

**CATECHISM FOR ADULTS:
III. 'AND IN JESUS CHRIST'**

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THE fall of man is the result of man's choice—he chooses to live centred on himself. This choice cuts him off from God and plunges him into a morass of unreality, for life apart from the Creator loses all meaning. The only reality that remains is the choice, the first sin that parts man from God. All men are born in disobedience, in a situation created by sin. Man by reason of his history, his origin from Adam, cannot fulfil the purpose of his first creation; fallen from grace, with his natural strength impaired, his state is that of original sin. The world is the system man builds up in self seeking; the flesh is man's desire, greedy for life, asserting itself against God. Each actual sin he commits is his personal endorsement of the state in which he is born.

Though he is prone to sin, though he is often sinful, man is not evil by nature; he tries to escape, he longs for beauty, for justice, for truth, above all for love. He can pervert these things, for he is free; for the same reason he can choose them, and pursue them when they elude his grasp. He has imagined beings who will bring these things to him, he has followed prophets and elaborated techniques. He has known failure and he has seen himself as failing; sometimes he comes near to a knowledge of sin.

Man is fallen, but he is still made in the image of God; he is still free, still, when he will, open to good. Fall as far as he may, he cannot fall out of the providence of God; plan as he may, he cannot close out the purpose of God. It is fallen man whom God instructs in Abraham; it is fallen man whom God leads out of Egypt, with whom he makes a covenant. Man's pride and sin become the occasion of a clearer revelation of God's nature, of his mercy and loving kindness towards his people.

The prophets brought the message that God helps, that he will save his people, that his mercy and his glory cover the earth. Through the testimony of the apostles, we know that God had spoken when the angel, speaking to Mary, said he was to be called Jesus.

He is the answer given by God to sin; he is the restorer of what was lost, for he is Emmanuel, God with us. Through his presence, God is present, and by him grace, union in love with God, is restored.

This is the very core of the creed. For us everything begins here. We are not the Adam of the first creation; we are those who wait for God. The coming of Christ is the end of the waiting, and the beginning of the new creation; of that great day of the Lord, the Kingdom of God, which is Christ ruling in the souls of men. This is the event, for it is here that God acts. It is his creative word breaking through and establishing a central point for all human history. Man lives either before or after Christ; no other time is relevant to him as human.

This is expressed by the second article of the creed: 'In Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord'. This was expressed by the first Christians when they said Jesus is Lord. The Child is born and he is the longed-for One of Israel; the Child is born and the Word is made flesh. This is quite clear from the Gospels. The Man heard, known and loved, teaches with authority, and proves by miracles that he is one with the Father. It goes even further than that. Apart from him no one really knows the Father. It is only the Son who knows the Father, only the Son who can reveal the Father to men. He is not simply the spokesman of the Father, he is the Word of the Father. He is not just a teacher of genius, or one inspired; he is the Wisdom of God. God chose us in him, wrote St Paul, before the foundation of the world. He is the Word who is with God, the Word that is God; it is the second Person of the Trinity who condescends, who empties himself and becomes a servant. In doing so he makes known to us the mystery of the will of the Father. It is because he is the Son, because he is the uncreated Wisdom, that he, and he alone, can reveal to man the mystery. No other has seen the Father: he is one with the Father, he alone can speak with authority.

For the Christian, as for St Peter, the crisis of personal history comes when the question is put: 'Whom do you say that I am?' The response is the assertion of the second article: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. This central text brings home two vital points. Peter is confronted by a man with whom he had by now spent some time, and he is asked first what people generally thought of Jesus, and secondly what he himself believed.

Peter is not being asked whether he regards some myth or saga as a plausible enough story; he is asked what he thinks of a historical character, of one who led a physical existence. It is this being that Peter says is the Son of the Living God. Not, be it noted, an emanation of some god or other, but the Son of Jahve, before whom there may be no other God. The reply of Peter bears witness to the majesty of the person of Christ in such a way that it becomes misleading to call Christ divine. Why? Because one who is divine shares in divinity—and by common usage the term is applied very widely. No, he was not divine, he was GOD.

The second point seems much less important. It is from one angle very ordinary. Man chooses and judges: that is, he remains free. As Adam's choice was free, so is ours. It is true that from another angle this is very surprising. For man to make here an efficacious choice, God must intervene with his grace; the grace which Christ brings to all men is applied by Christ as Lord to convert—that is to turn a soul towards God. It implies the mercy and the love of God who does not remember our sins; it implies his intervention, the unfolding of his salvific plan.

Man judges, he remains as he was made, an intelligent being. He sees, he questions, he weighs evidence—in the face of the claim made, only an intolerable levity of mind, vast indolence or sheer ignorance can explain any other course. He then speaks and his words are judgment. In judging he is judged—if the Light has shined in the darkness and the darkness has not comprehended, it is without excuse. The decision here cannot be trivial—it involves all one's life, and is its testing. None the less it is a decision that cannot be forced, in the sense that by being clever, man can worry it out quickly or find a slick answer. The answer may be given almost gradually by a whole life, or reached after years, or it can blind with its suddenness. It will involve respect for evidence; it will also involve wrestling with the angel of God, but most of all it involves waiting.

This is all conveyed in a quite straightforward way in the article. It is worth while just looking at each of the terms used. Both his names are given by God; they are imposed by the messengers of God. He is not Saviour because we have longed for a Saviour, but because he has been given to us. There is no suggestion in Scripture or Creed that he is the product, even the finest product, of the human spirit. All great and good men witness to

him, but do so as deriving their power from him, either explicitly as the saints do, or as those do who are used by God to prepare men for the knowledge of Christ. He is Jesus, the Saviour; his name is the only name given to men by which they can be saved, the name before which all, in heaven or on earth, must bow.

He is Christ, he is the Messiah, the Anointed. So often we slip over the word, treating it as if it were a mere surname. He is the King, the Priest, for whom the people of God has waited. The title says he has come to deliver; he is also the Servant of the Lord, the despised one who carries the sin of the people. He is the Son of David, sprung from God's chosen servant, to rule the people; he is the branch and the remnant; all others have fallen, wandered away from God, but he remains carrying the hope of Israel, so that in him the seed of Abraham is blessed. He is the presence that went before the people in the exodus, that protected them, that made the temple holy. All this and a great deal more is conveyed by the use of the term 'Christ'. That the early Christian community was quite clear on this we can see from St Peter's sermons in the first part of the Book of Acts. It is Jesus whom God has made both Christ and Lord, and the apostles cease not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ. Why? Once again because in none other is salvation.

Next, the Church emphasizes what has been said by the use of two phrases. He is the only Son, and he is our Lord.

He is the 'only Son'. In all the synoptic Gospels he is called the Son of God, and the title does not simply imply that he recognized God as Father, or that he is recognized as being full of power of the Father. It asserts that in him the full sovereignty of God is revealed; because the Son has come, the Kingdom of God is here. He is with the Father before all ages. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, equal to the Father as the image of his perfection; he is the Word and the Wisdom of God. He is the only, the unique, Son of the Father. It is this Person that is incarnate. It is the only begotten Son of the Father who became flesh, One who is the Son of God by right—this is the teaching of both St John and St Paul.

He is 'our Lord'. This again is a word of immense significance. Jesus is Lord. The term 'lord' has become secularized, even a little absurd, to the European mind. Perhaps this is a good thing in so far as it saves us from the connotation of the word as applied to

'the many' of the pagans—the Lord Zeus, the Lord Horus, and so on. None the less it is primarily a religious word, a title given to a holy one, and in each belief it is given a distinctive nuance. The Greek translators of the Old Testament used the Greek for 'Lord' to render the name of the Holy One of Israel, so that when a Jew like St Paul used the word of Jesus, or the early Jewish Church applied it to him as a title, they obviously meant to convey not a Greek idea, but the claim that was blasphemy to the rulers of the people, and salvation for those in darkness. So high is the claim made by the use of the title that it can only be said in the Spirit that Jesus is Lord. To grasp, even from afar, which is faith, the mind of man must be enlightened; for this is the great mystery—that Jesus the Lord is the Son of God.

Because it is a mystery, that is a truth which is beyond the power of the human mind to penetrate, the evidence for it must be extrinsic. The Scriptures witness from the first age of the Church that the claim was made and the deeds done; the saints witness through the ages to his power. The evidence, as it were, herds us towards some judgment. The Gospels are history, and as history they witness through the centuries of criticism to the claim of Christ. Have philosophy or science anything to say that affects the possibility of such a claim? The questions arise inevitably and must be faced honestly, giving to each its value. In the last resort, it is a decision of faith, something for which our minds, drawn towards truth, can clear the ground, but which is itself only accepted on the authority of God whose word, in faith, carries its own evidence.

It is the task of the Church to preach the Gospel of Christ, but this Gospel is not merely a teaching, a telling of good news. The Gospel is Christ himself; the action of God in the world, of which the telling is but the verbal witness. The Gospel is the light in the darkness, the remission of sins, the giving of life. Faith comes through hearing, through preaching, but only in part, for it is dependent on the action of God in Christ, or the gift of grace which restores and elevates the soul. It is because Christ is Lord and Saviour that we can believe.
