

THE HEART OF CIVILIZATION

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The Incarnation lies at the bottom of all sciences, and is their ultimate explanation. It is the secret beauty in all arts. It is the completeness of all true philosophies. It is the point of arrival and departure to all history. The destinies of nations, as well as of individuals, group themselves around it. It purifies all happiness, and glorifies all sorrow. It is the cause of all we see, and the pledge of all we hope for. . . . Happy are those lands which are lying still in the sunshine of the Faith, whose wayside crosses, and statues of the Virgin Mother, and triple angelus each day, and the monuments of their cemeteries, are all so many memorials to them that their true lives lie cloistered in the single mystery of the Incarnation. —FATHER FABER.

Unquestionably, the two most excellent objects that the mind of man can ponder over are the Trinity and the Incarnation. They are mysteries and, as such, cannot be thoroughly understood; but many, through persevering prayer and constant reflection, have penetrated deeply into these Divine truths. God is pleased with the efforts of those who desire to know Him in order that they may love Him; and in His goodness He casts His light over such minds. Many and beautiful are the inspirations of such holy and thoughtful persons. Their lights indeed fall short of expressing fully those highest realities; still, they convey divine truth and do produce in man the most perfect happiness of which he is capable in this life.

The Incarnation is not so difficult to reflect upon as the Trinity because Christ is human as well as divine. Due to this twofold aspect of the Incarnation, the intellect is able to consider, now the humanity of Christ, again His divinity. This way is natural to man because, according to the workings of his mind, he ordinarily passes from things material to the spiritual, from the visible to the invisible, from the natural to the supernatural. The outcome is that in thinking upon this mystery there is a continual shift from the human to the divine. It is by devout reflections on the two natures in Christ that the soul is disposed to receive graces which give an insight into the secrets of the Incarnation.

To profit most from reflection on the Incarnation, one might well heed the example of the Blessed Virgin. When the angel announced to her that she was to become the Mother of God, she did not quite understand how God could become man; yet she allowed not a single doubt to enter her mind. She knew that a mystery was being re-

vealed to her, that here was something beyond human ken. In humility and faith, she acknowledged the truth and power of God, and acceded to His holy will. All who think deeply and devoutly must follow in her footsteps; they must humbly and faithfully profess their belief in this mystery for no other reason than because it has been divinely revealed.

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The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary; and she conceived of the Holy Ghost.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.

It is Catholic teaching that at the instant Mary said, "Be it done to me according to Thy word," the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was made flesh and dwelt in the womb of Mary. The doctrine is handed down through the Christian custom of reciting the Angelus three times each day. This prayer is fervently cherished by the faithful because it inspires them with the sublime thought of God become man.

The Church has defined the Incarnation as the union of two natures, the divine and the human, in Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Each of the three Catholic Creeds—Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian—, explicitly contains this article of faith. The first two simply express that Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost and was born of the Virgin Mary. The Athanasian Creed, however, goes into greater detail. The following excerpt will help greatly to explain the doctrine of the Incarnation:

But it is necessary to eternal salvation that one also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The right faith therefore is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.

God, of the Substance of the Father, Begotten before the worlds, and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world.

Perfect God, Perfect Man, of a reasoning Soul and human Flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood.

Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not Two, but One Christ.

One, however, not by conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of Manhood into God.

One altogether, not by confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person.

For as the reasoning soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is One Christ.

This doctrine is found over and over again in the writings of the Fathers. A quotation from a letter of Pope St. Leo the Great shows how eloquently and accurately they enlarged upon this mystery.

He who is true God is also true Man, and in this unity there is no dissension, the greatness of the Deity and the lowliness of the man are in concord. As God is not changed by condescension, so man is not destroyed by elevation. Each nature acts in unison with the other in a manner appropriate to it; namely, the Word operates in a way which is becoming the Word, while the flesh executes that which is becoming the flesh. The first of these shines forth with miracles, the latter succumbs to injuries.

Man is made up of a spiritual and a material principle, soul and body. Anything which contains these two elements quickly attracts him, and holds his attention more easily than an object purely spiritual. That is why man has learned much more about himself and the wide world than about angels and the divine Being. The all-knowing God realizes this; He perfectly understands how best to operate according to the nature of man. He willed, therefore, to be clothed with human flesh and thus create a perfect balance, as it were, between Himself and mankind. This act of God makes man's search for his Creator much easier. As it is so concisely and beautifully expressed in the Preface for the feast of the Nativity:

For by the mystery of the Word made flesh, a new ray of Thy brightness hath shone upon the eyes of our mind: so that seeing God in visible form, we may be drawn by Him to the love of things unseen.

In the Office of Corpus Christi, St. Thomas gives the reason why God became man. The Angelic Doctor states how wonderful a thing it is for us to have our God so near to us, that the only-begotten Son of God, wishing us to share His Divinity, should assume human flesh and become man in order that men might become gods. This teaching of St. Thomas must not, however, be falsely interpreted. God ever remains perfectly distinct from the creature; moreover, God is divine by His very nature, while man becomes like to God only by participation in that divine nature.

This deification, or being made gods, is brought about in a marvellous fashion, the plan of which God alone could have devised. There is a gradual transformation embracing all creation, beginning at the lowest and arising to the highest. Inanimate things, the mineral substances, are assimilated by the vegetative, the vegetative by the animal, the animal by man, and finally man is assumed by God. Man to share in the Divinity, must do so by grace which comes to him through the rivulets of divine bounty, the Sacraments. The most perfect of these, and the one to which all the others lead, is the Holy Eucharist. In this Sacrament, the soul receives Christ, and since Christ is both human and Divine, the soul embracing Christ receives the Divinity. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in Me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me and I

live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me."

God deemed it fitting to be born of the Virgin Mary and, by assuming human flesh, He willed to endow it with His divinity. A greater good than that is not imaginable. He who is everything has given all in order that they who are nothing may have all. Divine love can do no more. It remains for man to accept this infinite generosity. If he will but ponder the "why" of Christmas, if he will but look behind and beyond the toys and tinsel of time, he will come to appreciate the mystery of God become man. And in doing that, man will find a new meaning to the problem of life, a problem so often complicated by the great mystery of human evil, yet a problem still more often solved by the greater mystery of divine goodness—the Incarnation.

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"Modern" civilization has fallen to a very low level in all its accomplishments. Its science denies the spiritual, its art does not represent the highest beauty, its philosophy scorns the thought of a Creator, and its history has forgotten the deeds of its most noble Hero. Nation after nation is forbidden to acknowledge the heavenly King because ungodly rulers usurp His power. Many solutions may be offered to remedy these conditions but only one can finally succeed; namely, the acceptance of the Incarnate Word as the motivating principle in the lives of men and nations. Christ has come into the world that men may have peace and happiness. Anything therefore which prevents the influence of Christ upon souls is likewise an impediment to human welfare and progress. Science, art, philosophy and history, when not falsified, are so many means or vehicles enabling mankind to share in the fruits and benefits of the Incarnation. Once the Incarnation is appreciated as the heart of civilization, all sciences will have their "ultimate explanation," all arts their "secret beauty," all philosophies their "completeness," and all history its "point of arrival and departure."