

**The Institute for Catechesis and Formation**  
**ICF 101 – Christian Anthropology**

## **Week 4: The Incarnation of Christ and the Mission of the Human Person**

**ICA pp. 147-156; 173-175; 186-208; 856-865**

We left off last week with ‘The Household of God’. Recall that God initiates the covenant with a free gift of Himself. This was progressive through the Old Testament beginning with Adam and Noah, etc., and working through the Kings and the Prophets. It culminated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

This reveals man to himself. It calls us out of comfort zone. We move in our mission through humility, faith and a radical dependance on God. Where we cannot change evil, we endure it (that is true and genuine tolerance...we do not accept evil). We are then and ultimately called to personal conversion, and through evangelization, through us, Christ calls others to conversion.

Tonight we will look at how that ‘conversion’ begins within us, and then moves out into the world in order to more firmly establish the Kingdom of God.

The Word became flesh for us (CCC 457-460):

- To save us by reconciling us with God

In the last section we explored that from the intentional and fully-free decision of our First Parents to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and good and evil, the Father’s first reaction was reconciliation (*protoevangelium*). This speaks volumes about the God that we image. Would the first reaction we have to someone we love who commits adultery, theft or murder be, “I will set out to reconcile this love between me and you?”

So again, the entire Old Testament is a witness to the crescendo-like love relationship that God is restoring between us and Himself. It is a restoration of friendship.

- That thus we might know God's love

If God is love, and Christ became Man to show us what God is like, then it is for the ultimate purpose of knowing God's love. But this knowing must understand the nature of love, and it must be an experience that codifies that 'knowing'.

I heard, actually watched a video clip of a discussion between a few individuals (a priest among them) with Neil deGrasse Tyson, whom if I understand him correctly, considers himself a 'passionate atheist' (he appears to be the heir to Carl Sagan in popular culture and media, though Sagan was an admitted atheist, so perhaps not as confused on the subject as deGrasse Tyson). Anyway, the priest asked deGrasse what must have been the conversation when Sagan died and met God. deGrasse pointed out that Sagan already addressed that, and said he would ask why God didn't provide more evidence of Himself. The priest said, rather God should've asked Him why not have faith. I think that's a good answer, but I would like to think God would've appealed to his scientific mind and rather ask, "How could the infinite be contained within the finite?" Our only access to the infinite God is in the Incarnate Person Jesus Christ. Our only true revelation of love of God is the love of His Son, Jesus Christ.

- To be our model of holiness

So then how does this love play out in the lives of Christians. That too is not so obvious. Even the Ten Commandments, which layout our duties to God and each others, though difficult to keep in themselves, are only the minimum of an expressed love.

- So Christ comes. He comes not as with thunder and fanfare, but as a Child born to poor parents in a lowly state. (Let us keep in mind that this is all supposed to point to who we are as persons - anthropology).
- He grew up quietly as a carpenter, not in the Jewish elite religious class, or learning techniques to make His mark through political influence.
- When He was baptized, marking His calling, His Father in heaven said, "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased," and did not begin to list His accomplishments or talents.
- Christ did not count among His inner circle people of influence and education, to make calculated gains in His ministry. He chose twelve fishermen who often stumbled, but nonetheless carried on.

- As Christ moved about His world (He didn't travel more than 30 miles from His place of birth), he spend His days preaching and ministering to the poor, the lame, the outcast and the lowly.
- Christ spoke the truth not because it was popular. He called people to repentance in spite of their jeering. He told the poor and sick to embrace their condition, and the rich to be very concerned for theirs...this is not the way to make friends.
- Christ refused to take the expected path, He was not what Israel was anticipating. He made no attempt to overthrow Roman control of His people. His Kingdom was not of this world.
- Christ then went further and deflated the anticipated hopes of His Apostles, and was put to death in a horrific fashion. This as Scripture states, was "a stumbling block to the Jews, and folly to the Greeks."
- We know the remainder of the story. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and left us as priests, prophets and kings to continue His mission.
  - To make us partakers in the divine nature

Now let's be clear. Christ did not come only to show us how to live and reveal humanity to us in terms of holiness. We are holy, and are restored to His image in that He became Man so that men may become god. This is known as theosis-divinization.

This is unique to Christianity. We have a God that wants to share the most intimate part of His Being with us, and it begins now. It is not something earned, nor can it be lost. We may cloud it up and make it hard to recognize, but the nature of love is to give of itself without return. That is genuine gift. This is what the Incarnation has accomplished for us, and in us.

**Protoevangelium – Gn. 3:15** – is fulfilled in the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38)

- Mary's "yes" to God's gift of Himself recuperates Eve's mistrust and her disobedient act.

It is said by the Church Fathers (those who came after the Apostles) that Mary untied the knot which Eve tied. So, where Eve 'chose' between good and evil, Mary simply accepted the gift of the Spirit and said, "Yes" without hesitation.

- Mary becomes the New Eve, and Jesus becomes the New Adam

The obedience of the New Eve ushered in the New Adam. So now rather than Eve who sought to do 'her' will is overcome by the New Eve (Mary) who sought to do not her own will, by the Will of God.

With the New Adam (Jesus), where the Old Adam ate from the tree and we received death, now when we eat of the fruit of the tree, we receive life.

- Mary is the first and model disciple who teaches us how to respond in trust

Mary's 'yes', her 'fiat' is the model response for us as Christians who should be willing to do the work Christ is calling us to do.

Recall the Biblical account of Mary, and the brothers of Christ came to see Jesus. We read in Matthew, "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." At first glance, this appears to be a slight against Jesus' mother and brothers.

Now on the surface, this appears as a slight towards Mary and Jesus' brothers. But, beyond the fact that such irreverence towards a parent would be breaking a commandment, why would Jesus say such a thing. Well, two things to consider. First, this is Jesus' way of widening His family. All who do His Father's will are considered family now. Secondly, it is a compliment in that Jesus is acknowledging that His mother and brother are those who do the will of His Father, and others should be like them, then they too will be family.

- Contrast Zechariah's response to the angel with Mary's upon each one hearing that God will do something miraculous and seemingly impossible. (Lk 1: 5-25)

Now to contrast, or better yet, to show the submissive willingness of Mary to accept God's word, we read in Luke how Zechariah's response to hearing he would bear a son in what seemed an unlikely condition, he said, "How shall I

know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." Where Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to your Word", Zechariah questioned the work of the Spirit and was struck dumb temporarily. It's probably much easier for us to identify with Zechariah's response, isn't it?

Jesus is true God and true man, having a human nature and a divine nature.

This is doctrine for us, Jesus who became Man taking on our nature without suffering any loss of divine nature. It's not the same for mankind. We have a human nature with a divine destination...but, without saying we possess the beatific vision (we cannot see God as who He is clearly), we could say that we possess the divine by virtue of Christ. The Eastern Churches speak about this in terms of created and uncreated realities (rather than the secular and sacred that the Western Churches typically use for comparison). Also, there was a philosopher priest, Fr. Antonio Rosmini who spoke of an 'appendage' of God that we all possess. That was quite controversial at the time, and his writings were sanctioned. Though now it appears it was misunderstood and since John Paul II referenced in *Veritatis splendor*, his reputation has been resurrected and his writings revisited.

God became man, not losing His divinity, or becoming corrupted by humanity

We can safely say this is a mystery, that is how Christ took on our humanity without a single drop of His divinity being diminished is not something one can easily wrap their minds around. We really cannot envision how a God, perfect in grace, could be tempted in the same way as we are.

I tried my best to develop an analogy to help here, but either it was too complex or it was misleading. I think it best to leave it at the level of mystery, and to simply understand it was and is the case.

Jesus willingly takes flesh from Mary, the Creator entering into a deep and personal relationship with His creation

It's easy to think that since God is omnipotent that He was the sole cause of His own Incarnation. Here I am using cause in the Aristotelian sense, where though the Spirit was certainly the efficient cause (made it happen), Mary as created flesh provided the material cause (what Jesus' humanity was made from). This was a reunited of creation with Himself.

### Jesus' Method of Encounter with the Human Person Relationship –

- Jesus encounters the person in fullness – body and spirit – and will touch him/her without fear (Today's Gospel brings us another step forward. Jesus allows a woman who was a sinner to approach him during a meal in the house of a Pharisee, scandalizing those present. Not only does he let the woman approach but he even forgives her sins, saying: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Lk 7:47). Jesus is the incarnation of the Living God, the one who brings life amid deeds of death, sin, selfishness and self-absorption. Jesus accepts, loves, uplifts, encourages, forgives, restores the ability to walk, gives back life. Throughout the Gospels we see how Jesus by his words and actions brings the transforming life of God. This was the experience of the woman who anointed the feet of the Lord with ointment: she felt understood, loved, and she responded by a gesture of love: she let herself be touched by God's mercy, she obtained forgiveness and she started a new life. Homily of Pope Francis for *Evangelium vitae* Day, 16 June, 2013, #2 Text from page <http://en.radiovaticana.va/articolo.asp?c=702006> of the Vatican Radio website)
- Meets us where we are (Woman at the Well)

The Samaritan woman was met by Jesus in her current state. It was not first necessary that she convert, than approach the Christ. Jesus, in His mercy met her where she was, but it's important to note that the woman was not left in her current state. Though it was Christ's initiative, the woman asked, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." Then in the end she told Him that when the Messiah comes, he will explain everything." Jesus now reveals Himself to her and declares, "I, the one speaking to you-am he."

This is our experience also. We will talk of the transformative power of this encounter later.

- Encounters us in our Freedom (Rich Young Man)

When the young rich ruler encountered Jesus, he asked sincerely what he must do to enter eternal life. Isn't this everyman's question. When Jesus told him to keep the commandments, the man said he had done so since he was young...

could you and I say that? But the Ten Commandments are the minimum. Jesus said that this man still lacked one thing and was told to go and sell all he had, then come follow Jesus. The walked away grieving, for he had many possessions.

In this encounter, the man's freedom was never impinged, thwarted or suppressed. Although that is the end of the scriptural account, we do not know that that was the end of the rich ruler's journey.

- Offers us a New Way ( Three Wise Men, Zacchaeus, men healed of demons)

With the three wise men, after their encounter with Christ, they returned another way. Of course in the story it was to avoid meeting Herod and revealing the location of the baby Jesus, but the point remains.

With Zacchaeus, the short tax collector who welcomed Jesus into his house, offered Christ his own new way by giving half of what he owned to the poor and then returning to those he defrauded four times the amount.

The man healed of demons in the region of Gerasenes. This man was chained near the cemetery outside of town because of his condition. After this encounter with Christ, the man now clean, asked to follow Jesus where He was going. Jesus set him off to the nearby towns to tell of the great thing done for him...he was sent a new way.

- Jesus knows the human person, and never sees him/her as a means to an end, but as an end in him/herself (Personalistic Norm)

Personalism is a philosophy that in very general terms, affirms the centrality of the human person. This makes the person unique and inviolable. The person stands above all created beings, it is a supreme value and an end in itself.

For us and our salvation, this means Jesus came for us. Our reuniting with Christ, and our filial adoption, and our elevated nature (becoming god) is the ultimate end. These things are not done for some other sake.

**Teaching –**

- Parables
- Precepts (Beatitudes, Love Command)

Truth, freedom, goodness (Jn 14:6, 8:32; Mk 10:18; Mt 19:16-17)

**Healing –**

So it is the whole person, each of us in our entirety that encounter Jesus and are transformed by Him. Jesus healed those physically, those who were in sorrow and sought emotional healing. And also those, such as Mary Magdalen who were healed in spirit.

- Physical healing (Lazarus, blind men, lepers)
- Emotional healing (Martha and Mary)
- Spiritual healing (Mary Magdalen)

Jesus encounters the human person his/her freedom, offers an opportunity for transformation;

The goal of Christ in our lives is conversion. It is a reorientation of the whole person away from sin and towards Christ. This is not just done in a large way where the reprobate becomes the saint. It is when we turn away from our shortcomings (missing the mark) and are reconciled to Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That 'door of mercy' is where we walk through for conversion.

no one remains the same

We are altered at the level of our very being. Our path is changed like the Three Kings. Just like the woman at the well who left her water jar (what she was doing), we to take on a new mission. An encounter with Christ is a turning point and convicts us, just as it did the young rich ruler...remember we don't know how it ended for him. That sadness at 'being rich' was a moment of mercy. He had the freedom to walk away sad, he retained the freedom to give it all away and follow Christ. Well, so do we.

Three Kings – go back by another way

Woman at the well – leaves her water jar

Rich young man – goes away sad

Jesus' life culminates in the **Paschal Mystery** – His suffering, death and resurrection. Paschal refers to the Passover, and it signifies that Christ is our Passover.

- In the first Passover, God sent the Angel of Death to pass through the streets and kill the first-born in the household. The Israelites were instructed to sacrifice a lamb and eat its flesh, and to mark the lintels of the entrance to the house with its blood.

This sacrifice where they were to eat of the flesh of the lamb and be saved by its blood was to foreshadow a great and definitive opportunity for transformation of who we are as people (anthropology).

- Jesus Christ is the new and definitive Passover. He is the Lamb whose flesh is offered in sacrifice and consumed by us, and we are marked with His blood, which washes us clean and saves us

The New Passover now marks the new and everlasting covenant. The parallels are obvious: it requires an unblemished Lamb, the Lamb must be slain, you are saved by the Blood of the Lamb, and you must eat the Lamb. Then the Angel of Death will 'passover' and you shall leave bondage (slavery) and enter eternal life.

- Jesus willingly submits Himself to suffering and death. He takes on all of our sin and by His complete self-emptying and self-sacrifice, He transforms all of creation.

Here we can see the ultimate act of love. Too, to see just how sacrifice, gift and love are really synonyms for us. So with those three ideas in mind, we who image God must be self-emptying and self-sacrificing. It is only in uniting our feeble attempts with Christ's sacrifice (this is done at the altar), that with Christ we participate in the transformation of all of creation.

From the Cross the Church is born in the blood and water that pour from His side.

*"Water and blood symbolized Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. From these two Sacraments the Church is born: from Baptism, the Cleansing Water that gives Rebirth and Renewal from the Holy Spirit, and from the Holy Eucharist. Since the Symbols of*

*Baptism and the Eucharist flowed from His Side, it was from His Side that Christ fashioned the Church, as He had fashioned Eve from the side of Adam”.*

*Saint John Chrysostom*

## **The mission of the human person**

The human person is made for love and for eternal union with God in heaven

If you think of a goal you have, and consider the objective to achieve that goal, I bet it isn't difficult to identify any obstacles to that goal. What is our reaction to those obstacles? To avoid them, remove them...isn't this what we do. How easily do we forget our ultimate goal of being united with God in heaven eternally. Is it money? Is it power? Is it prestige?

Jesus Christ teaches us our mission as persons by His life and example, and through His self-sacrificing love (Jn. 15: 12-13; CCC 1878-1879)

So too in Christ, we have not just a witness to sacrificial love, but also a concrete example. The popular phrase 'what would Jesus do', or WWJD isn't a bad beginning, is it? Let's briefly identify some witnessing to Christ, or we could just as well say, in what way will we martyr ourselves for Christ?

Our mission is to be Christian witnesses (martyrs); to follow Jesus in being:

- Relational (encountering other persons in charity and love)

Like Christ encountering the woman at the well, the young rich ruler, etc. How do we 'fall short' of encountering in a spirit of charity and love, those whom God has placed in our lives? Recall, that love is a Person, not simply some sentiment.

- Teaching (being witnesses to truth in how we live, helping people in their needs)

Everyone loves quoting (I paraphrase) St. Francis in terms of preaching the Gospel always, and when necessary, use words. We like this because often we are not comfortable witnessing to the truth. Well how could we 'preach' without speaking. One concrete way is to recognize the distinction between genuine goods and their counterfeits.

- Healing (being a spiritual mother/father, providing physical help - works of mercy- and spiritual comfort -prayer, witness, acts of charity and kindness)

I think you should consider this in terms of 'being present' for others. How do we go about filling the needs of others without making them feel dependent on us? In other words, how do we help others without impinging on their autonomy or dignity? It's an art.

Here's a unique way to 'heal' the creation we are called to transform. Let's not allow the Evil One to use us to further his lies by misidentifying what is truly and genuinely good.

Genuine Goods and Counterfeit Goods (The list is by Tom Morris, the definitions are my own, and adapted to fit the context).

1. Wisdom is neglected and the world rewards cleverness.
  - Wisdom is defined as: this directs the mind to judge all things in accordance to the principles of self-giving love.
2. Dignity is not sought, but rather glamour.
  - Dignity is defined as: the respect due to all persons equally, rooted in their humanity.
3. Rather than seek truth, people choose what is expedient.
  - Truth is defined as: to understand an idea properly, and know an object or person as they truly are.
4. Real beauty no longer moves an individual, so people seek titillation.
  - Beauty is defined as: the true nature of a thing that is made visible, where it is good and elevates and brings splendor.
5. Rather than identifying goodness in our lives, we try to just be nice.
  - Goodness is defined as: the quality of conforming oneself to their true nature and pursuing the proper end of happiness.
6. Opposed to developing character, many are attracted to personalities.

- Character is defined as: the quality of excellence in virtue that is found in an individual.
7. No longer is the concern primarily for a reputation, but fame is sought.
- Reputation is defined as: the habits of excellence or vice that a particular person has nurtured and developed.
- Praying (participating in the life of the Church, offering honor and gratitude to God for His gifts, and calling upon His help for ourselves and others)

What are the types of prayer that can help us to ‘pray without ceasing’?

### Personal Prayer [CCC §2626-2643]

#### Blessing

- Blessing-God’s gift and man’s acceptance are united in dialogue with each other. This is man’s response to God’s gifts.
  - Prayer ascends by the Holy Spirit, through Christ to the Father.
  - Prayer descends by the Holy Spirit, through Christ from the Father.

#### Adoration

- Acknowledgment man is dependent on God, that Man is a creature before His Creator. Often marked by respectful silence.

#### Petition

- Supplication-to ask, beseech, plead, cry out, etc.
- This expresses our relationship with God. Contain three movements...
  1. Forgiveness-be merciful oh God, for I am a sinner.
  2. Works for the coming of the Kingdom of God.
  3. Pray at all times for every need.

#### Intercession

- This is to pray as Christ prayed. It participates in His prayer.
- To pray on behalf of all men.
- This intercession should know no boundaries [friends and enemies].

### Thanksgiving

- Recognition of those good things Christ has done for us.
- This characterized the prayer of the Church in the Eucharist.
  - Eukharistia-[Greek] thanksgiving.
- Every event and need can become a prayer of thanksgiving.

### Praise

- This recognized that God is God, and does so for His own sake.
- Doxology of the 'Our Father'.
  - Doxa-glory and praise.
  - Logos-word and reason.

### ACTS

- A common formula for personal prayer!
  - Acclamation
  - Contrition
  - Thanksgiving
  - Supplication

*He who believes in Christ becomes a son of God. This filial adoption transforms him by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ. It makes him capable of acting rightly and doing good. In union with his Savior, the disciple attains the perfection of charity which is holiness. Having matured in grace, the moral life blossoms into eternal life in the glory of heaven. CCC 1709*

*...Christ offers himself as the path of my life. Sequela of Christ does not mean: imitating the man Jesus. This type of attempt would necessarily fail—it would be an anachronism. The Sequela of Christ has a much higher goal: to be assimilated into Christ, that is to attain union with God. Such a word might sound strange to the ears of modern man. But, in truth, we all thirst for the infinite: for an infinite freedom, for happiness without limits.*

*... Man is not satisfied with solutions beneath the level of divinization. But all the roads offered by the "serpent" (Genesis 3:5), that is to say, by mundane knowledge, fail. The only path is communion with Christ, achieved in sacramental life. The Sequela of Christ*

*is not a question of morality, but a "mysteric" theme—an ensemble of divine action and our response.*

*Thus, in the theme on the sequela we find the presence of the other center of Christology, which I wished to mention: the Paschal Mystery—the cross and the Resurrection. In the reconstruction of the "historical Jesus," usually the theme of the cross is without meaning. In a bourgeois interpretation it becomes an incident per se evitable, without theological value; in a revolutionary interpretation it becomes the heroic death of a rebel.*

*The truth is quite different. The cross belongs to the divine mystery—it is the expression of his love to the end (John 13:1). The Sequela of Christ is participation in the cross, uniting oneself to his love, to the transformation of our life, which becomes the birth of the new man, created according to God (see Ephesians 4:24). Whoever omits the cross, omits the essence of Christianity (see 1 Corinthians 2:2).*

*Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger*

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