

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>

By Matthew Plese

God Became Man to Ransom Us from the Devil

“O wondrous exchange! The Creator of Man, having assumed a living body, deigned to be born of a Virgin, and having become Man without Man’s aid, enriched us with His divinity.”^[1]

The Roman Catechism prefaces the third article of the Creed with a statement on its central importance to our Catholic Faith: “From what has been said in the preceding article, the faithful can understand that in bringing us from the relentless tyranny of Satan into liberty, God has conferred a singular and surpassing blessing on the human race. But if we place before our eyes also the plan and means by which He deigned chiefly to accomplish this, then, indeed, we shall see that there is nothing more glorious or magnificent than this divine goodness and beneficence towards us.”^[2]

Although Holy Mother Church teaches the mystery of the Incarnation using precise language, even Catholics today fail to understand this core truth of the Faith. And if we should fail to know with theological precision this mystery, how can we defend the perpetual virginity of Mary, the divinity of Jesus Christ, or the supremacy of God Who is One in nature

and Three in Persons? The answer is to carefully and prayerfully study the Catechism so that we may know true doctrine in order to pass it on to others.

He Was Conceived by the Holy Ghost

If we were to conduct a poll of one hundred Catholics and ask them when the life of Jesus Christ began, I highly suspect that most would say His life began in the Crib of Bethlehem. While that may be a common answer, it would also be a wrong answer.

The Baltimore Catechism explains, “The Son of God was conceived and made man by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”[\[3\]](#) But unlike us who did not exist before our human conception, Jesus Christ did exist. And we as Catholics should know, as the Baltimore Catechism further expounds, “Jesus Christ was always God, as He is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, equal to His Father from all eternity”; however, “Jesus Christ was not always man but became man at the time of His Incarnation.”[\[4\]](#)

When we speak of the life of Christ, it is important to note that we are talking about His *earthly* life. St. John teaches us in the profound beginning of his Gospel account:

“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.” (John 1:1-3)

Jesus is God, and God did not have a beginning like we do. All things were created through the Word, and since nobody can create themselves, we know that the Word is uncreated. After all, if He created all things, and He could not have created Himself, and “without Him was made nothing that was made,” then we know that the Word is uncreated. The only uncreated being is God, so, just like St. John tells us, “the Word was God.” In light of this truth, the Church confesses that the Son (Jesus) is co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost - in other words, He has always existed as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. When we talk about “the life of Our Lord”, we should preface such remarks as referring to the beginning of His *earthly* life, and because His life here on earth happened at a specific time and place, we can say it began.

Immediately after Our Lady said to the Angel Gabriel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38), Jesus was conceived in her womb and the Incarnation occurred: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

That precise moment of the Incarnation is the center of human history. It is the most important point in time. Nothing like this had ever happened before, and nothing like this

will ever happen again. We cannot adequately compare the Incarnation to any other historical event because it is not like anything else. We may feel a natural attraction to images of the Passion, of the Nativity, of the Resurrection, or other scenes which depict external happenings. Yet, in the Incarnation, which was the beginning of our salvation, we can too often overlook its singular importance because it is not something which can accurately be depicted by an artist. Nevertheless, we should not grow remiss in meditating often on this first mystery of the Holy Rosary.

In the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity took on a full human nature while remaining fully God. That is the central mystery of the Incarnation. Other religions have had mythological half-god, half-man figures like Hercules, or talked about men becoming gods, but never had anyone claimed that the Almighty God would empty Himself and become human.

The Roman Catechism succinctly affirms this mystery when it states, “That such is the meaning of the [third article of the Creed] is clear from the Creed of the Holy Council of Constantinople, which says: *Who for us men, and for our salvation,, came down from heaven, and became incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.* The same truth we also find unfolded by St. John the Evangelist, who imbibed from the bosom of the Lord and Savior Himself the knowledge of this most profound mystery. For when he had declared the nature of the Divine Word as follows: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,* he concluded: *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*”[\[5\]](#)



The Mystery of the Holy Trinity: Three Persons in One God

By introducing to us the Name of the “Holy Ghost”, the Roman Catechism expresses the reality that Almighty God – the one and only God – is in fact a Trinity of Persons. The Catechism explains the role of the three Divine Persons in the Incarnation:

“It is a principle of Christian faith that whatever God does outside Himself in creation is common to the Three Persons, and that one neither does more than, nor acts without another. But that one emanates from another, this only cannot be common to all; for the Son is begotten of the Father only, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son. Anything, however, which proceeds from them extrinsically is the work of the Three Persons without difference of any sort, and of this latter description is the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Of those things, nevertheless, that are common to all, the Sacred Scriptures often attribute some to one Person, some to another. Thus, to the Father they attribute power over all things; to the Son, wisdom; to the Holy Ghost, love. Hence, as the mystery of the Incarnation manifests the singular and boundless love of God towards us, it is therefore in some sort peculiarly attributed to the Holy Ghost.”[\[6\]](#)

The Baltimore Catechism succinctly states, “In God there are three Divine Persons, really distinct, and equal in all things – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”[\[7\]](#)

We are not polytheists. We do not believe in three gods but in one God. The Athanasian Creed, one of the earliest confessions of faith written in the fifth century, declares: “Therefore, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God. In the same way, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord; yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord; for just as we are compelled by Christian truth to confess each Person individually as God and Lord, just so the Catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three Gods or three Lords.”[\[8\]](#)

How is it, then, that there is a God the Father, a God the Son, and a God the Holy Spirit, but only one God? There is one divine substance, and three Divine Persons. You and I only have one substance and one person, but God has one substance and three Persons. Each of the Persons shares fully in the divine substance. This is not a construct invented by the early Church, as Jesus Himself said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Because God is perfect in and of Himself, He cannot become any more perfect. The Greek Church Fathers taught that God’s substance is all perfection; the substance of God is being and existence itself. God is He Who is (cf. Ex. 3:14). There cannot be two substances that contain all of reality within themselves, because they would at least not contain each other. Therefore, God must be One, because if there were two supreme beings, one of them could not possibly be completely supreme without being in charge of or better than the other. If they were exactly equal, neither of them would then truly be supreme because there would be at least one being they did not control.

We know that there must be a Supreme Being from which everything else derives its existence, and we also know that there cannot be more than one Supreme Being. The Baltimore Catechism again states for our edification, “There can be but one God because God, being supreme and infinite, cannot have an equal.”[\[9\]](#) Thus, we can say with absolute certainty that God is One, and because of that, God is one in substance or nature.

Hence, the Trinity is One. The three Divine Persons do not each possess a part of the one divine nature; rather, each of them possesses it whole and entire. In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): “...each of the Persons is that supreme reality, that is, that divine substance, essence, or nature which alone is the beginning of all things, apart from which nothing else can be found.”[\[10\]](#) Those who deny the ability of God to become man or to exist as a Trinity of Persons, whether they be Arians or Muslims, deny the ability of Almighty God to do what He pleases. God Himself can do all things, and this is what makes Him supreme. To claim as heretics and pagans do that God *could not* become a man, blaspheme the

omnipotence of God Who can do all things whatsoever except commit sin, which is contrary to His perfect goodness.



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The Second Person of the Trinity was Born to a Perpetual Virgin

The Roman Catechism continues in its explanation of the Third Article of the Creed by stating, “[T]he faithful are bound to believe that Jesus the Lord was not only conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost but was also born of the Virgin Mary.” Elsewhere, referring to the birth of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Catechism explains this sublime mystery on the Virgin Birth:

“... as the rays of the sun penetrate, without breaking or injuring, in the least, the substance of glass; after a like, but more incomprehensible manner, did Jesus Christ come forth from his mother’s womb without injury to her maternal virginity. This immaculate and perpetual virginity forms, therefore, the just theme of our eulogy.”[\[11\]](#)

In 2006, *The Nativity Story* film premiered and it was rightfully boycotted by some Traditional Catholics, despite having its premier in Vatican City, since it depicted Mary, the New Eve, in child birthing pains, which is heretical. Likewise, some Protestants and non-believers alike attempt to claim that the Virgin Mary had other children with either St.

Joseph or with other husbands by twisting the words of the Gospel of Mark 6:3 and the Gospel of Matthew 13:55-56, failing to understand, as Rev. George Leo Haydock explains in his illustrious Bible commentary published in 1859, “These were the children of Mary, the wife of Cleophas, sister of our blessed Lady and therefore, according to the usual style of the Scripture, they were called brethren, that is, near relations to our Savior.”

The central mystery of the Catholic Faith - namely, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary - is beyond our full comprehension. Yet, rather than twisting the Scriptures and Church history to fit heretical views, we pray that we can slowly come to better understand this marvelous mystery on how God Himself took human flesh and was born of only one biological parent. This mystery harkens back to the beginning of Creation with Adam and Eve, and in Christ and our Lady the Catechism rightfully calls them the Second Adam and the Second Eve:

“The Apostle sometimes calls Jesus Christ the second Adam, and compares Him to the first Adam; for as in the first all men die, so in the second all are made alive: and as in the natural order Adam was the father of the human race, so in the supernatural order Christ is The author of grace and of glory.

The Virgin Mother we may also compare to Eve, making the second Eve, that is, Mary, correspond to the first, as we have already shown that the second Adam, that is, Christ, corresponds to the first Adam.”[\[12\]](#)

Sister Lucia, one of the three children to whom Our Lady appeared at Fatima in 1917, was subsequently visited by Our Lady on Dec. 10, 1925, who came to request the practice of the Five First Saturdays devotion. Several months later in the summer of 1930, Sister Lucia related in a letter to her confessor what Our Lord communicated to her on May 30, 1930, namely, that the request for reparation on five consecutive Saturdays corresponds to the five kinds of blasphemies uttered against His Mother. One of those five blasphemies is the denial of Our Lady’s perpetual virginity. Not only would we do well by learning and sharing this truth of Our Lady’s perpetual virginity, we should also make reparation for those who blaspheme against her by attributing child birthing pains to the Blessed Mother.



Conclusion

In its closing remarks on this Third Article of the Creed, the Roman Catechism calls upon parish priests to “impress deeply on the minds and hearts of the faithful these mysteries, *which were written for our learning*; first, that by the commemoration of so great a benefit they may make some return of gratitude to God, its author, and next, in order to place

before their eyes, as a model for imitation, this striking and singular example of humility.”[\[13\]](#) After having considered and meditated upon the humility of God Himself to become a man, how can we ever express pride or envy with our fellow man? And yet, Our Lord did not just give us the example of becoming man for our edification and a guide in humility, He chose to subject Himself to the torment and agony of His Passion to show us both His true love for us and the horror of sin.

Next month, we will explore the Fourth Article of the Apostles’ Creed: “Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and buried”.

St. Charles Borromeo pray for us!

Matthew Plese is a traditional Third Order Dominican and president of CatechismClass.com. To learn more about his work, visit his blog, <https://acatholiclife.blogspot.com>, connect with him on Facebook, and follow him on Twitter @acatholiclife.

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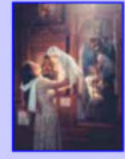
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"Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly ..." (Psalm 1:1)

100 Days of Pope Leo XIV

By Serre Verweij

Vatican analysts like to speak of Pope Leo XIV's "first 100 days in office." They are forced to admit that with a Pope, the first 100 days aren't the same as the first 100 days of a secular leader's term in office. Popes are not replaced every four to five years. Yet, Catholics are eager to get a clearer picture of the new Pope. Is he an ultra-modernist revolutionary, a centrist, or a clear return to orthodoxy?

From the lack of controversial in-flight press statements and alleged heterodox assertions in private, to the abandonment of performative humility and populism, Pope Leo has proven a radical break with the unrest and uncertainty of the Pontificate of Francis. He uses Latin and traditional vestments, while being fine with celebrating Mass 'ad orientem', though the *Novus Ordo* Mass remains the standard.

But while external appearances and style are important and represent a move in the right direction, they are very much secondary to substance, to the doctrine of faith our new Pope is taking to uphold. On this front, there are promising signs, too, which deserve a thorough analysis. While we still haven't had the Pope's first encyclical or key curial appointments yet, he has given indications of what kind his Pontificate will be.

A Return to Christ

Cardinal Burke has recently praised Pope Leo's pontificate, specifically describing it as centered on Christ. There is virtually no message, speech or memo, no matter how brief, where Pope Leo does not refer to Christ, rather than to political causes, platitudes about love, social friendship, or pseudo-Christian fraternity.



He also references the early church fathers more, rather than relying heavily on modern theologians. The new Pope has also affirmed *Humanae Vitae* while making only a single reference to a non-

controversial part of *Amoris Laetitia*. In general, the new Pope does not reference Francis excessively.

Pope Leo has also decided to make Cardinal John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church, a

prelate who held a proper understanding of Vatican I, tended away from an excessive ultramontanism, and who rejected modernist notions regarding the 'development of doctrine'.

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[1] First Antiphon of Vespers for the Feast of the Circumcision (taken from the Baronius Press 1961 Roman Breviary in Latin and English).

[2] Roman Catechism, Part 1: The Creed, Art. III (TAN Books, 1982), p. 41.

[3] New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 3, Question 342.

[4] New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 3, Question 339 and 340.

[5] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

[7] New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 3, Question 186.

[8] Denzinger-Hünemann (D.H.), *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 43rd Latin-English Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), n. 75 (p. 40).

[9] New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 3, Question 183.

[10] D.H. 804.

[11] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 47.