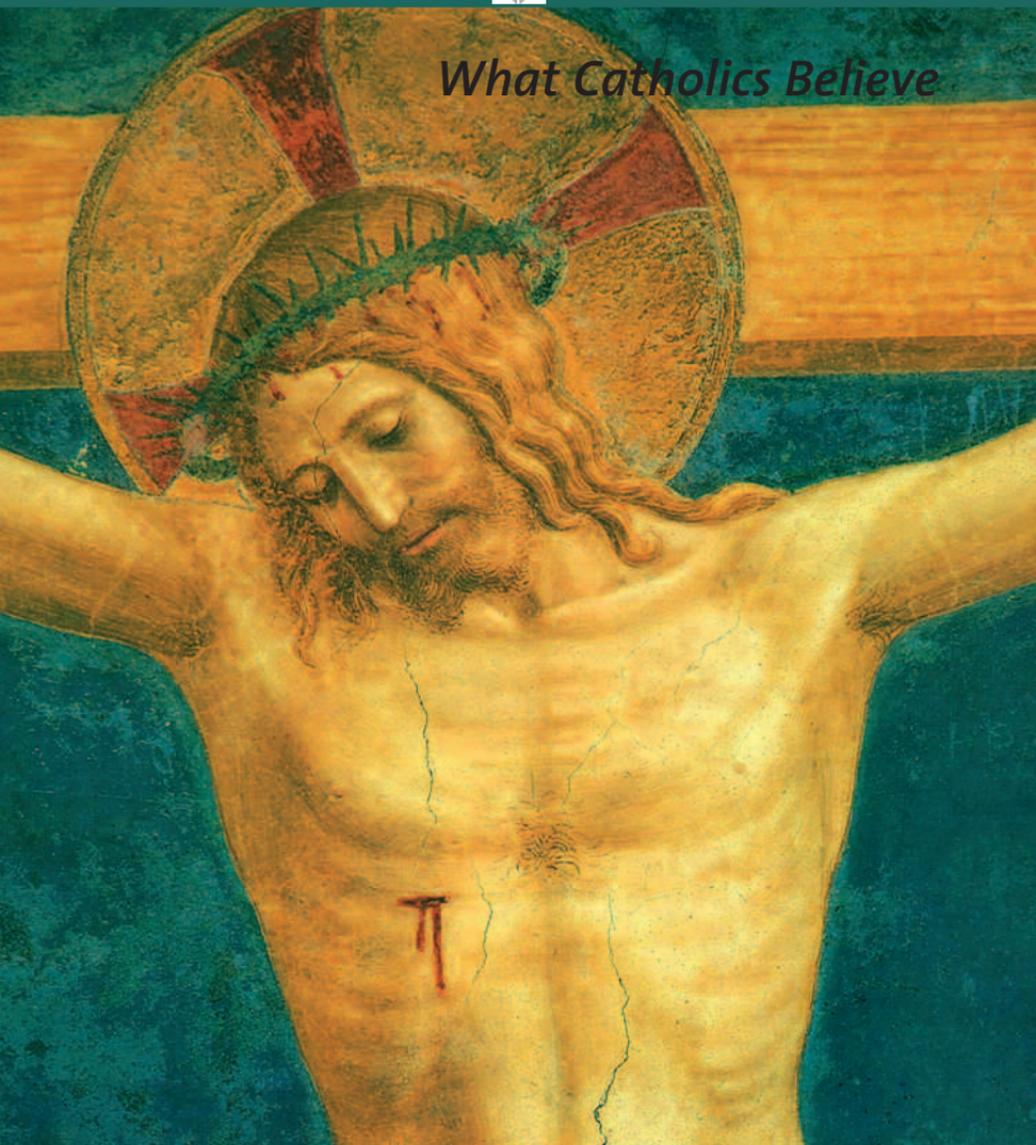


CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY



THE LUKE E. HART SERIES

What Catholics Believe



Section 5:

Jesus Christ



To Luke E. Hart, exemplary evangelizer and Supreme Knight from 1953-64, the Knights of Columbus dedicates this Series with affection and gratitude.

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

JESUS CHRIST

PART ONE • SECTION FIVE OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

by
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A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith.

The Catholic Information Service recommends reading at least one Hart series booklet each month to gain a deeper, more mature understanding of the Faith.

PART I: WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE
(THEOLOGY)

SECTION 5: JESUS CHRIST

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

1. *The centrality of Christ*

In the Apostles' Creed, 63 percent of the words (54 of 86) are about Christ. Why then is only ten percent of this series on the Creed (one booklet out of ten) about him? Not because Christ is only ten percent of Christianity. He is 100 percent. Christ is the essence of Christianity. Pascal says: “Not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ; we only know life and death through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God or of ourselves” (*Pensees* 417).

Why then is the “Gospel,” or “good news” about Jesus Christ covered in only one booklet? Because we have four perfect supplements to it: the four Gospels in the New Testament.

Do you want to be a Christian? Then read the Gospels, for there you meet Christ.

Do you want to be a saint? Then read the Gospels, for they were the main spiritual food of all the saints. No human words ever written have come even close to equaling their power to change lives.

2. *The distinctive doctrine of Christianity*

What distinguishes Christianity from all other religions? The answer is simple: Christ himself. All Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, God in human flesh. If they didn’t believe that, they wouldn’t be Christians. No non-Christians believe that; if they did, they’d be Christians. “Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith” (CCC 463).*

3. *The message and the person*

All other great religious teachers subordinated themselves to their message. They pointed away from themselves to their teachings. For instance, Buddha said, “Look not to me, look to my dharma (doctrine, teaching).” But Christ said, “Come unto *me*” (Matthew 11:28). Buddha said, “Be lamps unto yourselves.” But Christ said, “I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). Moses and Muhammad claimed only to be *prophets* of God; Jesus claimed to *be* God (John 8:58).

* CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Any other religion could survive the loss of its founder. If Muhammad or Buddha or Abraham or Confucius were proved to be mythical and not historical figures, the religions that stem from them might still survive. But Christianity could never survive without Christ. For other religious founders only claimed to teach the truth; Christ claimed to be the Truth (John 14:6).

4. *The essence of catechesis*

“The transmission of the Christian faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ in order to lead others to faith in him. From the beginning, the first disciples burned with the desire to proclaim Christ: ‘We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’”¹¹ (CCC 425). “‘At the heart of catechesis [instruction in Christianity] we find, in essence, a Person...’”¹³ (CCC 426). “‘In catechesis ‘Christ...is taught – everything else is taught in reference to him...’”¹⁶ (CCC 427).

5. *The essential qualification for all Christian teachers*

You can’t teach what you don’t know. You can’t give what you don’t have. The primary requirement for any Christian teacher, preacher, evangelist, or catechist is not just to know *about* Christ, but *to know Christ*. “Whoever is called ‘to teach Christ’ must first seek ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus’”¹⁷ (CCC 428).

6. *Christ the supreme surprise*

Throughout the Biblical narrative, God *acts*, intervenes in human lives, takes the initiative and reveals himself. It is a story not of “man’s search for God” but of God’s search for man. C. S. Lewis noted: “To speak of man’s search for God is like speaking of the mouse’s search for the cat.” And God’s acts always astonish

us. They go “far beyond all expectation” (CCC 422). God is the great iconoclast; the Incarnation leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins. The Incarnation was the most astonishing of all God’s acts, the most surprising, unforeseeable, unimaginable thing that ever happened. The immortal God, who has no beginning or end, became a mortal man, with a beginning (he had a mother!) and an end (he died!). The Author of all of history stepped into the drama he created and became one of his own characters, without ceasing to be the Author. The Creator became a creature. “He whom the world could not contain was contained in a mother’s womb” (Saint Augustine). No man ever dreamed this could happen (see Isaiah 48:6-8).

If it really happened, it is the greatest fact that ever entered the universe. If it did not really happen, then it is the greatest fantasy that ever entered the universe of human thought. Why do Christians believe it is a fact rather than a fantasy or myth?

The world was convinced and converted by the Incarnation. Not by arguments for it, but by *it* – or rather, by him, by the concrete Person, Jesus Christ. Even after he ascended, the world kept meeting him in the Gospels, and in his saints, and simply could not help falling in love with him. The Gospel is a love story – the story of God’s love for man. And the story of the world’s conversion is also a love story – the story of man’s love for this God.

They were not converted by the reasonableness of the story. The story is *not* “reasonable.” It is a story of immeasurable, passionate love that led the eternal Creator, infinitely perfect and lacking nothing, to become a mortal man and suffer torture, death and Hell (“my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”) to save us rebels from our sins. Our sin was irrational, and

his redemption was not “rational.” We sinned for no reason but lack of love, and he redeemed us for no reason but excess of love. Our sin was sub-rational, his salvation was super-rational.

It is the heart that makes us accept the Gospel, not just the head. The head understands what the heart must desire and believe. Tolkien says of the Gospels, “There is no tale that [good] men would rather believe is true.” The unbeliever’s only defensible defense against the Gospel is that it is “too good to be true.” Only the hard or despairing heart can look on that Face on the Cross, know who that is, what he is doing, what love made him do it, and whose sin made it necessary, without melting.

7. The meaning of the Incarnation

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 2000 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-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father. Through him all things were made.”

8. *The two natures of Christ*

The Creed confesses that Christ is both the Father's "only Son" 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.

"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). He is not half human and half divine, as a centaur is half human and half horse, or as Mr. Spock on "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).

9. *God as one in nature and three in Persons*

God is one: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord, 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" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). We are to give our all to him and to no other god 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.

But this one God is three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All three are called God in Scripture. Scripture is our data for the doctrine of the Trinity.

10. *Christ as both God and the Son of God*

Christ claimed to be God ("I AM" – John 8:58), and accepted Saint Thomas' worship of him as "my Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

But he also claimed to be the Son of God, whom he called his "Father." He received his teaching from his Father: "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me" (John 7:16). He prayed to his Father, obeyed his Father, and subordinated his will to his Father's: "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

How can he be both God and God's Son?

Because the word "God" is used in two ways in Scripture: 1) "God" means the one divine being, who exists equally and totally in each divine Person. 2) "God" also means the personal name for the Father, as distinct from Christ, who is the Son of God the Father.

11. *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; Zechariah 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).

His miracles were not meant to be the tools of a this-worldly salvation, but signs of an other-worldly salvation. “By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness, and death,²⁷⁴ Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below,²⁷⁵ but to free men from the greatest slavery, sin...”²⁷⁶ (CCC 549). (The sharpest distinction between traditional, orthodox Catholicism and Modernist, “liberal,” revisionist Catholicism is probably right here.) The Messianic promises in the prophets were deliberately ambiguous, to test people: those whose hearts were set on righteousness and salvation from sin recognized and accepted him as their Savior; those whose hearts worshipped other gods did not. The same is true today.

12. *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-begotten Son of God” (John 3:16). The Nicene creed says he is “begotten [eternally], 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.

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 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...”¹⁶¹ (CCC 503).

13. *The meaning of the name “Lord”*

“Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:11) is probably the earliest and shortest Christian creed. The name “Lord” is given to him hundreds of times in the New Testament. It is clearly a divine title. “In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the ineffable Hebrew name YHWH [“I AM”], by which God revealed himself to Moses⁵⁹ [Exodus 3:14] is rendered as *Kyrios*, ‘Lord.’ ...The New Testament uses this full sense of the title ‘Lord’ for both the Father and – what is new – for Jesus, who is thereby recognized as God himself”⁶⁰ (CCC 446).

“Throughout his public life, he demonstrated his divine sovereignty by works of power over nature, illnesses, demons, death, and sin” (CCC 447) – five signs of his divinity.

14. *Only one Lord*

A consequence of Christ's Lordship is liberation from the idolatry of worshipping any earthly lord. "From the beginning of Christian history, the assertion of Christ's lordship over the world and over history has implicitly recognized that man should not submit his personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power, but only to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Caesar is not 'the Lord'"⁶⁷ (CCC 450). There is a higher law than human law and a higher Lord than human lords. There is only one absolute Lord: Christ, not Caesar, or "society," or "public opinion," or "the spirit of the times," or all the authorities on earth. If Christ's Church is contradicted by all the powers of this world – as it was twenty centuries ago and increasingly is again today – we must say, with Saint Paul, "Let God be true though every man be false" (Romans 3:4).

Life is full of choices between lords. We will not be happy, and Christ will not rest, until he is the lord of all: our time, our money, our bodies, our souls, our lives, our deaths.

15. *Reasons for faith in Christ's divinity*

The titles "Lord" (God) and "Savior" (from sin) come together in Jesus' claim to forgive sins – all sins, any sins, not just sins against him as a human being. The Jewish religious authorities, hearing him do this, rightly asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:87). All sin is against God; that's why God alone can forgive all sins.

If Christ is not God, he is a blasphemous pretender. For he claimed to be God. He said such things as "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). This claim forced men either to worship

him as God (if they believed he spoke the truth) or to crucify him as the worst blasphemer in history (if they believed he did not speak the truth). Thus the earliest Christian apologists (defenders of the Faith) argued that Christ must be “either God or a bad man.” What nearly all non-Christians believe him to be – just a very good man – is the one thing he could not possibly be. For a mere man who says he is God is not a good man; he is either a liar or a lunatic. And if the Gospel records make it impossible to call this man either a liar or a lunatic, either a wicked blasphemer or a deranged egomaniac, then he is Lord. Not only faith but also logic forces us to our knees.

16. *Why God became man*

There are at least four reasons.

- a) “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, take-away] for our sins’... ”⁷⁰ (1 John 4:10, 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.
- b) “The Word became flesh *so that thus we might know God’s love*” (John 3:16; CCC 458). 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. Every ray of sunlight becomes a

ray of Sonlight; every creature become a little love letter when you recognize the Creator's big love letter that is Christ. We now know why he banged out the "Big Bang" billions of years ago: for the same reason he died on the Cross 2000 years ago: so that we may know him and his love for us.

- c) "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 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.
- d) Most incredibly of all, "[t]he Word became flesh to make us '*partakers of the divine nature*'⁷⁸ ... '[T]he Son of God became man so that we might become [sons of] God.'⁸⁰ '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'⁸¹ (CCC 460). 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 again" (John 3:3) is like the statue's coming to life, to share not only the *image and likeness* of its 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 Saint Paul's terms, our destiny is to be not merely "flesh" (human nature) but "spirit," living off the life of the Holy Spirit. In Saint Augustine's formula, the Holy Spirit becomes the life of our soul as the soul is the life of our body.

17. *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 [Colossians 1:15-20]: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the 'First Covenant.'¹⁹⁵ He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeed 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*.

18. *The universality of Christ and the salvation of non-Christians*

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who became man and died for the salvation of all humanity. Only in Jesus Christ are humanity and divinity united in one person. No other mediator could possibly do what Jesus does for our salvation, since there is only one God. When one understands that salvation is ultimately sharing in the life of God, it becomes clear that there is no other possible way to salvation except through Jesus Christ, who brings together humanity and divinity and allows human persons to

partake of the communion of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A salvation that was not mediated by Jesus Christ would have to involve another God – which is absurd.

Because adherents of other religions do not acknowledge that salvation comes through Christ, and sometimes do not even accept anything like the Christian understanding of salvation, this does not necessarily mean that they cannot receive the salvation offered through Christ. Scripture teaches that God “wants all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4). Christ’s salvation is intended for all. “The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: ‘There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer’”⁴¹² (CCC 605).

While Baptism is the way established by Christ for those who wish to be incorporated into the Body of Christ and to receive salvation through him, the Church has always recognized that catechumens who die before being baptized receive the grace of Baptism through their desire for it. This baptism of desire can be applied more broadly to people who through no fault of their own are not baptized before they die, if they would have desired Baptism had they known about it. “Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved” (CCC 1260).

All salvation comes through Jesus Christ, but by mysterious ways unknown to us God is able to grant salvation to those who do not explicitly recognize Christ and who have no outwardly apparent relationship to the Church and the sacraments established by him. “*God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments*” (CCC 1257).

While it is possible for people to be saved without explicit faith in Christ and regular sacramental Baptism with water, the Church has the duty to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, both because it is simply the truth and also because God has commanded her to do so.

19. *Christ and the Jews*

In Jesus Christ, all the promises given by God to the people of Israel are fulfilled. He is the Messiah foretold by the prophets, the one who would establish the Kingdom of God. Jesus was not accepted by the majority of his fellow Jews and faced strong opposition from many of the Jewish leaders, opposition that ultimately led to his crucifixion by the Romans. The Jewish people, however, are not collectively responsible for Jesus' death. "...[N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion.... [T]he Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture"³⁸⁸ (CCC 597). All sinners are responsible for Christ's sufferings. At Vatican II, the Church asserted that "she deploras all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews" (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 4).

20. *Christ's death and descent into Hell*

Christ really died and really rose. It was not just a show. If he didn't really die, he couldn't have really risen from death. And if he didn't really die, he didn't really pay for our sins.

The Apostles' Creed says he "descended into Hell." This ("Hell") means *Hades* (Greek) or *Sheol* (Hebrew): the realm of the physically dead, the grave. It does not mean *Gebenna*, the realm of the spiritually dead, the eternally damned. "Jesus, like all men,

experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there”⁴⁷⁹ (CCC 632).

21. *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...”⁵⁰² (CCC 642).

This is concrete evidence, not abstract myth (see 2 Peter 1:16). The Resurrection did not come from the apostles’ faith; their faith came from the Resurrection. It was not some inner mystical experience. For “far from showing us a community seized by a mystical exaltation, the Gospels present us with disciples demoralized (‘looking sad’⁵⁰⁴) 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 500 other witnesses – spoke untruth. They either knew their story was untrue or 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 were hallucinating, or “projecting” their subjective faith into objective reality. But they touched the risen Christ (John 20:24,29). He ate food (Luke 24:36-43). He had long conversations with many men at the same time (Luke 24:13-35;

Acts 1:34). He was 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 soft, cowardly hearts into hard, courageous ones, and convened the hard-nosed, cruel Roman Empire to a religion of unselfish love. “By their fruits you shall know them” – how could such true fruit 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 Saint Thomas Aquinas argues: “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 the 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” by a hallucination or a lie.

22. *The importance of the Resurrection*

What difference does the Resurrection make? Here are two different answers.

Answer #1: “If the bones of the dead Jesus were discovered in some Palestinian tomb tomorrow, all the essentials of Christianity would remain unchanged.” So wrote Rudolf

Bultmann, the founder of Modernist “demythologizing,” a century ago.

Answer #2: “If Christ has not been raised, then [1] our preaching is vain [2] and your faith is in vain. [3] We are even found to be misrepresenting God.... [4] If Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins. [5] Then those also who have fallen asleep [died] in Christ have perished. [6] If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:14-19). Six rather important consequences! So wrote Saint Paul, who was far closer to Christ in time, in space, and in spirit, than Bultmann was.

Nothing more concretely and conclusively proves Christ’s divinity than his Resurrection. No one but God can conquer death.

And no one but the One who can conquer death can conquer sin. We cannot be saved by a dead Savior. The difference the Resurrection makes is nothing less than this: our hope of salvation.

Even more, the personal and practical importance of the Resurrection is not just a past event but a present one: “Christ *is* risen.” The tomb of every other man who lived says: such and such a man is here. But at Christ’s tomb his disciples heard these words from the angel: “he is not here” (Luke 24:5).

Where is he, then? He is *here!* He is not absent but present: “Lo, I am with you always” (Matthew 8:20). He is not in the dead past but in the living present, as really present as we are. The angel’s question continually reminds us: “Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?” (Luke 24:5).

23. *The meaning of the Resurrection for our future*

Christ’s Resurrection was not just a resuscitation, like the raising of Lazarus. For Christ rose with a new kind of body, “not

limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills” (CCC 645). And this resurrection body can no longer die.

This is the kind of body he promises us. That is one very practical consequence of the Resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15). As Christ’s death conquered sin *for us*, his Resurrection conquered death *for us*. We will have immortal bodies like his.

24. *The Ascension*

Christ’s Ascension, like his Resurrection, is not only about him, it is also about us.

Christ’s Ascension to Heaven was not the undoing of the Incarnation. The Incarnation was not just a temporary visit. It was more like a hunting expedition, in which he captured a trophy and brought it home (Ephesians 4:8). The trophy was humanity.

And Christ brought humanity home to Heaven in the Ascension not only in the sense that 1) his death and Resurrection allowed us to enter Heaven, and he ascended to prepare a place for us to live with him forever (John 14:1-3), but also in the sense that 2) humanity was united with divinity in the Person of Christ forever. Not only were we changed forever, so was he! “The Father’s power ‘raised up’ Christ his Son and by doing so perfectly introduced his Son’s humanity, including his body, into the Trinity” (CCC 648). Christ’s Ascension brought his human body and soul to Heaven into the Godhead forever. The Second Person of the Trinity, God himself, is forever human as well as divine, and bodily as well as spiritual! The incorporation of humanity into divinity was completed in the Ascension.

25. *The Second Coming*

“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,” says the Creed.

He *promised* he would return (Luke 21:27-28), and he keeps his promises.

One of the reasons the early Christians lived in such great hope and expectation was their faith in this promise. Where we see only darkness when we peer into the future, they saw light; where we see clouds of fog, they saw a golden glory.

The *quantity* of years between his first and second comings is irrelevant; the *quality* of this time is the point. We are now living in “the last hour” (2 John 2:18). The final age of the world is with us now, whether it lasts ten years or ten million. The most important event in history has already happened, the Incarnation, the First Coming, the event that divides all time into two, into B.C. (“Before Christ”) and A.D. (*Anno Domini*, “in the year of Our Lord”). Only one more Great Event will happen: his Second Coming. There will be no more Lords, no more revelations, no more Bibles, no more Churches, no more Saviors until the end of time.

Scripture promises that this last age will not be one of sheer progress and goodness, but also of great evil and “tribulation” (John 16:3), of spiritual warfare between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; 1 John 2:18). All Christians now live in two worlds, two kingdoms: the world and the Church, the flesh and the spirit, “the old man” and “the new man” (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9), what Saint Augustine called “the City of the World” and “the City of God.”

26. *Christ the conqueror of the world*

Christ promised, “in the world you have tribulation. But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Only three men in history ever made good on that claim: Buddha, Alexander the Great, and Christ. Buddha overcame the world by “waking up” from it as from a dream, an illusion. (It is *not* an illusion; it is a creation of God!) Alexander the Great overcame the world by arms, then wept because he thought there were “no more worlds to conquer.” (He forgot the world of his own soul! As Buddha ignored the world without, Alexander ignored the world within.)

Christ overcame the world not by spilling its blood for himself, like Alexander, but by spilling his blood for it. The Cross is God’s sword, held at the hilt by the hand of Heaven and plunged down into the earth, not to take blood but to give it.

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

¹¹ *Acts* 4:20.

¹³ *CT* 5.

¹⁶ *CT* 6; cf. *Jn* 7:16.

¹⁷ *Phil* 3:8-11.

²⁷⁴ Cf. *Jn* 6:5-15; *Lk* 19:8; *Mt* 11:5.

²⁷⁵ Cf. *Lk* 12:13-14; *Jn* 18:36.

²⁷⁶ Cf. *Jn* 8:34-36.

¹⁶¹ Council of Friuli (796): DS 619; cf. *Lk* 2:48-49.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ex* 3:14.

⁶⁰ Cf. *1 Cor* 2:8.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Rv* 11:15; *Mk* 12:17; *Acts* 5:29.

⁷⁰ *1 Jn* 4:10; 4:14; 3:5.

- ⁷⁸ *2 Pet* 1:4.
- ⁸⁰ St. Athanasius, *De inc.*, 54, 3: PG 25, 192B.
- ⁸¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57: 1-4.
- ¹⁹⁵ *Heb* 9:15.
- ⁴¹² Council of Quiercy (853): DS 624; cf. *2 Cor* 5:15; *1 Jn* 2:2.
- ³⁸⁸ NA 4.
- ⁴⁷⁹ Cf. *1 Pt* 3:18-19.
- ⁵⁰² *1 Cor* 15:4-8; cf. Acts 1:22.
- ⁵⁰⁴ *Lk* 24:17; cf. *Jn* 20:19.

“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

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