furthermore, it is important to remember that Christianity has to be concerned with men's bodies as well as men's spirits, as Jesus did during his earthly mission.

-From: ***The commission confirmed*** (John 20:23)

***Jesus said: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."***

*If you forgive...*: This is a saying whose true meaning has to be carefully understood. One thing is certain; the Apostles had to bring Jesus' message to men. So, if they knew that a man was really penitent, they could with absolute certainty proclaim to him the forgiveness of Jesus. But equally, if they knew that there was no penitence in his heart, they had to tell him that until his heart changed there was no Jesus' forgiveness for him. So, this sentence doesn't mean that the power to forgive sins was ever entrusted to any man; it means that the power to proclaim the forgiveness was so entrusted; along with the power-duty to warn that forgiveness is not open to the impenitent.

However, if in the New Testament there is no justification for the "secret" in the confession and, moreover, there is no real justification for the confession itself, why both exist and are considered so much important? There is only one and clear justification for these and many other "religious" practices: the "Tradition." That human tradition Jesus has so many times condemned and which only purpose and result is to keep the power in the hands of those who control them -that is, of the hierarchical ecclesiastical authority- making, at the same time, more and more difficult to understand what Jesus really means as necessary to attain salvation (that is, spiritual communion with him and Yahweh).

-From: ***Clean and unclean*** (Mark 7:6-8)

***Jesus said, "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you; as it is written: 'These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of Yahweh and are holding on to the tradition of men."***

*Jesus said:* Jesus began by quoting a passage from Isaiah 29:13. There the prophet denounced the religious leaders of honoring Yahweh with their lips while their hearts were really far away. Jesus used this quotation to describe the tradition of the elders as "rules taught by men."

*You hypocrites:* Anyone to whom religion is a legal thing, meaning the keeping of certain external rules, and being entirely connected with the keeping of certain rituals and of a certain number of taboos, is an hypocrite. The reason is that he believes that he is a good man if he carries out the correct acts and practices, no matter what his heart and his thoughts are. Legalism takes into account only a man's outward actions and doesn't consider at all his inward feelings. The great peril is to identify goodness with certain social "religious" acts; church going, time-tabled prayer, bible-reading, careful financial giving. On the contrary, for Jesus the fundamental point was and is how a man's heart is toward Yahweh and toward his fellow-men.

### **Historical notes**

- There are three major periods in the confession development:
- Early Christian penance -from the Apostolic times till the 6th-7th century.
  - Tariff penance -from the 7th century till the 12th-13th century.
  - Individual confession -from the 12th century onwards.



**Early Christian penance**

Christians of the early communities obtained forgiveness from heavy sins (murder, idolatry, sorcery, theft, hatred, perjury, adultery, homosexuality, fornication, pederasty, etc.) by practicing prayer, good deeds, fasting and alms-giving. In the early Church, publicly known serious sins were often confessed openly and publicly in Church, and penance was often done before rather than after absolution. Sometimes penitents decided to publicly speak about their sins, but in most cases offenses were known to the priest alone. The public character of early penance should be understood as prayerful participation and support given by the community to a sinner, and not as a public humiliation. Nothing is known about the priests having to absolutely keep the "secret."

**Tariff penance**

A new approach in the practice of penance considering useful for the salvation of the faithful to prescribe a stated penance to a sinner as many times as he or she would fall into sin. More emphasis was placed on the Church's ability to expiate temporal effects of sins (by prayer, indulgences and most especially by the Sacrifice of the Mass) and penances began to be lessened or mitigated. Penitential practices consisted of confession, acceptance and penance fixed by the priest, and finally reconciliation. Penitential books provided precisely determined penances for all offenses, small and great.

**Individual confession**

It is the confession as practiced in present times. During the Counter-Reformation of the 16th century, the sacrament of penance was transformed from a social to a personal matter, that is, from a public community act to a private confession, taking place in private in a confessional.

**Chronological notes**

-Tertullian of Carthage, one of the most important Apologists, in his work "On Baptism," written at the beginning of the 3rd century, writes that adult baptism involves elaborate preparation, with confession of sins, renunciation of the devil, fasting, vigil and anointing. In his "Prescription of Heretics," aimed at the Gnostics and other heretics, he affirms that only the Churches founded by the Apostles are the depositories of truth and that Church Tradition is always in accordance with

Scripture and, therefore, of equal value. It is from this dangerous idea that, in the course of time, has evolved the doctrine of Roman Catholic Church Authority and of its Tradition.

-Private confession of sins to a bishop or a presbyter begins to replace, by the beginning of the fourth century, public confession.

-In the early Church, public confession of sins was essential for the restoration of Church membership after some serious fault. But since this practice seemed to foment scandals, it tended, from the days of Leo I, made Pope in AD 763, to become a private confession before a priest.

-According to Fleury, a Roman Catholic historian, private confession of sins before a priest was commanded for the first time, in AD 763, by Chrodegang, bishop of Metz.

-Second Lateran Council, in Rome, the tenth Ecumenical Council, called by Pope Innocent II. AD 1139. The Council:

--Condemns Arnold of Brescia (Italian theologian), who maintains that confession should be made to other Christians, not to a priest.

-Gratian, an Italian scholar, "the Father of the Science of Canon Law," writes "Decretum" (Concordance of Discordant Canons). AD 1140. It is a collection of canon laws from the early years of the Church to the Second Lateran Council of 1139. It includes the following declaration: "Let the priest who dares to make known the sins of his penitent be deposed."

-Peter Lombard, called "Master of the Sentences," writes "Sententiarum Libri Quatuor" (The Sentences). AD 1155. Four books on major theological issues based on the Latin Fathers. He is the first to assert seven "Sacraments" as opposed to the "sacramentals." His work becomes a standard text-book in the medieval West. It is largely through his influence that the medieval Church agrees on seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Eucharist, Matrimony, Ordination and Extreme Unction), a teaching given official status only by the Council of Florence (AD 1439).

-Fourth Lateran Council, in Rome, the twelfth Ecumenical Council, called by Pope Innocent III. AD 1215. The Council:

--Decrees that each faithful must confess and receive the Eucharist at least once a year at Easter.

--Establishes the modern system of private penance: confession, absolution, light penance.

--Makes the secret in the confession canonically binding.

-Pope Boniface VIII issues the bull “Super Cathedram” (Upon the Cathedra). AD 1300. It dictates that only those licensed can preach or hear confessions.

-Council of Basel/Ferrara/Florence, (Switzerland/Italy) the seventeenth Ecumenical Council. The Council is called in Basel, Bohemia (AD 1431), transferred first to Ferrara (AD 1438), then to Florence (AD 1439):

--Formally affirms the list of the Seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confession, Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony, Ordination and Extreme Unction.

-The use of the confessional “box” becomes common from the beginning of the seventeenth century.



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**Earthly ties, sentimental and legal. Will they still exist in the future life?**

At the end of time (and of the physical universe), what will it be of earthly human relations? Those that during life did involve the feelings (friendship, affection, love) and those due to social organization (kinship, marriage, membership of particular groups, religious and not)?

In the future life, when all men will be in full spiritual communion (see note) with Yahweh, with Jesus Christ and among them all, what relations will there be among various people? What value will the earthly bonds and ties have?

At the end of time, all people will gain admittance to the Reign of Yahweh even if at different levels of spiritual communion with Him, because of their different individual capacity, which is a personal characteristic that depends on both the earthly life of each person and his attitude at the moment of personal judgment. There is a substantial difference between entering the Reign of Yahweh immediately after death -as a result of a "Christian" life and of a prompt acceptance of the grace offered during the personal judgment- or after a period of corrective punishment in hell: the "spiritual scars" left by a bad life and by hell will always be evident and will constitute a limit to the maximum possible level of spiritual communion between this particular person and Yahweh.

**Note.** To be in spiritual communion does not mean to be fused to, to become part of, nor to cease being an autonomous and independent entity. Spiritual communion is the highest level of relationship that different, independent beings can reach. It is left to their free choice and decision and leaves them totally un-altered and independent. Each man will conserve his individual personality as it was formed by his parents -inherited physical and mental characteristics,- by his earthly life -acquired physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics- and by the possible spiritual life preceding his admission to the Reign of Yahweh -acquired spiritual characteristics.

In "The resurrection and marriage" [Mark 12:18-27 Matthew 22:23-33 Luke 20:27-40], Jesus Christ gives a clear indication of what will happen:

"Some of the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question. 'Teacher, Moses told and wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married a woman and, since he died without leaving any children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second brother, who married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. And then it was the same with the third. And in the same way, right on down to the seventh, the seven died. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Finally, last of all, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection, when men rise from the dead, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?'"

Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of Yahweh. The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But at the resurrection, when the dead rise, and they are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; and they can no longer die for they will be like the angels in Heaven. They are Yahweh's children, since they are children of the resurrection.'"

*'The Sadducees':* A Jewish party that represented the wealthy and sophisticated classes. Its members were located largely in Jerusalem and made the Temple and its administration their primary interest. Though they were very small in number, in Jesus' time they exerted powerful political and religious influence. They were an aristocratic, politically minded group, willing to compromise with secular and pagan leaders. They controlled the high priesthood at that time and held the majority of the seats in the Sanhedrin.

*'Moses told... us':* The reference (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) is to the Levirate-Marriage Law (from Latin "levir," which means "brother-in-law") which was given to protect the widow and guarantee the continuance of the family line. If a group of brothers lived together -this point is omitted in the Sadducees' quotation of the law- and if one of them died and left no children, it was the duty of the next to take his brother's widow as wife and to raise up children to his brother. So, when a child was born, the child was held to be the offspring of the original husband.

*'Jesus replied... At resurrection...'*: Jesus declared that when a person rises again, the laws of physical life will no longer apply. *'Like the angels'*: The risen will be like the angels, and physical matters like marrying (for men) and being married (for women) will no longer apply. Life to come can't be thought at all in terms of this life. Life in Heaven will be quite different, because men will be quite different. The resurrection order can't be thought in terms of the earthly one. *'Children of the resurrection'*: Men will really be as "sons of Yahweh" only after their resurrection. Heaven is not going to be simply an extension of this world. But life in heavenly places will be greater than any conception this present physical life can supply.

In essence, in this example Jesus says that in the future life, when all will be accepted into the Kingdom of Yahweh, there will be no more husbands nor wives. And this clearly applies to all legal ties of earthly life.

Does this mean that the ties of friendship, affection and love enjoyed during the earthly life will not have a follow-up in the future life? Absolutely not! All men will be in spiritual communion (each one completely satisfied) with Yahweh, Jesus Christ and all the others. And among those who have had special bonds of affection, love and similar there will be a further bond even in heaven, but outside of the legal earthly labels (as kinship, marriage, etc.). For example, if a woman has married a man for love and, if he dies, marries another man for social convenience, the woman will have a much more intense spiritual bond with the first husband.

Higher than the bond given by the spiritual communion of all with all, there will be the spiritual ties due to the affection, the friendship and the love enjoyed during earthly life.

And the earthly feelings as enmity, hatred and resentment? They will not be forgotten but, as in heaven will hold (it already holds) the principle "forgive but not forget", they will have no further consequence than putting a limit to the maximum level of spiritual communion among those particular people.

### Bibliography

Thoughts - cogito ergo credo

The Gospel of Jesus Christ





Sciarborasca, July 2014

### **Baptism in the New Testament and in the history of the Roman Church**

In the New Testament, we can find three different kinds of baptism:

**1-** John's baptism, imparted by John the Baptist to people willing to repent of their sins, *"a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."* (Mk 1:4, Lk 3:3)

**2-** John's baptism, imparted by John the Baptist to Jesus Christ -who had no sins to repent of- following his explicit request, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* (Mt 3:15)

**3-** Christian Baptism, imparted by Jesus Christ's disciples following his instructions, given after his death and resurrection, *"Go into all the world, preach the Good News to all Creation, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them, in the name of the Father and of the Son, by the Spirit of Yahweh."* (Mk 16:15, Mt 28:19)

Let's now analyze them, their meaning and their differences.

#### **1- John's baptism, to penitents.**

*John the Baptist... went into all the country around the Jordan, baptizing in the desert region of Judea, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."* (Mk 1:4, Mt 3:1-2, Lk 3:3) *The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem and the whole region of the Jordan went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.* (Mk 1:5, Mt 3:5-6) *John... [said], "I baptize with water for repentance, but... after me will come one who is more powerful than I... He will baptize you with the Spirit of Yahweh and with fire."* (Mk 1:7-8, Mt 3:11, Lk 3:16, Jn 1:26)

*'John'*: For four centuries Israel had had no prophets, and now one was there, preaching and baptizing. *'Baptizing'*: John's practice of baptizing those who came to him in repentance was so characteristic of his ministry that he became known as "the Baptist" or "the Baptizer." *'The desert region'*: The arid region west of the Dead Sea. *'Baptism of repentance'*: John was preaching a "repentance-baptism," that is, a baptism that had to be preceded by repentance, which involves deliberate turning from sin to righteousness, and John's emphasis on repentance recalls the preaching of the ancient prophets. *'Forgiveness of sins'*: Yahweh always grants forgiveness when there

is repentance. (To note that baptism was not new to John's audience. The Jews knew of baptism for Pagan converts -it symbolized their cleansing from the pollution of their past life- but had not heard that the descendants of Abraham -the Jews- needed to repent and be baptized). *'Repent'*: John's baptism presupposed repentance; it required a change of heart, which includes sorrow for sin and a determination to lead a proper life. *'The whole... all the people'*: This obvious hyperbole indicates the high interest created by John's preaching. *'Confessing their sins'*: A man's baptism was to be accompanied by a "confession," to himself, to those whom he had wronged, and to Yahweh. *'Jordan River'*: The main river in Palestine. *'John... [said]'*: He told men that his baptism soaked them with water, but that one was coming who would saturate them with the Spirit of Yahweh; and while water could only cleanse a man's body, the Spirit of Yahweh could cleanse his soul. *'I baptize with water for repentance'*: His baptism by water was the exterior sign, to show everybody that a person was really repentant. John would not have baptized those failing to give any evidence of repentance. *'After me will come one...'*: John was the precursor, his function was only to announce the coming of Yahweh's Messiah. *'He will baptize you with the Spirit of Yahweh'*: Christian Baptism will be totally different, as it will give a man the possibility to be in spiritual communion with Yahweh. *'And with fire'*: Here fire is a symbol of divine presence, as it will be at the descent of the Spirit of Yahweh by tongues of fire at Pentecost (actually, Yahweh entering in spiritual communion with all the present).

To note the way *"John exhorted the people and preached to them"* (Lk 3: 18): *When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them and to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire"* (Mt 3:7-10, Lk 3:7-9). John lived in the desert, and from the desert he was taking his phraseology and examples. Here we have his message to the people. Nowhere the difference between John and Jesus stands out so clearly because, whatever the message of John was, it was not a gospel. It was not good news, but news of terror; and only the promise of the incoming Messiah did make it bearable.

## 2- John's baptism, to Jesus Christ.

*Then... Jesus came... to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented and Jesus too was baptized by John in the Jordan. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water, and he was praying. At that moment Heaven was torn opened, and he saw the Spirit of Yahweh descending on him in bodily form like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice came from Heaven and said, "You are My Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mk 1:9-11, Mt 3:13-17, Lk 3:21-22)*

*'Jesus came...':* When Jesus came to be baptized, John was startled and unwilling to baptize him. It was John's conviction that it was him who needed what Jesus could give, not the contrary. From this point of view, the baptism of Jesus seems difficult to understand. In John's baptism there was a call to repentance, and the offer of a way for the forgiveness of sins. But Jesus, the Son of Yahweh, was sinless, did not need to repent, and did not need forgiveness from Yahweh. John's baptism was for sinners conscious of their sins, and therefore it does not seem to apply to Jesus at all. But, actually, this occasion marks the beginning of Jesus' Messianic ministry. *'To fulfill all righteousness':* Jesus' baptism had to indicate that he was consecrated by Yahweh and officially approved by Him, as it was especially shown by the descent of the Spirit and the words of Yahweh. *'Heaven... open':* Symbolic. Because of the direct communication from Yahweh (in Heaven) to Jesus (a physical man on Earth), it had to be Heaven to "open" and enter in some way in communication with the physical realm of Earth. *'The Spirit of Yahweh descending on him':* This was Jesus' official anointment for his ministry. Yahweh came in full spiritual communion with Jesus to equip him for his work as the divine-human Messiah. *'In bodily form like a dove':* There is a certain symbolism here. The dove is the symbol of peace, of gentleness. The message of John was one of the axe laid to the root of the tree, of terrible sifting, of consuming fire. It was a message of doom and not of good news. Jesus Christ will conquer, but his conquest will be the conquest of affection. *'Lighting on him':* The Spirit of Yahweh was in some way visible and came down "flying" as a dove would have done. Anyway, it is clear that it had even some other characteristics, as emitting a kind of light on Jesus. *'A voice came from Heaven and said, "You are My Son, whom I love"':* Here Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son.

In the moment of his baptism, Yahweh spoke personally and directly to him. Surely, not only the few words recorded by the Gospels, but much more, telling him about his position and his mission.

The point that makes Jesus' baptism different from all other baptisms imparted by John is not the fact that he was totally sinless and the human Son of Yahweh, but that he was the first human being to enter in permanent spiritual communion with Yahweh as a consequence of understanding and accepting Him and His will. Jesus' baptism was the bridge between a purely ceremonial baptism (immersion in or pouring of water) and the Christian Baptism which, even if maintaining the ceremony, has a deep spiritual meaning by putting a person in spiritual communion with Yahweh. In effect, that of Jesus Christ was the first Christian Baptism.

### **3- Christian Baptism.**

*Jesus... said, "Go into all the world, preach the Good News to all Creation, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them, in the name of the Father and of the Son, by the Spirit of Yahweh, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* (Mk 16:15-16, Mt 28:19-20)

*'Go into all the world, preach...':* After his resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples the "Great Commission," sending them out in the world to make all men his disciples. He had come on Earth with a message for all men and now he was going to his Father. So, from that moment onwards, his message had to be taken to all men by his disciples -by the Church. *'Baptizing them, in the name...':* After repenting of all past sins and having accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord, Baptism officially marks a man as Christian; it is a sign of his spiritual union with and commitment to Jesus Christ and Yahweh. *'Whoever believes...':* After believing in Jesus, repenting and entering in spiritual communion with Yahweh (the administration of Baptism makes this official in the eyes of all other members of the Church), a man is spiritually saved. On the contrary, a person who doesn't truly believe and repent, but accepts as well the administration of Baptism, is cutting himself out ("condemned") of the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Yahweh and, consequently, of spiritual salvation (until he truly believes and repents).

And how simple was to be the Baptism "ceremony" Jesus' disciples were instructed to administer! No particular vest, chant or prayer; no consecration of water or oil; no laying on of hands or anointment with oil. Only true repentance and whatever water was available nearby. Unfortunately, from the beginning, following Jewish customs, the immersion in or pouring of water was accompanied by laying on of hands and, a couple of centuries later, by anointing with oil, both wrongly considered essential for bringing spiritual communion with Yahweh. And both water and oil had to be previously "consecrated."

To note that *"It was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples"* (Jn 4:2): A very important information. It has been from the beginning of his mission that Jesus had assigned this essential duty to his disciples.

And Jesus' instructions, *"preach the Good News... teaching them to obey... whoever believes... will be saved"* made clear that Baptism was to be administered only to people declaring themselves conscious of what they were doing (understanding and accepting the "Good News" that the kingdom of Yahweh -the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh- was open to all human beings) and repentant of their sins, that is, to adults. Not to infants, and not even to children, who would not have had the necessary maturity. And, in effect, at the beginning, Christian Baptism (that is, a ceremony involving only water -immersion or pouring- and bringing spiritual communion with Yahweh) was administered to adults only. So when and why the practice of baptizing children and infants began? As the development of this practice is strictly linked to the development of the doctrine of the Original Sin and to the definition of the Seven Sacraments (with the splitting of Baptism in Baptism and Confirmation), it becomes necessary to give a short look to the history of Baptism/Original Sin/Seven Sacraments in the history of the Roman Church:

- Before Jesus' Ascension. The first to be baptized were the eleven apostles: *"Receive the Spirit of Yahweh"* (Jn 20:22) *"John baptized with water, but... you will be baptized with the Spirit of Yahweh"* (Ac 1:5).

- At Pentecost. All other disciples were baptized in the presence of the eleven apostles: *"A group numbering about a hundred and twenty"* (Ac 1:15) *"all of them were filled with the Spirit of Yahweh"* (Ac 2:4).

- In the period of the Apostles' missionary activity. The Book of Acts refers of a number of baptisms, inclusive that of Paul (Ac 9:18).

- About AD 125. The “Didachè” (The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles), a manual of Church life of unknown author, states that Baptism can be performed by immersion or by pouring of water on the head three times. Both the minister and the candidate must fast previously.

- AD 185. Irenaeus of Smyrna, Asia Minor, one of the major Apologists, writes “On the Unity of God and the Origin of Evil,” where he develops a doctrine of Original Sin, derived from Adam and Eve’s disobedience.

- About AD 210. The first explicit mention of Infant Baptism is in Tertullian of Carthage’s “On Baptism.” This practice, though never universally accepted, becomes quite common from the third century onwards. Adult Baptism involves elaborate preparation, with confession of sins, renunciation of the devil, fasting, vigil and anointing. And Tertullian clearly distinguishes Baptism from unction and from the laying on of hands in the initiation rite (the first time all three are mentioned together).

- AD 210. According to Tertullian of Carthage, adult preparation to and actual Baptism are closely associated with the festival celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the precursor of the modern Easter Vigil Service).

- AD 215. Hippolytus of Rome, an Apologist, writes “The Apostolic Tradition,” a detailed description of rites and practices of the Roman Church, where he speaks of Infant Baptism and describes the rite of Adult Baptism (preparatory fast and vigil, confession of sins, renunciation of the devil, washing with water, laying on of hands and anointing with oil).

- AD 225. Tertullian of Carthage, an Apologist, asserts that the human soul is transmitted by parents to their children and is therefore inescapably imprisoned in the Original Sin of Adam and Eve.

- AD 240. The earliest known Baptism inside a House-Church is imparted at Dura-Europos on the river Euphrates. Before, Baptism was usually carried out in natural water sources.

- About AD 250. Cyprian, Apologist and bishop of Carthage, in “The Unity of the Church” makes the distinction between Baptism, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. The latter rite is a precursor of Confirmation.

- By the middle of the third century, infant baptism begins to become the norm.

- AD 256. Council of Carthage, Africa. The Council forbids women to baptize.

- AD 386. Ambrose, bishop of Milan writes “De Sacramentis” (Concerning the Sacraments). Six Easter addresses to the newly baptized (adults) on Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, showing that the separation Baptism/Confirmation was already well established.
- AD 390. Second Council of Carthage, Africa. The Council restricts to bishops the consecration of Chrism (a mixture of olive oil and balsam), the oil used for Christian rituals. The Christian custom of anointing dates back to Old Testament times, with more and more formality accruing to it throughout the years.
- AD 390. Siricius, bishop of Rome, declares that only Easter and Pentecost are appropriate times for Baptism.
- AD 397. Augustine of Hippo, theologian and Doctor of the Church, writes “Confessions,” where he further defines the doctrine of Original Sin developed in the second century by Irenaeus of Smyrna.
- AD 411. Pelagius, a monk from Britain, the originator of the heresy of Pelagianism (he considers man as born essentially good -and with no “Original Sin”- and capable of doing what is necessary for salvation, as men are free to choose good or evil), is officially condemned.
- AD 416 - 418. Council of Milevis (Carthage, Africa). The Council condemns Pelagianism, affirming that men are hopeless to resist evil on their own and confirms Augustine of Hippo’s doctrine of Original Sin, affirming that humanity is condemned to eternal damnation because of Adam’s sin.
- By the middle of the fifth century, Confirmation is officially a separate rite from Baptism. Baptism is done more often by priests than bishops. Confirmation is seen as conferring a distinct grace than Baptism. The grace given through Confirmation is the spiritual assistance of Yahweh in resisting evil.
- By the fourth and the fifth centuries, Baptism had become a several weeks long rite ending with the actual Baptism on Easter. Catechumens had to attend catechetical instruction, accompanied by special prayers, exorcisms and other rites.
- AD 1155. Peter Lombard, called “Master of the Sentences,” is the first to assert seven “Sacraments” as opposed to the “sacramentals” (all other sacred acts, as benediction, consecration of water and oil, etc). It is largely through his influence that the medieval Church agrees on Seven Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Eucharist, Matrimony, Ordination and Extreme Unction), a teaching given official status only by the Council of Florence in AD 1439.

- AD 1431 to 1439. Council of Basel/Ferrara/Florence, (Switzerland/Italy). The Council, called in Basel, is transferred first to Ferrara (AD 1438), then to Florence (AD 1439). The Council formally affirms the list of the Seven Sacraments. And maintains (with the majority of two votes) that women, too, have a soul.

- AD 1546 to 1547. The Council of Trent (first period), declares that Baptism wipes out the stain of Original Sin and that Jesus Christ has instituted all Seven Sacraments. There is disagreement, however, about when he actually did so.

At this point, for the Roman Church, Infant Baptism is a Sacrament, a sacred ceremony, with a double significance: a new born official introduction to the Christian community and his delivery from the Original Sin. And this clearly makes necessary a later Sacrament allowing spiritual communion with Yahweh: Confirmation. The reason is that the decision to enter in spiritual communion with Yahweh is an individual one, something infants and children cannot take. This is possible only when they understand all its implications, that is, when they are sufficiently grown up. And it is obvious and evident that this is a decision that, at the time of an infant's Baptism, cannot be taken in his or her behalf by parents and godparents.

The doctrine of Original Sin states that all human beings, from the moment they are born, are under the "wrath and curse of Yahweh" and are liable to the "pains of hell forever." That is, that all infants (actually, from the moment of their conception) are in a sinful condition because of the inherited spiritual stain of the Original Sin. But this contrast with Jesus' declaration, ***"Let the little children come to me... for to such as these belongs the Kingdom of Yahweh"*** (Mk 10:14, Mt 19:14, Lk 18:16) when *"people were bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them, and for him to place his hands on them and pray for them"* (Mk 10:13, Mt 19:13, Lk 18:15).

It was the custom for mothers to bring their children to some distinguished Rabbi at their first birthday that he might bless them. They had seen what Jesus' hands could do healing any kind of disease. And they wanted those hands to touch their children.

Now, if infants (in case of death) have full and immediate access to the kingdom of Yahweh, this means that they are without any sin, Original Sin included. And this means that the spiritual stain of Adam and Eve's sin was not transmitted to their descendants. By eating the forbidden fruit, and not repenting of it, Adam and Eve "sinned" for the first time in their lives and



in the history of mankind. This was the "Original Sin" -the sin committed at the beginning of mankind for which only Adam and Eve were responsible and bore the punishment. All the other human beings, who are their descendants, did not and do not have any moral involvement nor responsibility, even if they are suffering the consequences of it, having to live outside the Garden of Eden.

### **Conclusion**

From what said we have to conclude that in this case -as in so many others- the interpretations and regulations handed down by "tradition" (defined by Jesus Christ as *"teachings that are but rules taught by men"* [Mk 7:7, Mt 15:9] and *"your human traditions, that you have handed down"* [Mk 7:13]) are considered even more authoritative than Scripture.

### **Personal note**

Origin of the present article: It had been my intention (first notes taken and put aside about five years ago) to write a short article (not more than one page) using "The little children and Jesus" [Mk 10:13-16, Mt 19:13-15, Lk 18:15-17] to demonstrate the non-inheritance of the Original Sin. But, as in many other cases, what I did want to write was not what came out.

### **Bibliography**

Thoughts - cogito ergo credo

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

History of the Western Christian Church



Sulmona, May 2016

**Summary of Teachings and Deductions from the New Testament**

Which is the real teaching of the New Testament?

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**PERSONAL INTRODUCTION:** What follows is not intended and does not want to be a new or original study of the New Testament global message, but simply the summary of what I have learned from it and of it, then put in writing.

### **Introductory notes**

A comparison of what we read in the New Testament and of what the liturgical churches (Roman Catholic, Orthodox; Anglican, etc.) teach, make us immediately understand that there are abysmal differences between what is written in the New Testament and what those churches teach and practice.

Christian faith is and has to be as it clearly appears from reading, studying and analyzing the New Testament.

Whatever else is an arbitrary (even if in good faith) interpretation of or accretion to the New Testament's true teaching.

The purpose of this summary is not to criticize the liturgical churches, but to put in evidence what, in Christianity, is really important.

For a proper comprehension of some New Testament passages and concepts which don't appear to be “Christian” or “Good News,” is important to remember that:

- We usually don't realize how near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism. All the first Christians were Jews and all their traditions would have convinced them to keep the Good News for themselves, excluding completely the Gentiles.
- All New Testament writers viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ's birth as “the last days.” They understood this period to be the “last” of the days because neither former prophecy nor new revelation concerning the history of salvation indicated the coming of another era before the return of Jesus Christ.
- The New Testament Books give an over-all idea of Jesus Christ's teaching and healing activity and an explanation for his physical sacrifice.
- Even Jesus' words, as reported by these Books, are not actually his own but, at the best, what his closer followers remembered of his preaching and healing activity. Many times, their own interpretation of Jesus' teaching.
- As we can see by his parables, Jesus' preaching was very linear and simple. These characteristics are at their maximum in the first 3 Gospels (Mark, Matthews and Luke) and already giving way to important interpretation and re-elaboration in the fourth Gospel (John). And then less and less linked to Jesus' simplicity (Acts of the Apostles; Letters of

Peter, James, John and Jude; Paul's Letters) to end with Revelation, which actually doesn't have anything to do with Jesus, his teaching and his moral.

- Furthermore, the actual meaning of what is written is too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament ideas, as it could not have been easy for the writers of the New Testament Books, to detach themselves immediately and completely from the ideas they grew up with.

- Every time “the Spirit of Yahweh” is cited (mainly in the Acts of the Apostles ), it has the wider meaning of “the spiritual communion and communication, always due to Yahweh's will and initiative, between Yahweh and men -and all ensuing actions.”

### **The New Testament**

The New Testament gives the early Christian Church's point of view about Jesus Christ's life and teachings. It contains 27 books, written between 50 AD and the end of the first century.

The four Gospels (written by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John), which are the first four books of the New Testament, and the initial part of the Acts of the Apostles (written by Luke), which is the fifth book, tell us almost everything we know about Jesus Christ. They tell us the Good News that Jesus, the Son of Yahweh, was born on Earth where he died for our sins, for the final salvation of all people. The actual purpose of the Gospels is to spread the Good News, not to write Jesus Christ's biography.

The 4 Gospels give a rough outline of Jesus Christ's life and teachings. 3 of them, called synoptic Gospels, closely resemble one another; though each author has his own distinctive arrangement and purpose.

Mark, the earliest Gospel, was written in Rome. It is mainly concerned to show that Yahweh has come and saved us through Jesus; everything leads up to the climax -Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.

Matthew was written for the Jewish Christian community in Antioch. It was written particularly to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Luke was directed to the Pagan converts. It shows Jesus as the Savior of all mankind. It was written at about the same time as Matthew, probably in Rome.

John is the more spiritual of the Gospels. Its purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Yahweh. It shows a developing Christian theology about Jesus Christ. It was written at the end of the first century.

The Acts of the Apostles, also written by Luke, takes where his Gospel stops. It tells of some outstanding incidents at the beginning of the Christian Church and gives a series of glimpses of the great moments and personalities of the early Church. It is the follow-up, we can say the book number 2, of Luke's Gospel.

The 13 Epistles of Paul are letters written to early Christian communities or to individuals. They are letters of instructions, guidance and admonition, written to strengthen the faith of the early converts and to put down some errors.

The Letter to the Hebrews was written by an anonymous author to teach the Jewish Christians -some of whom were thinking of going back to Jewish faith- that Jesus completed the Jewish faith by making the final sacrifice for sin.

The 7 Catholic -General, or Universal- Epistles are letters addressed to the Church in general (2 of Peter, 1 of James, 3 of John, and 1 of Jude). Attributed to these apostles, these letters were probably written by their followers.

Revelation is a totally distinct kind of literature. Revelation is “apocalyptic” -a kind of highly symbolic writing, which often seems bizarre to the modern reader- and gives a series of figurative visions in symbolic and mysterious language. It was mainly meant to encourage and console the early Christians struggling under the Roman persecutions, and only then describes what will happen at the end of the world.

### **Summary of teachings and deductions**

**- Yahweh the only God, Creator of everything and everybody**

**- Logos**

The basic belief of Christianity: The only one God is Yahweh, there is no other god, not even as part of a “trinity,”

It is of fundamental importance not to confuse Yahweh -the Father, the Only Eternal God Creator Almighty- with Jesus Christ -the Son, who has both the divine nature of his Father and the human nature of his mother, and who is not God, not even as a part of a supposed Trinity.

To note that the term “Logos,” found at the beginning of John's Gospel and usually translated “Word,” can't be rendered by one word only. The beginning of Genesis (Old Testament) makes it clear that “Logos” is Yahweh Himself (the Jews used this term as a periphrasis for His Name, which could not be pronounced), His Spirit in action, creating. In effect John's “Logos” is Genesis' “Spirit of Yahweh” (Genesis 1:1-24).

**- Jesus Christ, son of Yahweh, a man (not a god, not a part of a trinity)**

Jesus Christ is Yahweh's son, a man, His only son with the human race through a woman, not a “god,” not even a part of a “trinity.”

Jesus, a man, was born and began to exist in a certain place and at a certain point of time, something that doesn't apply to a “god,” not even to a part of a “trinity.”

Even if son of Yahweh, Jesus was fully a man and exactly for this reason his body and mind had to develop following the rules imposed by the human nature. He did not have all knowledge and wisdom from birth, and he had to mature like any other man. And later, as a grown man, after becoming aware of his special relation with Yahweh, at the moment of his temptations, he had to choose what to do and which way; in essence, which kind of Messiah to be.

Jesus always declared that, even if being son of Yahweh, he was essentially and totally a man, physical with body and mind and spiritual with soul, and that all his powers came only from Yahweh, from his total obedience to, and his spiritual communion with, his father Yahweh.

Jesus' teaching was not of human origin, and the things he said and did came straight from Yahweh; not from Jesus, but throughout him.

Jesus, too, being a man, had to demonstrate his faith; he, too, had to accept what he could not fully understand. In the Gethsemane, Jesus had his supreme struggle to submit to the will of Yahweh. A further demonstration that Jesus was a man, not a “god,” not a part of a “trinity.”

After having being scourged, beaten and crucified, Jesus died and then was buried. It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to die, as all human beings have to go through death. If Jesus was truly and completely man, then he had to experience it.

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself.

**- Jesus, Yahweh's Messiah of Salvation, Savior of all men**

There is only One God, Yahweh, Creator of everything and everybody. Jesus Christ, His Messiah, is subordinate to Him, ruling on His behalf as Lord, Judge and Savior of all men with the task to improve the human physical and spiritual condition on Earth, and to administer justice to the living and the dead thus making everybody suitable to be in spiritual communion with Yahweh and everybody else.

Jesus Christ's duty was and is to bring salvation, that is, eternal life in the Kingdom of Yahweh, to all men, without any exception; that is, to all men of all races, countries and religions of the past, present and future.

Judgment is not the purpose of Jesus' coming, but judgment is the other side of salvation. Jesus did not come to condemn; he came to save. It was not the wrath of Yahweh which sent Jesus to men; it was His affection. Yet the coming of Jesus inevitably involves a judgment because by his attitude to Jesus a man shows what he is and therefore judges himself. If he finds in Jesus a person to be fond of, even if he never succeeds in making his life what he knows he ought to make it, he is safe. If on the other hand he sees in Jesus nothing to desire, it means that he is impervious to Yahweh; and he has therefore judged himself.

Yahweh -the only one who can perfectly judge- has delegated the task of judgment to Jesus Christ, who judges: during terrestrial life; at the moment of physical death; when offering his Gospel to those subject to -formative and redemptive- punishment in hell; at the Universal Judgment. All those who didn't hear of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel of salvation during their earthly life will be judged, at the moment of their physical death, following the moral standards of their society (clearly, the vast majority of them will have to undergo a formative and redemptive period in hell) and later -in hell- will be offered to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus Christ's death on the Cross brought forgiveness of sins and spiritual salvation to all men.

**Note:** It is clear that all Scriptures (Old and New Testament) speak of and refer to the human race only, not of and to all other intelligent and spiritual races that, surely, exist around the universe. This means that the saving action of Jesus Christ, the human son of Yahweh and a woman, was and is for the human race only.

### **- Jesus, only intermediary and intercessor**

Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized "saint," not even Jesus' mother. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself and died on the Cross -once for ever and for all- for the spiritual salvation of all men of every time, country and religion.

Jesus is at the center of the Christian faith for he alone can reveal Yahweh to men. And all men have to know that, through Jesus Christ's action of salvation, they all will be saved.



**- Jesus' brother and sisters**

After Jesus' birth, fulfilled her “physical” mission, Joseph and Mary had four sons, -Jesus' half-brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas- and some daughters -Jesus' half-sisters, whose names are not known- as reported in Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56; John 2:12; 7:3,5; Acts 1:14; 1Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19.

**- Spiritual communion Yahweh-men (grace and spiritual salvation)**

To note that, at the time of the Old Testament, the spiritual communion between Yahweh and men was completely due to His initiative and reserved to few chosen people only. On the contrary, Jesus' saving action -following Yahweh's will till his crucifixion- has opened once for ever to all people of any religion, race and country, of the past, the present and the future, the possibility of entering in spiritual communion with him and Yahweh, that is, to be accepted in His Kingdom.

Yahweh's grace -spiritual salvation- is given to each man -even to the worst sinner who recognizes himself as such- who wants to accept it. And Jesus only, being the only intermediary with Yahweh, can offer this possibility. This is the message his true disciples have to spread all over the world.

The Jewish religious leaders could not accept that Yahweh's salvation was for the Gentiles too. And the same was and is still valid for many Christian Denominations: they can't and don't want to accept that salvation is for all men, Christian or not.

At the end, all people of every time, race and religion will be “saved,” that is, accepted in Yahweh's Kingdom, without any exception. Only their “position” in the Kingdom -that is, the level of spiritual communion they will receive from and give to others- will be different. There will be the “great” -those who had tried to live a “Christian” life- and the “least” -those who will enter the Kingdom after a bad life and a long, redemptive, period in hell, that is, only after recognizing Jesus Christ and his saving action.

**- Original sin****- Mary, without original sin**

Here it is necessary to contrast two wide-spread beliefs:

1) That all human beings are marked by the stain of the so called “original sin.”

Now, by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve “sinned” for the first time in their lives and in the history of mankind. By not obeying they introduced sin in the human race (“in the world”); by being banished, and not allowed any more to eat from the tree of life, they introduced physical death (in the human race). This was the “Original Sin” -the sin committed at the beginning of mankind for which only Adam and Eve were responsible and bore the punishment. All other human beings, who are their descendants, did not and do not have any moral involvement nor responsibility, even if they are suffering the consequences of it, having to live -and die- outside the Garden of Eden.

2) That Yahweh had preserved Mary from the stain of the original sin. If true, it would mean that Mary had no freedom of choice, that she was predestined -obliged- to carry Yahweh's son, without the need of personally being worthy of it. But, as seen above, no new-born human being partakes in Adam and Eve's sin. Proof of this is that “The Kingdom of Yahweh belongs to the little children” [The little children and Jesus (Mark 10:13-16 Matthew 19:13-15 Luke 18:15-17)]. And the Kingdom cannot belong to sinners of any kind, not even to infants (supposed to be sinners because of the stain of the original sin). This passage gives a very important confirmation: If the Kingdom is open to little children, when a baby of any religion dies he goes straight into Heaven, without being barred from it by something as “the Original Sin” which, anyway, doesn't exist.

### **- Mary, chosen virgin, Mediatrix of all graces, intercessor, Regina Coeli et Mundi**

To write that Mary was a virgin points, quite simply, to the fact that Jesus, her son to be, will have no human father. Mary was found worthy of carrying Yahweh's human son and as such, was chosen. No choice was given her: to be chosen by Yahweh means to accept, act and live as He wants. In this special, unique case, Mary not only was in spiritual communion with Yahweh; she received in herself His creative, life-giving, Spirit to generate His human son.

It is from Mary's request at the Wedding at Cana [John 2:1-11] that began the development of the wrong doctrine of “Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces.” The belief that Mary participates in the mediatory work of Jesus Christ in a unique way. That her holiness and her unique relationship

to Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer, would make her a powerful intercessor in Heaven for the needs of humanity. But Jesus himself has declared a number of times to be the Way to the Father, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh; that all prayers have to be addressed to Yahweh, not even to himself, and much more not to the angels or to his mother Mary or to the officially recognized “saints.”

At the Crucifixion, the passage of Jesus committing his mother to John and John to her is understood by some Churches -as the Roman Catholic- as the committing to her of the whole humanity, giving then to Mary the position of “Mediatrix of all Graces.” But Jesus himself has declared a number of times to be the Way to the Father, the only intermediary between men and Yahweh.

Revelation 12:1 depicts “a Woman luminous as the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of stars on her head.” Undoubtedly, the woman is the Mother of Jesus Christ, Yahweh's Messiah, and this is the -only- picture which justifies the titles of “Regina Coeli” and “Regina Mundi” given by the Roman Catholic Church to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ.

#### **- Prayers, how to pray**

Even Jesus, as a man, knew that he could not accomplish his mission without the help of Yahweh. That if he was to spend his life for others he had to pray and ask for spiritual aid and reinforcement. That if he had to be sure of his choices he had to ask for his Father's help in private prayer, that is, being in deep spiritual communion with Him.

Jesus himself has taught his disciples how to pray and how not to pray [Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father) Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]:

1) Jesus is very clear. Prayers have to be addressed to Yahweh, not even to himself and much more not to the angels or to his mother Mary or to the recognized “saints.”

2) Jesus condemns two habits. First, to pray to be seen by men, making of it a show of devotion. Second, to pray using repetitive fixed formulas, which don't require mental concentration and so carry very little spiritual meaning.

The Christians can go directly to Yahweh in their prayers, making their requests in Jesus' name. Through Jesus, and through Jesus alone, men can find access to Yahweh, as Jesus alone opens the way to Him. Between men and Yahweh there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized “saint,” not even Jesus' mother.

It is important to remember that praying to Yahweh is always a way to enter in spiritual communion with Him.

Another, more intense exhortation is to pray and ask for real necessities only (prayers that, anyway, will be answered as requested if that fits with Yahweh's decisions).

Unfortunately, in any established Church prayers tend to be formalized, in kind and timing, with the liturgy supplying specific prayers to be recited at specific times or occasions. Furthermore, there is a tendency to link prayers with certain places, as Churches, Sanctuaries and so on, as if the prayers were more efficacious if offered there. And so often orthodox, fully observant people are absolutely confident to be right and tend to rate low every person who does not pray as them. But no man who is proud can properly pray, and no man who despises his fellow-men can really pray.

Furthermore, when more people meet to pray and worship together, there is an overall spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh stronger than the sum of the individual ones. And that gives more power to their prayers (which, anyway, will be answered if that fits Yahweh's decision).

#### **- Miracles, healing and faith**

It was because of his deep spiritual communion with Yahweh, his father, that Jesus, a man on Earth, had the power to heal.

Jesus always prayed to the Father, he always clearly declared that the power which flowed through him was not his; that it was Yahweh's. That he followed always and only the will of Yahweh; and that all his miracles were due to the power of Yahweh Who had sent him.

To obtain Jesus' help in something extraordinary as healing from an incurable illness is absolutely necessary to have faith, that is, to believe that the miracle asked for can actually happen. Nothing more is requested.

Many times Jesus healed people brought to him (and who clearly hadn't had the chance of listening to his preaching in the synagogue) because their faith in Jesus' capability of healing them was enough to be healed, even if they understood little or nothing of his Messiahship.

The essential for a "miracle" is faith. Even if simple people come to Jesus with a very inadequate idea of who and what he is, even if they approach him in a superstitious way (in "holy" places, through saints, relics, and so on) still he helps them seeing the sincerity of their faith. Clearly, this doesn't extend to learned people, who don't have any excuse to be superstitious and condemns all Church people and all Churches who believe to or spread "religious" superstitions of any kind, such as considering "sacred" the images, statues, etc. of Christian "saints," Jesus, his mother and Yahweh Himself!

The disciples who had received the “gift of healing” could use it only after praying to Jesus and Yahweh. And when they took for granted the power given to them and had come to believe that it was inherent in them, and as a consequence they did not pray enough, they did lose their spiritual connection -communion- with Jesus and Yahweh and were not able to heal any more. The healing was and is not by the healer own power, but by the power coming from his faith in, and spiritual communion with, Jesus and Yahweh. This is why there are so few miraculous healings; for the vast majority of people is too difficult, almost impossible, to have such a strong faith.

**- Prophecy**

Prophecy did consist mainly in proclaiming Yahweh's words; only seldom in predicting future events. The prophets, because of their spiritual communion with Yahweh (due to Yahweh's decision and initiative), were able to express and proclaim Yahweh's will, that otherwise they could not have formulated on their own.

**- Papal infallibility (Roman Catholic dogma)**

In “Paul opposes Peter” (Galatians 2:11-21) Paul rebukes Peter for his hypocrisy by behaving and acting not following Jesus' -that is, Yahweh's- will. Now, if even the apostle Peter (who is considered the first Pope of the Christian Church) was so much in the wrong, how can the Popes pretend to be infallible? How can they pretend to possess a divine assistance that enables them to teach divinely revealed doctrines on matters of faith and morals?

**"Higher than the pope as the expression of the binding law of the ecclesiastical authority, still stands the individual conscience, to which first of all we must obey, in case of necessity even against the injunction of the ecclesiastical authority."**

From: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Dokumente und Kommentare  
(II Vatican Council. Documents and comments)  
Author: Joseph Ratzinger (future Pope Benedict XVI)

**- Explanation, teaching of Scripture**

To be fond one another is the shortest form, the essence, of Jesus Christ's teaching.

The core of this ethic is in the phrase “do to others what you would have them do to you,” which expresses the very essence of Christian conduct, that consist not in refraining from bad things, but in actively doing good things. And, the nearest is a man to this way of conduct, the nearest he is to Yahweh.

Any kindness shown, any help given to another person will be rewarded in the next life. And Jesus request was and is for very simple things and help, which can be given without any difficulty.

The real teaching, as in the case of Jesus', comes straight from Yahweh to the men He chooses and sends for some reason (reasons many times they are not aware of and don't understand at all).

Scriptures are to be taken for their moral and spiritual meaning, without any need to study and analyze every single word.

“Jesus Christ is Lord” and “Yahweh raised him from the dead” represent the earliest Christian profession of faith, the first Creed. Furthermore, this is a further declaration that Jesus was a man, not a “god,” not a part of a “trinity,” for he was resurrected and anointed as Savior of everybody by Yahweh, not by his own initiative.

New Testament teaching is not confined to personal salvation but includes much instruction about practical living and how to improve the well-being of the community.

Generally, discussions about not important points of Scripture are to be avoided. Furthermore, the Christians don't have to sit discussing theological questions when the simple tasks of Christian life are left unattended. A discussions which does not end in Christian action is a wastage of time and only generates divisions based on unessential matters.

All Christians as well -not only the missionaries- are “appointed and sent,” that is, have to give testimony to and spread Jesus' Good News, without forgetting that taking care of the physical needs is, many times, the priority. And always having clear that, even if refused, the seed of Christianity is planted. Unfortunately here, again, it clearly appears that the vast majority of Christians -inclusive of so many priests and nuns- does not.

A teacher, that is, a priest or a pastor, can have a great influence with his ideas, explanations and personality. And for willing to be a teacher and, as such, being learned, his responsibility is great and he will be held more accountable for his teaching.

“False teachers” were and are all those priests and pastors who, instead of teaching the true Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, “invent” useless doctrines, rules and myths (for example about the lives of the “saints”), teach and explain the Gospel in wrong ways, so actually bringing incomprehensions and divisions into the Christian Church. Furthermore they, the very persons who should bring men close to Yahweh, actually obscure their understanding with faulty interpretations and erroneous systems of theology, giving “official” interpretations of Scriptures, tuned to keep the power of knowledge in their hierarchical organizations, excluding everybody else. Their main interest is to make a profit from their teaching, not seeing it as a moral and spiritual mission. From the beginning of the Christian Church there always were (and unfortunately there always are) too many priests and pastors (non to speak of the higher hierarchical positions) looking for the social status coming with their position (prestige, authority, power and money).

And, what a difference, between what Peter and other apostles wrote in their letters only few years after Jesus' preaching (practically sermons of admonition and scolding) and Jesus' way of teaching, as seen in the Gospels! Their letters are mainly “negative” sermons, empty of Jesus' affection and understanding and full of complains and scoldings. And, -unfortunately- most of Church sermons are always quite similar.

Christian faith has to be only in the “Word of Jesus Christ,” that is, in Jesus' teaching, as it is reported in the four Gospels, not in any other book or comment or whatever else!

An expedient, a must, to facilitate the spreading and comprehension of Scriptures is their translation in local languages, without imposing the use of a “sacred” language (first, Greek and later, for the Roman Catholic Church, Latin).

### - **Christian Church, Christianity**

The existence of the Christian Church -of Christianity- is rooted in Jesus Christ's words: ***“Go into all the world, preach the Good News to all Creation, and make disciples of all nations...”*** (The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20).

Whoever believes in Jesus Christ as Yahweh's Messiah and spiritual Savior of the human race is truly a Christian -in effect, all Christian denominations fall into this definition.

The Church is the togetherness, the unity, and the communion of all who believe in Yahweh and in Jesus Christ: the “Believers.” Presently, the Church is divided between Earth and the Kingdom of Yahweh. On Earth, it is composed of living people, and so it is very far from perfect. In the Kingdom of Yahweh, it is composed of the souls of men waiting for their resurrection. In the future, at the “end of time,” and after the conversion and the consequent resurrection of even the last man, the Church will be composed of all men who were ever born -all of them believers.

The Earthly Church, which has to continue what Jesus Christ has begun, is open to everybody, and is universal; “catholic,” as it is expressed by the Greek word “katholikos” that means, precisely, universal. This concept is perfectly expressed by the Greek word for Church: “Ekklesia,” an assembly of people having a strong common interest; in our case the Community of those who have accepted the invitation and the command of Yahweh, given by Jesus Christ, to come to Him.

The calling to be full-time disciples of some of Jesus' followers marks the beginning of the Christian Community, the Christian Church.

Unfortunately, as time was passing and the Church expanding, many different ecclesiastical structures developed from the original group of Jesus Christ's followers. This situation constitutes the biggest of the many defects of the earthly Church which, because of its being earthly, does not have any possibility to be good and perfect. Anyway, imperfect as it is, the Church is composed of ALL Believers; of ALL people who have faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of ALL men.

It does not matter, as well, the particular hierarchical organization, the denomination, and the physical place or building used for worship: the Church is composed by every one of its local congregations, by every group of people gathered together to listen to a message from Yahweh, to read the Scripture, and to pray.

It is the community of all Christians (all of them in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh) which constitute the Temple of Yahweh, the Christian Church, not the more or less “sacred” buildings or places where the community could gather for common prayer.

Many times Jesus told his disciples to be careful of not identifying the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth -the Christian Church- with terrestrial goods and with political influence. And we can see how much both his exhortations have been followed!



Even the disciples were ambitious and many times showed how far they were from understanding what the Kingdom of Heaven really is. And it seems that most high prelates of all Churches are still at this point.

In effect, Jesus did not abolish ambition. Rather, he defined it in a totally different way. For the ambition to rule (to have earthly power and greatness) he substituted the ambition to serve (to do things for others). For the ambition to be served (to have things done for themselves) he substituted the ambition to serve, to do things for others.

And, many times, Jesus has pointed to the different standards of greatness in the kingdoms of the world and in Yahweh's Kingdom on Earth, where the standard of life has to be that of service, where greatness has to consist, not in reducing other men to one's service, but in putting oneself to their service, in this way overturning the value structure of the world, and has warned against three things. 1) Desire of prominence. Office in the Church is a responsibility, not a privilege. 2) Desire for deference. A basic fact of Christianity is that it ought to make a man wish to obliterate self rather than to exalt it. 3) Attempt to make a commerce of religion. Religion does not have to be used for self-gain and self-advancement. And the higher is the place of a man in the life of the community, the more severe is the demand of true justice; the more hypocrisy a man will show, the greater will be his condemnation.

Even if, on Earth, is always necessary to put someone in charge of something -in this case of the proper teaching and the running of the Christian Community (the Local Church)- unfortunately many of these men tend to feel important and in a position of power, and so often give rise to heavier and heavier organizations.

High self-esteem is contrary to Jesus Christ's teaching about being humble and serving the others. How different always was and is the behavior of so many priests and pastors, not to speak of high prelates!

Peter had been the first to understand that Jesus was the Son of Yahweh, so he was the first “stone”, the first “brick,” that is, the first member of the Christian Church which, in this sense, is built on him [*Peter... on this rock I will build my Church*], the first member, not the head of the Church. And each Christian, in any place and in any time, is another stone, another brick, added to the Christian Church.

And Peter was assigned the responsibility of spreading Jesus' Good News, not the top position in the Church [*I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*], a typical Jewish phrase, carrying the meaning of duty and responsibility, not of power. Nothing to do with his -presumed-position of first Pope at Rome.

Peter, the recognized chief of the apostles, did not consider himself more important or in a higher position than the other apostles and elders. And, although he had full apostolic authority, did not “lord it over” the elders he was writing to, but exemplified the virtues he recommended. And how different was and is the actual behavior of most of the elders of every Christian Denomination!

**- Religion, rituals, rules, titles, traditions, places, etc.**

In the Old Testament the “Commands of Yahweh” or the “Law” originally were the Ten Commandments and the first five books, the Pentateuch. And, even if they contain a number of social and religious regulations and instructions, in the matter of moral questions they set down a series of great moral principles which a man must properly take, interpret and apply to the individual situations in life. The problem was that the Teachers of the Law, the Scribes, did reduce those great principles of the Law to literally thousands of rules which to them were the essence of religion. To serve Yahweh, to be religious, it was absolutely necessary to observe all of them. This gives rise to “hypocrisy,” when a man believes to be a good, “clean,” man if he carries out the correct acts and practices, no matter what his heart and his thoughts are. The Jews pursued the letter of the Law developing religious traditions and trying to obtain salvation by “works,” that is, by acts, ceremonies, set prayers, rules “do” and “do not,” religious organizations, buildings and objects of cult, etc. (exactly as the Christians have done, and still do, in all their Denominations).

Jesus has declared that he had come not to cancel the Law, but to fulfill it, to bring out its real meaning; that is, the one great principle of reverence and respect. Reverence for Yahweh, respect for everybody else. A reverence and respect that did not, and does not, consist in obeying a multitude of regulations. Not in sacrifice, but in mercy, not in legalism, but in affection.

Jesus coming has put an end to the materialistic way of worshipping Yahweh with animal sacrifices and priestly rituals and put in their place a direct approach to Yahweh which doesn't need a ritual of sacrifice or a temple. The whole Earth, actually His whole Creation -the Universe- is Yahweh's temple, where He is always present. In other terms, the place and the ritual of worship are totally irrelevant, actually totally unnecessary. Religion does not consist in rules and rituals. People are far more important than rituals. The best way to worship Yahweh is to help men in their spiritual and material needs.

Jesus did not follow the social-religious ceremonial acts and practices. To omit them was -and so it is for their equivalent in Christian times- considered to sin!

The teachers of the law were considered the only authorized successors of Moses, exactly as, in Christian times, priest and pastors of all denominations consider themselves the only authorized successors of Peter and the apostles. And all of them used and still use their position to impose on men plenty of absurd ceremonial rules and ceremonies, making of religion a depressing affair of burdens and prohibitions; a religion of ostentation (imposing churches and ceremonies, compulsory use of objects “necessary” for the proper cult, inclusive of their “uniforms,” the so called “sacred paraments”).

The Twelve Apostles and all people, men and women, following Jesus during his preaching, were ordinary working men; none of them was noble or rich and none of them did become rich or powerful during the rest of their life. Furthermore, they always kept dressing as ordinary people, without wearing any kind of religious “uniform.”

Jesus saw that the Jewish people were left without guidance, that the Priests and the Teachers of the Law, the pillars of the orthodox religion of his days, had nothing to offer them; neither guidance, nor comfort, nor strength to give. On the contrary, they were harassing men with subtle arguments about the Law, which could not give any help or comfort. And, how similar is the situation, even today, in many liturgical Churches and Denominations!

A religion expressed in rituals, liturgies and ceremonies is not religion at all. Real worship does not consist in rich and elaborate rituals, but in the practical service of mankind (“look after orphans and widows”) and in the honesty of personal life (“keep oneself from being polluted by the world”).

There is only One God, Maker of everything and everybody, and any kind of temple service, with the use of “sacred” objects and set rituals, is totally useless. The only essential -and necessary point- is to have faith in Him.

Jesus Christ will not judge Christians by their observance to legalistic requirements but by their observance to his fundamental teaching to be fond of one another, as all those “Do and Do not” rules, so much characteristic of the human laws developed by all religious hierarchies, were canceled once for ever by his action of salvation.

In the eyes of Yahweh all men are exactly equals (brothers), so no one has the right to consider himself to be a master (Rabbi). Furthermore, all Christians should always remember that they have only one Father -Yahweh- and only one Teacher and Master -Jesus Christ. And we can see how much these words are respected by all levels of Church-men and -women. He who gives himself to the service of the Gospel can't ask to be called Father, Monsignor, Excellency, Eminence, Holy Father, Pontiff, Vicar of Peter, Vicar of Christ, and so many other titles, even in their feminine form. To note that the form of address “Holy Father” is found only once in the whole New Testament, referred to Yahweh only and, so, doesn't have to be used by anybody else. Yet Roman Catholic Popes dare using it, beginning with Urban VI (1378 - 1389 AD). Repeatedly Jesus had told his disciples that, if they looked for greatness, they would find it not by being first, but by being last; not by being masters, but by being servants of all.

And how many times ecclesiastical “positions” have been bought and sold for the money, power and prestige they would bring to the sellers and the buyers!

In “Peter at Cornelius' house [Acts 10:23b-48]” we see Cornelius kneeling in front of Peter. Now, Cornelius was only intending to honor him, but Peter did not want to allow any possibility for a misunderstanding: no created being has to be worshipped. And this means that the habit of kneeling in front of high ranking prelates, kissing their ring and other similar acts are absolutely not justified. Not to speak of the kneeling and praying in front of the tomb of some officially recognized saint or high prelate!

In “Jesus sends out the Twelve” [Mark 6:6b-13 Matthew 10:1,5-42 Luke 9:1-6;12:1-9,11-12] we see that they “anointed many sick people with oil”. In the ancient Mediterranean world olive oil was widely used as a medicine, and was regarded as a panacea for all cures. Practically they were using the pharmacopoeia of their time for treating men, and not performing a “religious act.” In effect, Jesus and his apostles did never “bless” or “consecrate” water, oil or any other substance. Jesus did and does call and send, without any ceremony. To note that only “laying on of hands” is cited in the New Testament as an “official act” and that no “holy water” and no “holy chrism” are ever taken into account.

**- Sanctuaries, places of pilgrimage as “market areas”**

In Jerusalem, the merchants and the money changers were using -with the approval of the religious authorities- the Temple (its Court of the Pagans) as a market area (which, in theory, was forbidden) depriving the Temple of its sanctity. And, furthermore, they were charging too much, taking financial advantage of the people. In effect, the Temple authorities were treating the pilgrims not as worshippers, but as subjects to be exploited for getting the maximum possible profit. And we can say that even today this still is the situation around every Christian Sanctuary and Place of Pilgrimage.

**- Baptism**

The ceremony of Jesus' baptism was officiated by a prophet of Yahweh, John the Baptist, and marks the beginning of Jesus' mission. The descent on Jesus of Yahweh's Spirit (symbolic of actively entering in spiritual communion with him) and His words, represent Jesus' official anointing for his ministry.

Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: on the Mount of Transfiguration (The Transfiguration. Mark 9:2-13; Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36) and in the Temple during Jesus' final week (Jesus predicts his death. John 12:20-36). Here Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son and speaks personally and directly to him. This was the first “Christian Baptism” and Jesus was the first human being to enter in permanent spiritual communion with Yahweh as a consequence of understanding and accepting Him and His will. Jesus' baptism was the bridge between a purely ceremonial baptism (immersion in or pouring of water) and the present

Christian Baptism which, even if maintaining the ceremony, has a deep spiritual meaning by putting a person in spiritual communion with Yahweh. (Clearly, this better applies to adult baptism, as in the case of Jesus, who at the time was thirty years old, that is, the baptism of people who fully understand and accept the ceremony and its moral and spiritual meaning. In effect, present-day children baptism is followed, years later, by a similar ceremony, Confirmation, when they are supposed to be sufficiently grown-up).

The importance of the baptism ceremony -in its simplest form, that is, immersion in a river, when feasible, and pouring of clear, plain water- is clearly stated by the fact that Jesus and his more closed disciples were baptizing from the beginning of the Church. Yet, almost from the beginning, unction and laying on of hands were -uselessly- part of the baptism ceremony. It is a characteristic of every institution -in this case the Church- to forget the initial simplicity and make every ceremony more and more complicated.

Jesus had come with a message for all men and then his message has to be taken to all men by his disciples -by the Christian Church. This means that the Church -every one Christian- has to be a messenger and spread as much as possible the “Good News” of the Kingdom of Yahweh open to all men, that is, of the real possibility to be in spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh. And, when a man accepts Jesus, it is appropriate -even if not strictly necessary- to have a ceremony -the baptism- to officially introduce that man to the Christian community. The baptism -whose ceremony can be performed in various ways, with or without immersion in or pouring of water- is actually “by the Spirit of Yahweh” as it indicates the spiritual communion between that man and Yahweh. This shows what baptism truly is: a ceremony of introduction of a new believer in the Christian Community, symbolizing that, as the water cleanses the man's body, so his soul is cleansed by Jesus Christ's grace.

In “Paul in Ephesus” [Acts 19:1-12] we read, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” How simple the ceremony of baptism was at that time! In effect, nothing more in terms of formula, acts or objects is really needed.

The water of baptism (at the time by immersion) represents salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Anyway, it is clear that the believers are not saved by any ritual, but by the power of Jesus Christ's saving action (confirmed by his resurrection -an act of Yahweh.) Baptism can't

bring about forgiveness, as forgiveness is given because and if those undergoing the ceremony of baptism have already repented of their previous sins.

**- Born again (Confirmation)**

Jesus' baptism was the first “Christian Baptism” and Jesus was the first human being to enter in permanent spiritual communion with Yahweh as a consequence of understanding and accepting Him and His will. Clearly, this applies to adult baptism, as in the case of Jesus, who at the time was thirty years old, that is, to the baptism of people who fully understand and accept the ceremony and its moral and spiritual meaning. In effect, present-day children baptism is followed, years later, by a similar ceremony, Confirmation, when they are supposed to be sufficiently grown-up.

To be “born again” happens not only at the Baptism of an adult, or at the Confirmation of someone who had been baptized as an infant (born of water), but every time an adult decides to live in a “Christian” way (born of the Spirit).

A repented sinner is spiritually reborn, “born again” in the sight of Yahweh.

All men are “born anew” (or “again”) the moment they believe to the Gospel and become Christian.

In “The Transfiguration” [Mark 9:2-13 Matthew 17:1-13 Luke 9:28-36] we find what can be considered the institution of the ceremony of Confirmation or of being Born Again. Two other times the Gospels record the declarations of a voice coming from Heaven and addressing Jesus: at Jesus' baptism (The Baptism of Jesus. Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22) and in the Temple during Jesus' final week (Jesus predicts his death. John 12:20-36). Here, for the second time, Yahweh Himself proclaims Jesus as His own Son and Messiah. In practical terms, Yahweh said to Jesus, “My Son, you are acting properly, go on.” On the mountain of the Transfiguration Jesus was assured that he had chosen the right way and saw not only the inevitability, but the essential rightness of the Cross. It was Jesus' “Confirmation,” his full acceptance of Yahweh's will.

**- Confession, forgiveness, authority to forgive or not**

In “Peter's confession of Christ” [Mark 8:27-30 Matthew 16:13-20 Luke 9:18-21] Jesus tells Peter that “whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in Heaven, and what-ever you loose on Earth will be loosed in Heaven.” A typical Jewish phrase, commonly used for the teachings of the great Rabbis and carrying the meaning of declaring something “allowed” or “forbidden.” Jesus was actually saying to Peter that he will have to be the guide and the support of the infant Church, not giving him the power to admit or to exclude from Heaven, absolving or not men from their sins.

On Earth, nobody is without sin, and nobody can perfectly judge another human being, having in his hands only “appearances,” not deep knowledge. Perfect justice has to take into exact account all the circumstances of every person's life -country and epoch, social reality, family, education, hereditary and acquired diseases, physical and psychological dysfunctions, etc. Only Yahweh and, because of His decision, Jesus Christ, are in condition to judge properly, knowing really everything of a man and to administer this perfect justice. And this is valid even for the Churches having a sacramental or ceremonial “confession” of sin. In effect, priest and pastors can listen and give advice, but cannot “absolve” or not. Their real duty is to tell to people asking for moral help that, if they truly repent, Yahweh forgives them; if not, no.

The true meaning of the passage about forgiving or not has to be carefully understood. Peter and the Apostles had to bring Jesus' message to men. So, if they knew that a man was really penitent, they could with absolute certainty proclaim to him the forgiveness of Jesus. But equally, if they knew that there was no penitence in his heart, they had to tell him that until his heart changed there was no Jesus' forgiveness for him. This passage does not mean that the power to forgive sins was ever entrusted to any man; it means that the power to proclaim the forgiveness was so entrusted; along with the power-duty to warn that forgiveness is not open to the impenitent.

In effect, usually it is easier to confess sins to Yahweh than to men; so to confess them to another person represents a better proof of true repentance. Yet, this doesn't justify the compulsory confession of sins to a priest, nor the compulsory “secret” in the Roman Catholic confession.



Forgiveness will be offered, by Jesus only, both in this life and after death and, in both cases, can be accepted or refused. Jesus is the only intermediary between men and Yahweh as there is no other intermediary or intercessor -no priest or pastor, no angel, no recognized saint, not even Jesus' mother. And Yahweh always forgives, every time the request of forgiveness is accompanied by true repentance. And so must do the Christians: there must be no limit to their forgiveness, even because they must forgive men to be forgiven by Yahweh (to remember also that to forgive does not mean to forget; will is a spiritual matter, memory a physical one).

The same advice is found in the Lord's Prayer [Jesus' teaching on prayer (Our Father) Matthew 6:5-15 Luke 11:1-4]: forgive men to be forgiven by Yahweh. An advice accompanied by an invitation, actually a command, to be generous, with the certainty, but not the purpose, to receive the due reward in the future life.

Jesus has clearly said that if we forgive others, Yahweh will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, Yahweh will refuse to forgive us. Human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are inextricably inter-combined, and cannot be separated. If a man has not put things right with his fellow men, he cannot put things right with Yahweh.

Many times Jesus, the “Son of Man,” has declared that his mission was and is to save those in need, that is, the “sinners” who are “lost” to Satan.

After Jesus Christ's physical death, his spirit -his soul- went to the “Land of the Dead” to preach to the souls of all men who lived and died from the beginning of the human race and who never had the opportunity of hearing him, announcing the Gospel of salvation and declaring the remission of sins, which was received by those who believed in him, in the same way he did on Earth.

It is Jesus' way, for bringing men to himself and to Yahweh, to give them chance after chance both in this life and in the afterlife. So, at the end, a man has always the possibility of rising to Jesus and Yahweh.

The case of the crucified criminal who, in his suffering and with his own death approaching, understood the wrong of his life and repented, and the fact that, immediately after he had asked for forgiveness, Jesus did grant it to him, tells above all that, from Jesus' point of view, it is never too late to turn to him, in this life or in the next one.

Yahweh, the Creator of everything and everybody, has all the right to receive in His Kingdom every man who truly repents, even at the very last moment of his life.

**- Resurrection**

Jesus' resurrection was an act of the will of Yahweh. In effect Jesus, a dead man, could not have risen himself. The climax of the Gospels is the Resurrection, without which Jesus' death, though noble, would only have been tragic. But the Resurrection, due to the will of Yahweh, confirmed him to be His Son.

One thing is certain, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of him. Clearly, the women had come to pay the last tribute to a dead body. Clearly, the attitude of the disciples was that everything had finished in tragedy. By far the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of Christianity. Nothing else could have changed a group of sad and despairing men and women into the people radiant with joy and flaming with courage we find later. In effect, the Resurrection is the central fact of the whole Christian faith.

Jesus' death and resurrection would have effects far beyond the Jewish nation, extending to all of Yahweh's people -that is, to all people of all races and religions- who ever lived, live and will live on Earth. And its final result will be to have all of them, after their admission to Heaven, living in complete spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh.

Jesus' second coming at the end of the world will be followed by the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. The resurrected body will not be a non-material body but a physical one, similar to the present yet radically different in that it will be fit to live in eternal universal communion with Yahweh.

The resurrected Jesus' hands, feet and side bore the mark of the most serious wounds. This is an indication that a man's resurrected body will carry in clear evidence, for eternity, those special particularities which could have characterized the most important part of a person's life.

**- Taking of Bread and Wine or Breaking of Bread and Sharing of the Cup (ceremony) or Holy Communion or The Lord Supper**

On the night of the last supper all together -shortly after the Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem- Jesus took two parts of the traditional Jewish ceremony -the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup of wine- and gave them a new symbolic meaning. The Christians have to meet together to break and eat the bread and drink of the cup remembering and

proclaiming the deliverance of believers from the bondage of sin obtained by Jesus once for ever and for all. Important to note that the repetition of the ceremony is not the repetition of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross -as many Churches came to believe- but -as asked by Jesus- a remembrance of it and a reminder of the “New Covenant” the new relationship between Yahweh and all men, a relationship based solely on affection.

The Lord Jesus Christ's Supper was and is a commemorative communal meal, of deep spiritual significance, recalling Jesus Christ's death for the spiritual salvation of all men, and should be held periodically, even if Jesus did not leave any explicit instruction as to how often. It is a memorial, a symbol of fellowship with the crucified Jesus Christ, not a literal drinking of his blood and eating of his flesh, done at the end of the communal meal.

To the ancient people, accustomed to animal sacrifices, these ideas presented no difficulty at all. They would not read phrases like “eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood” with crude and shocked realism. They would think about the experience of an union closer than any earthly union, of a kind of “communion;” a spiritual union between the worshipper and a god, here Jesus. In few words, all this means that Jesus is the essential for life, that to refuse his invitation is to miss true life both in this world and in the world to come, that, at the end of time, all people will be in spiritual communion with Jesus and, through him, with Yahweh and with everybody else.

### **- End of time, end of the world (forecast of), second coming of Jesus Christ**

At the time, the first Christians and even the apostles believed imminent Jesus Christ's second coming and the end of the world. And, in spite of Jesus' declarations (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36), even presently many Christians continue to make forecast of those events.

But no one knows the time of the end of the world and of Jesus' the second coming; not the angels, not even Jesus himself when living on Earth knew it, but only Yahweh. Another clear demonstration that Jesus was a man, not a “god,” not a part of a trinity.

The New Testament writers viewed the whole period beginning with Jesus Christ's birth as “the last days” and believed that Jesus' second coming and the end of the world were imminent.

Only Yahweh knows the future, so it is totally wrong to make any forecast about the end of the world and Jesus' second coming.

Nobody will be able to predict Jesus Christ's return on Earth at the “end of time,” nor will have the time to announce it. Many people will come out with false prophecies and false predictions; but nobody must believe and follow them. Any speculation is totally vain.

Just as Jesus Christ's first coming occurred at the precise time Yahweh wanted, so will be with his second coming, and nobody knows when. It will happen at the end of time, in full view of everybody, all around the world. The important point is that nobody can know that time, and nobody has to speculate about it.

After Jesus' second coming and the end of the world, there will be the Universal Resurrection, and then all men will live for ever in Yahweh's Kingdom, not only with their soul, but with their resurrected body. Then, after the end of the human race and after the conversion to Christianity of the last man, Hell -the place where Yahweh is not and Satan reigns- will be an empty space and, for that, the reason itself of its existence will end. At that point even Lucifer, convinced of his mistake, will repent and enter for ever -accompanied by all his angels- the Kingdom of Yahweh, that is, Heaven.

#### **- Millennialism**

In “The 1000 years of Christ and the saints,” [The Revelation 20:1-10] we find the only foundation document for the doctrine called “Millennialism;” the only passage in the New Testament in which it appears. As it can be clearly seen by reading the Gospels, this doctrine does not correspond at all to Jesus' teaching. Actually, Jesus never spoke of a “1000 years” Christian Earthly Kingdom free of Satan's influence. On the contrary, he always affirmed that Satan will be heavily influential on Earth, till the “end of the age.”

Actually, Jesus has warned his men of any time that till the end of the world they might well find the state and the consolidated religious organization allied against them; that both State and Church would persecute them. And the persecutions will even come, too often, from other “Christian” people: it is a matter of fact that so many religious orthodox people have often persecuted others -Christians and not- in the strong conviction that this was right, that they were working for Yahweh, and not

against Him. In effect, no established Church likes and accepts to be upset, and quite often the man with a message from Yahweh had -and still has- to undergo the hatred and the enmity of a fossilized orthodoxy.

To remember that the Revelation is the announcement of a foretelling of the near future, the proof that it is wrong to use it as a kind of mysterious timetable of what is going to happen thousands of years later (too many people did use and are still using it to draw celestial time tables of what is to come). The things it deals with are to happen in the immediate future and, so, the Revelation has to be interpreted only against the background of its own time.

### **- Leaving Christianity and coming back**

The disciples' flight in the Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested; Peter's triple denial and Jesus' silent look at Peter in the High Priest courtyard; Jesus' later triple reinstatement of Peter and full forgiveness by the Sea of Galilee give an important lesson: People who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and come back have to be accepted again in the Christian community.

In the High Priest courtyard Jesus, passing by, did not speak to Peter in anger but looked silently at him in sorrow. No accusation, no condemnation for human weakness; only sorrow.

Peter's reply at his reinstatement shows that Jesus perfectly knew his true sentiment. But it was necessary to ask the question and have the answer in front of all disciples, to reinstate Peter publicly and officially. This episode is the better example of what to do with people who fall away from or repudiate Christianity and then repent and ask to come back: they, after showing their sincerity, have to be fully accepted again in the Christian community -something that was and is seldom done!

### **- Legalism/Grace**

In the Old Testament we find a number of social and religious regulations, yet very few moral rules; what we do find are great, broad principles which a man must himself take and interpret under Yahweh's guidance, and apply to the individual situations in life. The problem was that the Teachers of the Law, the Scribes, did reduce the great principles of the Law to literally thousands of rules which to them were the essence of religion, giving rise to Legalism. Jesus said he had come not to cancel the Law, but to fulfill it, to bring out the real meaning of the Law; that is, the one great principle of reverence, respect and tolerance. Reverence for

Yahweh, respect and tolerance for everybody else. A reverence that did not, and does not, consist in obeying a multitude of rules. Not in sacrifice, but in mercy, not in legalism, but in affection and grace. A tolerance and respect that must be based not on indifference but on understanding and compassion.

The coming of Jesus Christ marks the passage from Legalism (Moses' Law) to Yahweh's Grace.

To note that in every moment of the Jewish and Christian religions' history, too much relevance was and is still given to sexual conduct, much more than to social problems and injustice.

### **- Gifts (talents)**

Every member of the Christian community has been given some spiritual or physical gift to be able and carry on his assigned service or work. And all those gifts come from Yahweh, who determines which gift or gifts each believer should have and use for the build up of the Christian community and not for selfish advantage. Important to remember that not everyone has the same gift, nobody has all the gifts and nobody should expect a particular gift. Anyway, the existence of the gift -which comes from Yahweh- has to be acknowledged and the gift used.

Yahweh gives different men different gifts. One man can received five talents, another two, and another one. It is not the number of talents which matters; what matters is how they are used. Yahweh never demands a man to use abilities he has not got; but He does demand that a man should use to the full the abilities he does possess. Men are not equal in talent; but they can be equal in effort.

A tricky gift is that of an ecstatic -not of a foreign- language. Sometimes a highly regarded gift, supposed to be due to the direct influence of Yahweh's Spirit. And it happens even today that someone would fall into ecstasy pouring out a torrent of unintelligible sounds which only a person having the gift of interpretation can understand; and with plenty of people blindly believing to the interpretation!

### **- Human soul**

The soul -the spiritual part of a man- is not preexistent and is not created by Yahweh at the moment of the conception of a new human being, is generated by his parents souls at the moment of his conception, as his body -his physical part- is generated by their bodies.

Interesting to know that the Christian Church's seventeenth Ecumenical Council of Basel/Ferrara/Florence, held in AD 1431 to 1439, maintains (with the majority of two votes!!) that women, too, have a soul.

**- Sin – suffering**

The Jews -and so many Christians- connected and still connect suffering and sin. They assume that wherever there is suffering, there must be sin. Another belief is the pre-existence of the soul. The belief that all souls exist somewhere in Heaven, waiting to enter into a body, that these souls have the possibility to sin, and that a man's affliction, especially if it is from birth, comes from some sin his soul has committed before he was born. An alternative belief is that a man's affliction is due to the sins of his parents -idea still quite wide-spread, even among Christians. In effect, clearly, children simply inherit -suffer or enjoy- the physical and moral consequences of whatever their parents do. And Jesus many times strongly contradicted both beliefs. Furthermore, as we know very well, it is often the greatest saints who have to suffer most, to carry the heavier cross.

**- Marriage and celibacy of priests**

Peter, as well as many other disciples -as Philip (Ac 21:8-9)- and even other apostles, was married. And so it has been for more than 1000 years of Church history. Even Paul asserted his right -the right of each one of Yahweh's workers- to be married, if he wished to.

And, for those having higher responsibilities in the Church, Paul considered essential to be married and to have children (further than being strong and mature Christians, not to risk to become too proud of their importance). Yet, going through the history of the Christian Church, what a difference with the position of authority, power and privilege of all bishops and high prelates!

It was the Synod of Rome, called by Pope Gregory VII in AD 1075 that imposed clerical celibacy. Married priests were excommunicated. As a result, the priests of the Roman Church become a class apart, cut off from the most sacred and elevating experience of family life.

There are those who voluntarily renounce marriage, parenthood, and human physical love to dedicate themselves to some particular mission, a condition that has to be strictly voluntary, and doesn't have to be made compulsory to all the people who want to follow a religious vocation.

**Note.** Article taken from:

“Teachings and Deductions from the New Testament”





Sciarborasca, January 2017

### **The “GOOD, OLD DAYS” of the Christian Preachers**

A recurring topic of many (too many) sermons is that things don't go well anymore, that the present situation is not good, that people don't follow anymore the Church requirements, rules and indications, and so on. In essence, that the “Good, Old Days” are over, are a matter of the past.

To understand which, most probably, those “Good, Old Days” of Christianity were for most of modern Christian preachers, it is my opinion that we must go back a full millennium, to the social-religious situation typical of the Middle Ages, when the reality of the world was defined by the powerful prelates of the Church. Because of their social position, these men held great influence over the minds of everybody, not only the populace, but the rich and noble as well. And the world these prelates described as real was, above all, spiritual. They had created a reality which placed their own idea about Yahweh's plans for mankind at the very center of everybody's life.

Almost every man of that time was confined to the social class of his father and knew he would be always confined to that class. But, regardless of which class the man was in, or the particular work he was doing, he had to realize from an early age that social position was secondary to the spiritual reality of life as defined by the Church.

Life on earth was about passing a spiritual test. The Church explained that Yahweh had placed mankind on the Earth, at the center of His universe, surrounded by the entire cosmos, for one single purpose: to win or lose salvation. And in this trial a man had to correctly choose between two opposites: either Yahweh's commands or the temptations of the devil.

But he didn't have to face this challenge relying on his own strengths and ideas: as a mere individual he was not qualified to determine his condition in this regard. This was up to the churchmen; they were there to interpret the Scriptures and to tell him every step of the way whether he was in accordance with Yahweh or being duped by Satan. If he followed their instructions, he was assured that a rewarding afterlife in Heaven would follow. But if he failed to follow the course they prescribed, then there was excommunication and eternal damnation.

The important thing to understand is that every aspect of the Medieval world was always defined in other-worldly terms. All phenomena of life -be it a thunderstorm, an earthquake, a good crop or the death of a loved one- were defined either as the will of Yahweh or the malice of the devil. There was no concept of natural weather or of geological forces or physical disease. All that would have come much later. At the time, a man had to completely believe the Church, and take for granted that every event of the world was caused by spiritual means only.

At this point, we have to be aware that, as well-intentioned as it may be, the machinery of a religious organization can crush people in its gear. Too often what was and is done in the name of Yahweh has nothing to do with Him and was and is, even when unintentional, quite contrary to His purposes. Every religious institution, as every other human institution, is governed by a hierarchy. And you need rules to administer it, and then you need laws and their enforcement, and you end up with an organization that destroys true human relationships rather than promote them. And hierarchical authority, as it is usually practically used by everybody at any time, is merely the excuse the strongest use to make others to conform to what they want.

But historically, the social situation of those “Good Old Times” and the spiritual-terrestrial power of the Christian Church as an organization, began to change in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when some people began to put in evidence certain improprieties on the part of the churchmen themselves: secretly violating their vows of chastity, for example, or taking gratuities to look the other way when government officials or the rich and the powerful violate scriptural laws. These improprieties alarmed those people because the same churchmen held themselves to be the only intermediary between men and Yahweh, the only interpreters of the Scriptures, the sole arbitrators of everybody's salvation.

And, suddenly a group led by Martin Luther was calling for a complete break from Papal Christianity. They said that the Roman Church hierarchy was corrupted and demanded an end to their reign over the minds and the souls of the people. New Churches were being formed based on the idea that each person should be able to have access to the Scriptures personally and to interpret them with no middlemen.

And their rebellion succeeded. The men of the Roman Church, who for many centuries had defined reality, now were losing credibility. Consequently, the whole world organization was thrown into question. The unconditional consensus about the nature of the universe and about humankind's purpose here on Earth, based as it was on the Church's description, was collapsing, leaving all men in western culture in a precarious situation of overall doubt.

If the Church's description of reality and the reason for human existence were wrong, then what was right? The situation was clearly unsettling and the old world view was being challenged everywhere. In fact, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the astronomers had proved beyond any doubt that the sun and stars did not revolve around the Earth as maintained by the Church. Clearly the Earth is only a small planet orbiting a minor star in a universe that contains uncountable stars, and mankind is not at the centre of Yahweh's universe.

The descriptions of Creation literally based on Scriptures was no longer blindly accepted. In essence, a thousand years ago men lived in a world where Yahweh and human spirituality were clearly defined, then they did lose these certainties and men in the West suddenly became aware that they lived in a totally unknown universe and began studying and understanding it, free from the respect of religious tradition, removing little by little the esoteric from the world.

And all this explains why so many preachers -of almost all Christian religious organizations- continue to speak even of recent past as of the “Good, Old Days” when everything was much better, that is, of the terrestrial power they have lost in the course of the centuries, and continue to lose; still vastly unable to replace it with a spiritual equivalent.

**Note.** Many (too many) times, to understand some particular aspect of the more traditional Christian Denominations (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican) we have to go back to a far past as, to make some examples, in the case of: veneration of crosses, images, statues, relics; cult of martyrs and saints; patron saints “protectors” of countries, towns, working categories; cult, doctrines and dogmas of the Virgin Mary; doctrines and dogmas in general; tradition of the Church in accordance and of equal value with Scriptures; liturgy of the Mass and of all religious ceremonies; nostalgic vision of a pious past that has never really existed; composition and titles of the clergy; opulent pageantry of the officiants at the more important ceremonies; etc.



Sciarborasca, July 2018

### **Notes on Papal Authority and Election's Requirements.**

Contemporary Roman Catholic Christians generally assume that all the popes (who are, first, bishops of Rome) were elected and have exercised their authority as the popes with whom they are most familiar -the current and the recent ones. And they assume that papal authority comes transmitted in an unbroken line of succession from the Apostle Peter and, furthermore, that this line of succession has never been in doubt and that, if ever there has been a serious question about the legitimacy of a particular pope, the Church had readily resolved it.

But history tells differently:

There has been no solo Bishop of Rome till the middle of the second century. Until then the Church of Rome was governed by a committee of elders, perhaps with one of them acting as the body's leader. And perhaps those prominent individuals were the ones whom the Catholic Church regards as the successors of Peter. But we cannot be certain. And we have to remember that Peter was not present in Rome when the Church was founded there (nobody knows by whom), at least two decades before his arrival.

The bishops of the first four centuries had relatively limited authority beyond Rome and its environs. They did not convene nor attended to the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381) and Ephesus (AD 431), which issued the Church's first definitive teachings on the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Over the course of time, the bishops and popes of Rome engaged in theological and doctrinal disputes and entered in conflict over pastoral practices with the leaders of other important Churches (as Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople). Furthermore, successive bishops and popes had different -notably non constant- points of view. And, in the middle of the fifth century, it was Leo I, the Great, the first to try and claim universal jurisdiction (over the whole Church, East and West) calling himself "Vicar of Peter," trying to impose his theological and doctrinal points of view over all the existing Christian Churches.

Doctrinal deviation was never the only serious problem of the papacy: from the ninth to the eleventh century the papacy, given to lavish lifestyles, was stained by simony, nepotism, concubinage, brutality and even murder. And it was dominated by German kings and by powerful -and corrupt- Roman aristocratic families.

It was Gregory VII at the end of the eleventh century who determined a whole change in the papacy, beginning to reshape it in the kind of monarchical and legalistic institution it is today.

The direct line down from Peter is many times uncertain as, for example, during the “Great Western Schism” when there were many contemporary popes and/or antipopes, the validity or not of whose elections were -and are even today- uncertain or questionable.

For the first centuries of the Church history, the bishops of Rome were elected by the clergy and the people of Rome. The same happened in every part of the Christian world, as from the beginning the clergy and laity have always selected their own pastors, by the votes of all the people constituting the local Church. And Rome was no exception.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, popular election of bishops, including the bishop of Rome, continued, but with the participation of the bishops of neighboring dioceses.

In the sixth and seventh centuries the clergy and the bishops of the neighboring dioceses took a more prominent part in the election of the bishop of Rome, and influential laypersons, such as civil and military officials, began to exercise a greater influence than ordinary citizens, although the approval of the general populace was always considered necessary. In this period the Eastern Emperors had great influence over papal elections, so much that it was taken for granted that a pope could not be consecrated such until the approval would arrive from Constantinople.

We have to note that most of the popes until this period were deacons, not even presbyters (priests), at the time of their election to the papacy. This means that, after election, each of them had to be consecrated priest, then bishop of Rome, and finally Pope. Furthermore, the practice of imperial confirmation is quite interesting when we take into consideration the papal claim of the Supremacy of the Roman See. Yet that See could not have its own bishop, the successor of Peter, without the approval of a lay ruler, the Byzantine Emperor, resident in far away Constantinople. And this meant, always, some months of religious and political vacuum and uncertainty. Later, this time gap was reduced by giving to the Emperor viceroy (the Imperial Exarch) resident in Ravenna (on Italy’s East coast) the responsibility for the imperial approval.

When, in the eighth century, the political power shifted from the Byzantines to the Lombards and then to the Franks, the papacy became completely detached from the Byzantine Empire and put itself under the protection of the Franks, now simply notifying the kings of the Franks of

the election of a new pope, without having to wait for their approval. At the end of this period a Roman Synod decided that only cardinal-deacons and cardinal-priests were eligible for the election as Bishop of Rome and that, as a consequence, only the clergy could vote in a papal election.

At the beginning of the ninth century the kings of the Franks restored the role of the laity in papal elections. So the popes had to be elected by the clergy, the nobility and the people of Rome and the newly elected pope had to take an oath of loyalty to the Carolingian Emperor, and only then he received imperial approval. And when they did differently, the emperors even invaded and plundered Rome in retaliation.

The tenth century signed a change for the worse with the powerful and corrupted aristocratic Roman families making the papacy their plaything, interrupted only shortly by the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I. During this chaotic period there were some twenty-five popes and antipopes.

The eleventh century was under the overall control of the German Emperor, in spite of some new rules introduced at the middle of the century (prohibition of simony, only cardinal-bishops; a century later even cardinal-priests and -deacons could vote; two-thirds majority required). The German kings continued to interfere, (the French kings and the aristocratic families of Rome as well) supporting various popes and antipopes, till the beginning of the fifteenth century, that is, till the end of the Great Papal Schism. To note that some of the rules introduced in the middle of the thirteenth century (the new election was to be held ten days after the death of the pope, in the town where the pope had died and in a secure place where the electors could not have any contact with anyone else, plus some temporal and financial restrictions to assure a quick election) were at the best sporadically respected.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century simoniacal elections were declared not only illicit but also invalid and the candidate elected was considered an apostate (that is, one who has completely rejected the faith).

In the twentieth century this decree of nullity was revoked so that the validity of a papal election may not be challenged for that reason; the required majority was set to two-thirds plus one, then brought back to two-thirds; simple majority is required after thirty-three unsuccessful ballots; only cardinals under the age of eighty can vote; maximum number of cardinal-electors is set at 120; the conclave has to take place in the Sistine Chapel fifteen days after the death of the pope (anyway, not later than twenty); election by acclamation is no longer possible, as the only form of election is by secret ballot.

**Note on the title “Cardinal”**

The title “Cardinal” was originally given to all the members of the Roman Curia, consecrated or not, who administered the most important churches of Rome.

“Cardinal” presently is the title given to the members of the College of the Cardinals, all of whom are already bishops and are appointed directly by the pope and serve as his closer advisors and as papal electors.

Traditionally, there were four categories of cardinals:

--Cardinal-deacons: originally they had the care of the poor in the seven districts of Rome; now they are titular bishops assigned to full-time service in the Roman Curia.

--Cardinal-priests: originally they served as pastors of the titular churches of Rome; now they are bishops of dioceses outside Rome.

--Cardinal-bishops: originally they were the heads of the neighboring (or suburbicarian) dioceses around Rome; now they are engaged in full-service in the Roman Curia.

--Cardinal-patriarchs: they are the heads of the sees of apostolic origin.

To note that the distinction among Cardinal-priest, -deacon and -bishop was abolished in AD 1958 by Pope John XXIII and reintroduced in 1962 by Council Vatican II.

**Note.** Article taken from:

“History of the Western Christian Church”





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#### **The letters of Peter, James, John and Jude to the Christian Church**

Peter, James, John and Jude's advices and exhortations, in their letters addressed to all believers.

#### **IV- Paul's thought**

From Paul's letters: 1&2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1&2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, 1&2 Timothy, Titus. And from the letter to the Hebrews.

Paul's thought made clear and understandable by merging all his letters into one.

#### **V- The Revelation of John -disclosed**

Which is the real meaning of this cryptic book? Does it carry a true "Christian" message?

Is it in line with the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

#### **VI- Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh, a man**

The only human son of Yahweh, the Only Creator Almighty of everything and everybody.

A selection (from: The Gospel of Jesus Christ, The Acts of the Apostles, The Letters of Peter and Paul's Thought) of the most important and clear passages demonstrating that Jesus Christ, the Son of Yahweh, was a man, a divine being, yet not "God."

#### **VII- The Last Week and the Resurrection**

The most important facts and words of Jesus Christ's life in the merged narratives of the four Evangelists.

Taken from: The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### **VIII- Miscellanea**

Articles on various topics.

#### **IX- History of the Western Christian Church. A chronological summary study**

A chronological study of the two millennia of history and evolution of the Christian Church in the western world with the purpose of understanding the present situation and its fundamental differences from early Christianity.

#### **X- Haggai Zechariah Ezra Nehemiah Malachi. Post-exilic prophets of Yahweh**

A simple study, to understand who they were, what they did, and why.

#### **XI- Teachings and deductions from the New Testament**

A selection of particularly significant and enlightening passages.