

## **Excerpts from the book, “Catholic Christianity; based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”**

by, Peter J. Kreeft

### **The meaning of the names “Jesus” and “Christ”**

“Jesus” (*Yeshua* or *Joshua*) means “Savior” or “God saves”. This name was given at the command of God’s angel: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Christ” (*Christos* in Greek), or “Messiah” (*Ha-mashia* in Hebrew) means “the anointed one”, that is, “the promised one”, the one God promised through the prophets of his chosen people.

The promised Messiah was to have three offices, or functions: *prophet*, *priest*, and *king* (see Isaiah 11:2; 61:1; Zech 4:14; 6:13; Luke 4:16-21).

But what kind of kingdom did Jesus establish to fulfill the prophecies and show that he was the Messiah? The prophets had promised that the Messiah would save God’s people from their enemies. Many of the Jews in Jesus’ day rejected Jesus as the Messiah because they looked for a worldly king who would save them from their worldly masters—the Romans; not realizing that their worst enemies (the ones he came to save them from) were their own sins and not realizing that his kingdom would be, not a political kingdom, but a kingdom “not of this world” (John 18:36).

Jesus’ miracles were not meant to be the tools of a this-worldly salvation but signs of an otherworldly salvation. “By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness, and death, Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the greatest slavery, sin” (CCC 549).<sup>(1) (2)</sup>

### **The meaning of the name “Son of God”**

The Old Testament sometimes uses the term “sons of God” loosely to include angels and righteous men. But Jesus called himself the “only Son” of God (John 3:16). The Nicene Creed says he is “eternally begotten..., not made [created].”

A son has the same nature as his father. As the son of a man is a man, and the son of an ape is an ape, and the son of a Martian would be a Martian, so the Son of God is God.

### **The Authority of the Roman Catholic Church**

Despite the approximate 30,000+ Christian denominations currently around the world, the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* is the only true authority of the *complete* teaching of Christian doctrine as originally bestowed upon the Church by Jesus Christ himself in Matthew 16:13-19.

According to Judeo-Christian scripture, Jesus began the Catholic Church so that all people, for generations to come, would learn how they can be saved from their sins through its founder, Jesus Christ. Jesus is *the Church*; and the people who follow Jesus are *the Church*. Jesus did not speak of multiple Churches, but of “one flock” (John 10:16). This was to fulfill the prophecy of God’s final and global covenant with mankind (John 1:29; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The word “Catholic” means “universal” and is taken from the Greek words, *kata* and *holos* which means, “according to the whole.” All other Christian churches were founded by self-appointed leaders who used some (or many) of the teachings put forth by the Roman Catholic Church. This is why there are many truths found in non-Catholic denominations and why Roman Catholics consider non-Catholics to be their “brothers and sisters in Christ” (Luke 9:49-50).

However, it is only through the Roman Catholic Church that one is given the complete explanation of *all* of Christ’s teachings. There was a reason Jesus appointed one group of people to govern his Church (this group being his original Apostles and their successors). It was to avoid confusion, heresy, and ignorance by those individuals who believed they knew more than the original witnesses and forefathers of Christ’s Church and who believed (in some cases) to know more than Jesus Christ himself...

<sup>1</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 71  
<sup>2</sup> “CCC” means “Catechism of the Catholic Church”. The number “CCC 549” means the “549 section” of the chronological order of the Catechism. The Catechism is an in-depth explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the early traditions of the Roman Catholic Church established by Jesus and the Apostles he ordained to be its forefathers. These forefathers include the Bishops the Apostles ordained to be their successors.

He is both Son of God (thus divine) and Son of Man (thus human), for he has a divine Father from eternity and a human mother in time. The Virgin Birth shows both his divinity and humanity, conceived “by the power of the Holy Spirit” and “born of the Virgin Mary”, “ ‘Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity.’”(CCC 503).<sup>(3)</sup>

### God as one in nature and three in Persons

God is one: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and [therefore] you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:4-5).

We are to give our all to him and no other precisely because he is *all*; there is no other God! The doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity do not compromise God’s oneness at all. Christianity is as monotheistic as Judaism or Islam. There is but one God! (see, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene\\_Creed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed))

But this one God is three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three are called God in the Bible. Scripture is our datum for the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>(4)</sup>

### The meaning of the Incarnation (*God born into this world through a woman, Mary, Jesus’ mother*)

But what does this astonishing thing—the “Incarnation”—mean?

It means that the second Person of the eternal Trinity, who is called the “Logos” or “Word” of God (John 1:1-3), became “flesh” (John 1:14), that is, added our human nature (body and soul) to his divine nature some two thousand years ago and was called “Jesus”. That is the Incarnation looked at “from the top down”, so to speak. Looked at from the bottom up, it means that this man Jesus is, in the words of the Nicene Creed recited at every Sunday Mass, “the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being in the Father. Through him all things were made.”<sup>(5)</sup>

### The distinctive doctrine of Christianity

What distinguishes Christianity from all other religions? The answer is simple: Christ himself. The essence of the Christian faith is in its first and shortest creed: “Jesus Christ is Lord [*Kyrios*, God]” (Phil 2:11). All Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, God in human flesh. If they did not believe that, they would not be Christians. No non-Christians believe that; if they did, they would be Christians. “Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith” (CCC 463).<sup>(6)</sup>

### Why God became man

There are at least four reasons:

1. “The Word became flesh for us in order to save us” [from sin and its consequence, eternal separation from God] “by reconciling us with God, who ‘loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation’ [atonement] ‘for our sins’ [I John 4:10; 4:14]; (CCC 457). It is as if the governor voluntarily became a prisoner and went to the electric chair in place of the condemned murderer, to set the murderer free. He came most fundamentally to die, to give his life for ours.

<sup>3</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 72

<sup>4</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 71

<sup>5</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 70

<sup>6</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 68

2. “The Word became flesh so that we might know God’s love” (CCC 458; cf. John 3:16). Once you have heard this word—the word of divine love—in the most supernatural thing that ever happened, the Incarnation, you can then hear this same word in the most natural things as well, in the whisper of every breeze and the trickle of every brook... The Creator’s big love letter that is Christ...
3. “The Word became flesh to be our model of holiness” (CCC 459)—to show us, not just tell us (as he had done in the Mosaic law), what is the design and purpose of our life, what kind of person he made us to be. He came to show us our own ultimate identity; to reveal man to man as well as to reveal God to man.
4. Most incredibly of all, “The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ [2 Pet 1:4]... The Son of God became man so that we might become “sons of God.” The only begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods. He transforms our *bios* (natural life) into *zoe* (supernatural life).

“We are brethren” [of the God-man, of God] “not by nature, but by the gift of grace, because that adoptive filiation” [adopting us as his brothers “gains us a real share in the life of the only Son” (CCC 654).

By nature we are created in God’s image, or resemblance, as a statue is sculpted in the image of its sculptor, but we do not have God’s life any more than a statue has the human life of its sculptor. What Christ called being “born anew” (John 3:3) is like the statue coming to life, to share not only the image and likeness of the sculptor, but his very life—like Pinocchio, transformed from mere wooden puppet to real boy, miraculously sharing the life of a boy: thinking, choosing, talking, playing. In St. Paul’s terms, our destiny is to be not merely “flesh” (human nature) but “spirit”, living off the life of the Holy Spirit. In St. Augustine’s formula, the Holy Spirit becomes the life of our soul as the soul is the life of our body.<sup>(7)</sup>

### **When God became man: “The fullness of time”**

“The coming of God’s Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ [Col 1:15-20]: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the ‘First Covenant’ [Heb 9:15]. He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming” (CCC 522) through their philosophers and poets and myth-makers (see Acts 17:16—28). He also providentially prepares the world for the spread of the gospel by unifying it as never before or since under a single Roman law, language, communications, transportation, and peace: the *pax Romana* was God’s providential preparation for the *pax Christi*.<sup>(8)</sup>

### **The two natures of Christ**

The Creed confesses that Christ is both conceived “by the power of the Holy Spirit” and “born of the Virgin Mary”. This one Person has two natures: he is both fully divine and fully human.

This is a mystery and a paradox, but not a logical contradiction, not impossible. It is not one person and two persons, or one nature and two natures, but one person with two natures. Human nature itself contains a similar though not identical paradox. Each of us, though only one person, is both visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, material and spiritual at once, by having both body and soul.

“The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God” (CCC 464).

<sup>7</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 74

<sup>8</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 75

He is not half human and half divine, as a centaur is half human and half horse, or as Mr. Spock in Star Trek is half human and half Vulcan. The Church rejected all heresies that denied his full humanity (such as ancient Gnosticism or modern New Age versions of it) and all heresies that denied his full divinity (such as ancient Arianism or contemporary Modernism).<sup>(9)</sup>

### Christ's Resurrection

Christ's resurrection is a real event, with manifestations that were historically verified" (CCC 639).

"The faith of the first community of believers is based on the witness of concrete men; Peter and the Twelve are the primary 'witnesses to his Resurrection,' but they are not the only ones—Paul speaks clearly of more than *five hundred* persons to whom Jesus appeared [1 Cor 15:4-8; cf Acts 1:22]" (CCC 642).

This is concrete evidence, not abstract myth (see, 2 Pet 1:16). The Resurrection did not come from the apostles' faith; their faith came from the Resurrection. It was not some inner mystical experience. "Far from showing us a community seized by a mystical exaltation, the Gospels present us with disciples demoralized ('looking sad' [Luke 24:17; cf John 20:19]) and frightened" (CCC 643). "Even when faced with the reality of the risen Jesus the disciples are still doubtful, so impossible did the thing seem" (CCC 644).

If Christ did not really rise, then those who say he did—his apostles and the five hundred other witnesses—were not telling the truth. They either knew their story was untrue, or they did not. If they knew, they were deliberate liars, deceivers; if not, they were deceived. But liars do not suffer and die for a lie as they did; nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom.

And if they were deceived rather than deceivers, they must have been hallucinating or projecting their subjective faith into objective reality. But they had touched the risen Christ (John 20:24, 29). He had eaten food (Luke 24:36-43)- He had had long conversations with many men at the same time (Luke 24:13-35; Acts 1:34). He had been seen by all who were present, not just some (Mark 16:14; John 24:36, 50). No hallucination in history ever behaved like that.

And no hallucination ever had such power to transform lives and to give love, joy, peace, hope, and meaning to millions of men for thousands of years. For the sake of this "hallucination" saints joyfully endured tortures, persecutions, crucifixions, and martyrdoms.

This "hallucination" changed cowardly hearts into hard, courageous ones and converted the hard, cruel cowardly hearts into hard, courageous ones and converted the hard, cruel Roman Empire to a religion of unselfish love. "By their fruits you shall know them"—how could such true fruit have come from such a false tree? Pascal asks the simple question: "If Christ was not risen and present, who made the apostles act as they did?"

If the Resurrection did not really happen, then an even more incredible miracle happened, as St. Thomas Aquinas argues in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, "In this faith there are truths preached which surpass every human intellect; the pleasures of the flesh are curbed; it is taught that the things of this world should be spurned.

Now for the minds of mortal men to assent to these things is the greatest of miracles... For it would be truly more wonderful than all miracles if the world had been led by simple and lowly men to believe such lofty truths, to accomplish such difficult actions, and to have such high hopes" on the basis of a hallucination or a lie.<sup>(10)</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 70

<sup>10</sup> Kreeft, Peter, J. *Catholic Christianity, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, pg. 79