Roman Catechism Series

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Editor's Note: *CFN* is excited to re-introduce this series which covers the entire Roman Catechism. This series was first presented in earlier editions of the monthly paper. The author, Mr. Matthew Plese, is a traditional Third Order Dominican who resides in Chicago, IL. After entering the Church with his family in 2004 as a high school freshman, he went on to earn degrees in Business and Philosophy as well as a Certificate in Catechesis from the Catholic Distance University. Since 2010, Mr. Plese has served as the president of CatechismClass.com, an online apostolate devoted to providing top-quality sacramental preparation and other religious education resources for individual and parish use. Readers can follow Mr. Plese online by visiting his blog, *A Catholic Life* http://www.acatholiclife.blogspot.com

I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

Second Article of the Creed

By Matthew Plese

The Core of Christianity is the Person of Jesus Christ

The Roman Catechism begins this article with a concise and essential statement: "For this Article is the most firm basis of our salvation and redemption."[1] To believe in Jesus Christ and Who He really is – namely, "the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) – is one of the unmistakable marks of a Christian. To deny the nature and role of Christ is to deny Christianity entirely, for it is not possible to profess to be a Christian and at the same time deny the role of the Christ Himself.

Unfortunately, in the modern era man has become inclined to portray the Lord in his own image. He is portrayed to some as a liberator, to others as a merciful Savior who would never condemn anyone for any reason, and to others as a wise teacher no different than Plato and Socrates of old. But what do we as Christians know of Jesus Christ? Who was He *really*?

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God's Name: Jesus

First and foremost, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is God Almighty. He is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is not merely a wise teacher or a lawgiver or even the Savior; He is God. There exists only one God Who has created the world, guides it, judges it, and by Whose care all things come to be. He is the only substance that was never created. God has always existed and will always exist without beginning or end. And this omnipotent, omniscient God chose to become a man, as we read in the beautiful Prologue of St. John's Gospel:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him: and without Him was made nothing that was made. … And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the Only Begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-3, 14)

God Himself, "the Only Begotten of the Father", the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, assumed a human nature from the Immaculate Virgin Mary and was born in the most destitute of circumstances – even to the point of being laid in a feeding trough for animals. Concerning this awesome mystery of our Faith, Saint Peter Chrysologus (d. 450), Bishop and Doctor of the Church, wrote: "Our God chose to be born this way because He wanted to be loved." And yet, when "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), for the most part He was met with coldness of heart, neglect, and indifference to His teachings. Sadly, the same is true today of many who are exposed to the traditional teachings of the Faith. They prefer to neglect them, act indifferently to them, and fashion a religion to their liking.

Nevertheless, the truth remains that God Himself became man. And why did He become man? In order to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), a mission that is summed up by His very Name.

The Roman Catechism explains, "*Jesus* is the proper name of the Godman and signifies Saviour: a name given Him not accidentally, or by the judgment or will of man, but by the counsel and command of God."[2] As St. Alphonsus Liguori relates, "This great name of Jesus was not given by man, but by God Himself."[3] The Baltimore Catechism summarizes the meaning of Our Lord's Name when it states, "The name 'Jesus' signifies Savior or Redeemer, and this name was given to Our Lord by an Angel who appeared to Joseph and said: 'Mary shall bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus' [Matt. 1:21]."[4]

As we advance in years and fight illness, busyness, and sloth, there is one prayer that we

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should always have at our forefront: The Holy Name of Jesus. We do not always need to remember the most elaborate prayers, nor do we always need to feel God's inspirations during prayer. Amidst trying or difficult times, we may be unable to do anything more than pray the Name "Jesus" over and over. And yet, such a simple prayer of a single word is nevertheless of immense value.

Richard Rolle (d. 1349), a hermit, mystic, and writer of devotional works and Biblical translations succinctly summarized the power of the Holy Name of our Redeemer: "If you think the Name 'Jesus' continually, and hold it firmly, it purges your sin, and kindles your heart; it clarifies your soul, it removes anger and does away with slowness. It wounds in love and fulfills charity. It chases the devil and puts out dread. It opens heaven and makes a contemplative man. Have Jesus in mind, for that puts all vices and phantoms out from the lover."[5] May we always have recourse each and every day – even, or perhaps especially, in sickness and anxiety – to the Name of so sweet and holy a Redeemer, Who chose to save us while we were still sinners (cf. Rom. 5:8).

Christ: The Title for the Redeemer

Regarding the name "Christ," the Roman Catechism explains why it is part of the Name of Jesus: "To the name *Jesus* is added that of *Christ*, which signifies *the anointed*. This name is expressive of honour and office, and is not peculiar to one thing only, but common to many; for in the Old Law priests and kings, whom God, on account of the dignity of their office, commanded to be anointed, were called christs. … When Jesus Christ our Saviour came into the world, He assumed these three characters of Prophet, Priest and King, and was therefore called *Christ*, having been anointed for the discharge of these functions, not by mortal hand or with earthly ointment, but by the power of His heavenly Father and with a spiritual oil; for the plentitude of the Holy Spirit and a more copious effusion of all gifts than any other created being is capable of receiving were poured into His soul."[6]

As a result, the name "Christ" is a title which applies so intricately to Our Lord's work and mission that it has become a part of the Name of the Son of God made man. The Baltimore Catechism summarizes this teaching as follows: "The name 'Christ' means the same as Messiah, and signifies Anointed; because, as in the Old Law, Prophets, High Priests and Kings were anointed with oil; so Jesus, the Great Prophet, High Priest and King of the New Law, was anointed as man with the fullness of divine power."[7]

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Who Is Jesus Christ?

The Name of Jesus Christ is truly unique, “a name which is above all names” (Philip. 2:9)! This is the name of the Savior of the world, the Redeemer, the Anointed One par excellence, and the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made flesh. As St. Peter the Apostle boldly proclaimed shortly after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost, “Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ was not merely a new Aristotle, nor was He a

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marauder who conquered villages and subdued peoples like Mohammed to advance a religion. He was not a new Buddha who taught a "way of life" without a road to salvation. Rather, the religion inaugurated on Mount Calvary by Jesus Christ was revolutionary! Never before or since has a religion been founded on a man who claimed to be God Himself and by whose death salvation wound abound. Simply put, Jesus Christ did not merely claim to be a prophet, a military leader, a teacher, or someone sent by God. He claimed to be God. And it was for this reason that the Jews brought about His death (cf. Matt. 26:59-66).

The Roman Catechism expounds on this awe-inspiring reality, which we as Christians too often take for granted: "But when we are told that Jesus is the Son of God, we are not to understand anything earthly or mortal in His birth; but are firmly to believe and piously to adore that birth by which, from all eternity, the Father begot the Son, a mystery which reason cannot fully conceive or comprehend, and at the contemplation of which, overwhelmed, as it were, with admiration, we should exclaim with the Prophet: *Who shall declare his generation?* [Isa. 53:8] On this point, then, we are to believe that the Son is of the same nature, of the same power and wisdom, with the Father, as we more fully profess in these words of the Nicene Creed: *And in one Lord Jesus Christ, His Onlybegotten Son, born of the Father before all ages, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made.*"[8]

True God and True Man: The Hypostatic Union

How, we might rightly ask, did the Son of God take on a human nature? This mystery is so far beyond our mind's ability to understand that we can only begin to grasp the very basics of it as defined by the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451):

"Following therefore the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body, the same one in being [Greek *homooúsion*] with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity, like unto us in all things but sin [cf. Heb 4:15]. The same was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born to His humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God.

We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. Their union never abolished the distinction between the natures but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one Person and one hypostasis. He is not split or divided into two Persons, but He is one and the same only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as formerly the prophets and later Jesus

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Christ Himself have taught us about Him and as has been handed down to us by the creed of the Fathers."[9]

Simply put, Jesus Christ is one Divine Person with two natures, divine and human. To help make clear the distinction between *person* and *nature*, the Baltimore Catechism (specifically, the New Saint Joseph illustrated edition) explains that the term "nature" refers to *what* someone or something is, whereas "person" refers to *who* someone is. One illustration in this children's catechism shows a boy asking Our Lord, "Who are You?", with Our Lord answering, "I am Jesus Christ." The boy then asks Him, "What are You?" and Our Lord replies, "I am God and man."[10]

As a result of the Incarnation (the Word becoming flesh), there is a union of the Divine Nature and our human nature in the one Divine Person of Our Lord, "without confusion or change, without division or separation" (Council of Chalcedon). This marvelous union is called the Hypostatic Union because the Greek term *hypostasis* (literally "substance", cf. Heb. 1:3) is similar to "person", as in the definition of Chalcedon that "the two natures…came together in one Person and one hypostasis." Jesus is not a human person, for He is not a finite creature (as the Arian and Nestorian heretics falsely claimed) but rather the infinite Creator. He does, however, have a human soul with its natural faculties (intellect and will), but those faculties are wholly *informed by* and *conformed to* the Divine intellect and will.[11]

The dogma of the Hypostatic Union reminds us that while Jesus is fully God, "consubstantial with the Father" (Nicene Creed), He is also fully human, and we see His humanity portrayed so beautifully all throughout the Gospel accounts. Jesus had emotions, He felt hunger, He slept, He worked, and He was even subject to cold and heat and pain and death. That is how much God humbled Himself in becoming human.

At the same time, once again, Jesus is fully God. As the Roman Catechism teaches, "we say in truth that Christ is Almighty, Eternal, Infinite, and [that] these attributes He has from His Divine Nature,"[12] that is, the one Divine Nature He shares with the Father and the Holy Ghost. He never stopped being God, and never stopped relating to the Father precisely as the Son: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), He testified. This means that whatever pertains to the God the Father (e.g. omnipotence, omniscience, infinite goodness, etc.) pertains also to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, because He is God the Son Incarnate.

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Putting Faith Into Practice: Honor the Holy Name

Truly, no name deserves more respect than the Redeemer's own Name. Catholics are bound to bow their heads at the Holy Name of Jesus. The practice of bowing the head at the mention of His Name was formally written into the law of the Church at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274:

"Those who assemble in church should extol with an act of special reverence that Name which is above every Name, than which no other under Heaven has been given to people, in which believers must be saved, the Name, that is, of Jesus Christ, Who will save His people

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from their sins. Each should fulfil in himself that which is written for all, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow; whenever that glorious Name is recalled, especially during the sacred Mysteries of the Mass, everyone should bow the knees of his heart, which he can do even by a bow of his head."[13]

Additionally, the bow of the head is also to be made at the mention of the Holy Name of Mary as well as when the name of the saint in whose honor the Mass is being said is mentioned. And additionally, when the Holy Trinity is mentioned by name (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), a bow of the head is also required. Therefore, we should bow our heads during the *Gloria Patri* prayer whether during Mass, while saying the Rosary, or at the end of the Psalms in the Divine Office.

While the bow of the head is required at the mention of "Jesus" or "Jesus Christ", it is not required only at the mention of "Christ", which is a title as opposed to being the Name of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made flesh.

Concerning the due reverence prescribed by the Church, Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds writes:

"It is part of our Catholic tradition that we offer reverence not just with the words on our lips but through actions such as a bow of the head. This bow is made whenever the Holy Trinity are named together, for example, in a doxology, and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honour Mass is being celebrated."[14]

In our modern world, where so many people use the name of the Savior in curses or in exclamations of surprise, pain, or anger, we must do our part to make reparation for these grave sins against the Second Commandment. When we hear such offenses, we should instruct the blasphemer to cease and desist, unless it is probable that by doing so he will only increase his blasphemous use of Our Lord's Name. Furthermore, we should make an Act of Reparation for Blasphemies Uttered against the Holy Name of Jesus, pray the Divine Praises, or pray the Golden Arrow prayer. This prayer was given to Sister Mary of St. Peter in an apparition by Our Lord Himself in France in August 1843. Sister Mary said of this prayer that it is "an Act of Praise that Our Lord Himself dictated to me, notwithstanding my unworthiness, for the reparation of Blasphemy against His Holy Name."[15]

May the Golden Arrow prayer be on our nightstands as we, the members of the Church Militant, are implored to ever increase our acts of reparation for the proliferation of sin in the world. The text of this prayer is as follows: "May the most holy, most sacred, most adorable, most incomprehensible and unutterable Name of God be always praised, blessed, loved, adored and glorified in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth, by all the creatures of

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God, and by the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Amen."

Conclusion

In its closing remarks on this Second Article of the Creed, the Roman Catechism calls upon parish priests to "remind the faithful that from Christ we take our name and are called Christians; that we cannot be ignorant of the extent of His favors, particularly since by His gift of faith we are enabled to understand all these things. We, above all others, are under the obligation of devoting and consecrating ourselves forever, like faithful servants, to our Redeemer and our Lord."

Next month, we will explore the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary".

St. Charles Borromeo pray for us!

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[1] Roman Catechism, Part 1: The Creed, Art. II (TAN Books, 1982), p. 31.

[2] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[3] Discourse on the Name of Jesus by St. Alphonsus Liguori.

[4] Baltimore Catechism No. 3, Q. 322.

[5] *The Form of Perfect Living and Other Prose Treatises*, Thomas Baker, 1910 London

[6] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[7] Baltimore Catechism No. 3, Q. 323.

[8] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[9] Denzinger-Hünermann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 43rd Latin-English Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), nn. 301-302 (pp. 109-110).

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[10] New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 2 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1969-1962), pp. 22, 47.

[11] For a more detailed discussion of the Hypostatic Union, see the *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 9 and q. 19, art. 1.

[12] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[13] Constitution 25 of the Second Council of Lyons, convened in 1274 by Pope Gregory X (r. 1271-1276).

[14] http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Scripture/Name.shtml

[15] *The Golden Arrow: The Revelations of Sr. Mary of St. Peter*, Dorothy Scallan, 2010.

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