

The Institute for Catechesis and Formation ICF 101 – Christian Anthropology

Welcome and introductions...

This course will address the fundamental existential questions (Who is God? Who am I and why am I here? Does God want a relationship with me?), within the structure of an authentic Christian anthropology. The course will examine who God is as a Trinity (communion of persons), who seeks to share Himself with His creation. The Biblical accounts of the creation of the world, the human person (the crown of creation), and the circumstances surrounding the fall into sin will situate the human person within God's plan of salvation. A brief survey of Salvation History will be traced to Jesus Christ, the Redeemer who saves humanity, teaches the person the meaning of his humanity and his life, and is the answer to the questions with which the class began.

Texts: Introduction to Catholicism for Adults, Rev. James Socias (ICA)
Supplemental Reading:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>

The Bible: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>

We will be using these sources, or at least the material will be derived from them. I will also try to utilize many of the fine discussion questions that the ICA places at the end of each chapter.

So let's see how we can find a balance between discussing the material, but not venture down discussions that get us hopelessly off topic. We will also not be able to solve all the world's problems, but it is my sincere hope that we can place them in proper context and provide insight.

I also have many stories that I will try to intertwine into the material. I will also augment any material with comments that I have found useful in teaching this material in the past. I will always be orthodox (right teaching), but as the Catholic Church has never, neither will She ever exhaustively declare authoritative in all matters, some ways in terms of approach and method come down to style and temperament, that do not effect the doctrine. That's not the same as simply saying it's all opinion. This will be easier to grasp with a concrete

example, so we'll leave it at this: I promise in the end, you will not be confused as to what the Church teaches.

I also want you to know (this is important) that I will do my best to contrast what the Christ has revealed through His Church to what the world presents to us. In the end, I hope you will realize just how radical the love that Christ wills for us really is for the world. You will hopefully come to understand terms or phrases such as, "light in the darkness," "disciple of Christ," "child of God," "priest, prophet and king," "baptized" in a new radical way, and realize that union with God is simply "getting into heaven."

Week 1: The Mystery of God and the Human Person

ICA Chapters 2 and 3; pp. 105-116; 574-588

What is Christian anthropology?

Christian Anthropology is the study of humanity (*anthropos*) within a Christological context, that is, with Christ at the center. By His Incarnation, Jesus Christ teaches the human person who he/she is.

If you want to sound profound, and thoroughly confuse someone, simply ask them, "What does it mean to be a human?" One would think that being humans ourselves, we would have the answer ready on our lips. That's not the case often.

So the real shocker here is that there really is an universal human nature, that it can be known and that it was fully revealed in the person of Jesus the Christ. You might be nodding approvingly to that statement, but most do not accept that there can be a definition of the human person. Here are some challenges...

- The human person, including his nature is evolving. Neuroscience has shown us more about the human person in the last decade than all times previous.
 - Think of the implications of the genetic or epigenetic foundations of our sexuality, aptitude for intelligence, propensity for violence, or even being faithful in a relationship (risk taking), to name a few.
- A person is determined by their utilitarian contributions to society or at least, their own ability to reason.

- Is the elderly person who sits in the hallway of a nursing home, in a wheel chair, unresponsive with their mouth open really a person? Is an unborn child a person? Or even a 3 month old child?
- Or is the nature of the human person evolving?
 - In other words, are we growing in consciousness as a species? Will we one day evolve past what we now consider human?
- Or too, the belief that there simply is no nature that is universal.
 - The best we can do is describe similarities between all human persons, but it is nothing more than categories that we construct.
- And finally, in what way will our understanding of the human person affect our consideration of other high level animals being afforded the same status?
 - How often does one hear of the DNA comparison between humans and chimpanzees? Are other apes persons?

But as human persons redeemed by the person Jesus the Christ, we are set immeasurably apart from all other created beings.

Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* 1: THE REDEEMER OF MAN, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of human history.

Gaudium et spes 22: The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.

Jesus Christ reveals to us who we are by becoming one of us. By His Incarnation, Christ shows us the essential goodness of the human person, and the path we are to follow to become fully human. Christ reveals who God is, who we are, and who we are made to become.

"God became man so that man might become a god." St. Athanasius. The Incarnation is a significant event to be sure. Blessed Duns Scotus proposes, and I believe (the Church has not definitive teaching concerning this matter) that the Incarnation was not necessary because of Adam's Fall, but because it was always

God's intent. The thinking is that such a sublime manifestation of love could not be dependent on the weakness of a created being.

Nonetheless, however it may be expressed; beatific vision, attaining heaven, being with God forever, becoming god, as long as we understand there is and always will be a distinction between the Creator and the creation, we should at least know this union is more profound than "making it to heaven."

So, to know God is to know something about ourselves. So we ask the question...

Who is God?

I'm going to comment as we move through this material, but I will address the *imago Dei* towards the end of this first section that I hope will wrap it all up and connect it well for you!!

- Trinity – one in substance, three Persons (unity in difference), each equally possesses fullness of divinity and are inseparable in action, each is distinct in relation to the other.

We're good Christians. We accept the Trinity rather uncritically. The fact is that it is not explicit in Sacred Scripture. If you doubt that, then I encourage you to have a discussion with a Jehovah Witness, you might not wind up on the better end.

The truth is that the early Christian Church didn't question Jesus was divine or God. Yes, there were, and always are dissenters or heretic (those who choose for themselves). [Briefly describe Arianism and how widespread it was]. So the issue was to work out how God would be one (monotheism) yet three persons.

- Communion of persons .

St. John Paul II used the term *communio personarum*. It means that we were made in love and for love.

- God is relation

I'll talk about this again, but if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in a reciprocal relation of love with each other, and we are in God's image, then we are built for relation also!

- God has revealed Himself to us as Trinity (John 15: 10-11; Matthew 28:19; John 14: 16- 17; John 15:26; CCC #234)

We are in mystery here...and mystery is something beyond our comprehension, but still something by grace which we can grasp in part.

There's the story of the Bishop asking the confirmands a question about the Trinity. The child spoke softly when he answered, and the bishop not hearing the answer, responded "I'm sorry son, I didn't really understand your answer concerning the Trinity." The confirmand remarked, "That's okay Bishop, it's a mystery and nobody really gets it."

God is the Creator

(Genesis 1 and 2)

- God creates freely and gratuitously.

Creation is really an act of love. What does love do, but communicate itself. Think of a time when you heard really good news. What was the first thing you did? Share it? That's what God does, but He is not compelled to do so, that would limit the meaning of love as a gift.

- All being is contingent – radical dependence on God.

Be contingent means that we need not exist. That all existence, all being is dependent on God to sustain us in His love. Think how this understanding dismisses the many apparent issues concerning evolution...how was God involved. For Catholics it's simple...He sustains us!

- All being is gift.

We could spend a lot of time speaking about the many ways in which 'gift' could be understood; must it be necessary, is it undone if anything is given back (reciprocal), can any part of it be retained, etc.

I want to add my own twist here and tell you that there can be no gift which is not a sacrifice. Reciprocation can really be understood as a type of graciousness in accepting a sign of gratitude. And as for whether something retained diminishes the gift, this is only true if one thinks in human terms of quantity...if you have 20 and give 1, you have 19 left. Love as gift is incommensurable.

- Seven day structure of creation - God's order (creation ex nihilo, chaos to order)
Here it is important to understand the radical nature of our creation story by contrasting it to another creation story; the Enuma Elish.

[Contrast here the two creation accounts, being certain to point out of each leaves with reader with a different understanding of the human person].

Priestly Creation Mythos

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Babylonian Creation Myth (Enuma Elish)

The divine beings were being attacked (there was a plot) by the ocean goddess Tiamat (water was evil). The divine beings create Marduk (their hero) to defend them. Marduk agrees on the condition that if successful, he become their unquestioned ruler; the divine beings agree. Marduk battles and destroys Tiamat. Ripping her corpse in half Marduk fashions the earth and the sky. Marduk then organized the stars and regulates the sun and moon (calendar). He creates Babylon as the earthly counterpart of the home of the divine beings. Marduk then destroys Tiamat's husband, Kingu. From the blood of Kingu, Marduk creates all of humanity to become slaves of the gods.

- God declares all creation to be good.

That alone tells us something. We've all heard the slogan that "God doesn't create junk." It's a pedestrian way to affirm that God has a purpose for His creation, and that purpose is union with Him. To reduce a person down to how short or tall, pretty or plain, smart or dumb is to not recognize the fundamental truth that these are not ways to determine the worth of a human person.

I will read through the remainder of the first section of material without comment. I'll try to pull it all together then in a summary.

The Human Person is the crown of creation

- The human person is the crown of God’s creation, and recipients of His greatest gift:
- Man created imago Dei – image and likeness of God; capax Dei – with a capacity for God
- Self-knowledge, self-possession, self-mastery
- The human person is created for love, communion, as male and female with differences that are complementary.
- The human person is the only being created for his own sake (Personalistic norm: the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use, and as such the means to an end. Karol Wojtyla, Love and Responsibility).

Man created as a unity of body and soul

Body – matter

Soul – created for eternal union with God; powers of the soul: intellect and will

Image and likeness of God:

- Dominion over the earth (stewardship; share in God’s kingship over the earth)
- Sharers in God’s power of creation (be fruitful and multiply, Gn. 1:28)
- Freedom (CCC 1731; 1743-1748) Instructor Outline
- Conscience (CCC 1778)

I would like to list, for comparison reasons, some of the attributes of *imago Dei* and to contrast them with the world’s perspective.

Explain and expand where appropriate:

<u>Image Dei</u>	<u>The World’s Culture</u>
Rational	Slave to Instincts
Free Will	Determinism
Incarnate	Only Interior is Important
Relational	Individualistic
Contingent on God	Existence is Separate from a Creator
Supernaturally Oriented	You Only Live Once

And may I add...we are built for sacrifice!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you think you would respond to someone who says, “If God is so far above human nature and human reasoning that He cannot be known, how can we learn anything about the *human person* from an unknowable God?”
2. Do you think we could prove that God exists to an atheist?
3. The Trinity is a mystery. Do you think there is a danger in using it as an analogy for man’s relationships, say for marriage? Why?