

Day 2: Lesson 3: The School of Mary: Initiation into Spiritual Life Dogma and Spiritual Life

*"There is an organic connection between
our spiritual life and the dogmas."
(CCC 89)*

In this lesson, we want to reach the sources of our prayer, of our spiritual life, to find them in God, in God's Plan. By doing that, we want to define prayer as well. We would like to see the deep and living relationship that exists between our Christian Dogmas (the Truths we believe in) and our Spiritual Life. We will explore God, His Being, His Plan (Creation of the human being *at the Image and Likeness of God*), the Fall, Incarnation, Redemption and the Journey of coming back to God: Sanctification. This will help us understand better Prayer, and its real frame of work.

I- Introduction : what are the dogmas, why do we need dogmas ?

1- God reveals himself

- In the Old Testament God reveals himself to us by his own initiative
- In the New Testament, He comes personally to us and speaks to us, revealing himself more powerfully and finally to us. He introduces us to His life.
- Revelation is closed by the death of the last Apostle.

2- We are People of the Word and not people of the book. See CCC 107-108.

3- Revelation and development: We need to distinguish between the end of the Revelation and our growing understanding of it: the Development of Christian Doctrine (see JH Newman's book: "Development of Christian doctrine")

4- Birth of Dogmas

Early formulations in the New Testament (Jesus is the Son of God), or St. Paul to Timothy 2 Tm 2:8-15).

Formulations during the Councils: Athanasius 4th century says: our Fathers believed this way.

There is first a spiritual experience of the Dogma in the heart/spirit. See S Theresa of Avila: what he believes in during the journey, we see it in the Mansions of the Groom (seventh mansion (7M 1,6 and 7M 1,7)).

5- Dogma and spiritual life

Dogma is the description of a living reality in us. Transmitted only orally because of its "utmost value".

The Creed is the best Prayer, the Best Psalm.

« Dogma » for the Greek philosophers and culture means a word of wisdom (a Divine Proverb) that one would hold on to, meditate and put into practice (See the works of Pierre Hadot). When the Greek Fathers said for instance that the Trinity is a Dogma, they meant what Baptism meant: we hold on to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit in whom we are immersed. We shouldn't come out of this Immersion (Baptism). This is exactly what Matthew the Hebrew will do with the three chapters of the Sermon of the Mountain: he will offer us three sets of advice in order to remain immersed in the Son (second part of chapter 5), the Father (chapter 6) and the Holy Spirit (chapter 7).¹

6- Dogma and Prayer

Dogmas tell us about the invisible reality dwelling in us.

¹ See Fr. Marie Eugene, "I want to see God", Third Part, Chapter IX, about the relationship between dogma and contemplation: "Theology and supernatural contemplation". In the Fifth part as well, Chapter VII B: Spiritual Marriage (The imaginary vision of the Trinity and the intellectual one).

II- Dogmas and our Spiritual Life

1) The Trinity origin of the mystery of prayer

a) Prayer as a mystery

b) God reveals his intimate life

Jesus reveals the life of the Trinity and opens it out to us.

There are two operations in the Trinity: 1- the Father generates the Son, 2- The Father and the Son 'spirate' the Holy Spirit.

Like for the human being: we think (mind), and we love (will) God has a Thought (all his thought is the Son) and has a Will, and Love (the Holy Spirit).

One of the best images as well of the Trinity on earth is: The one who loves, the Beloved, and Love between them.

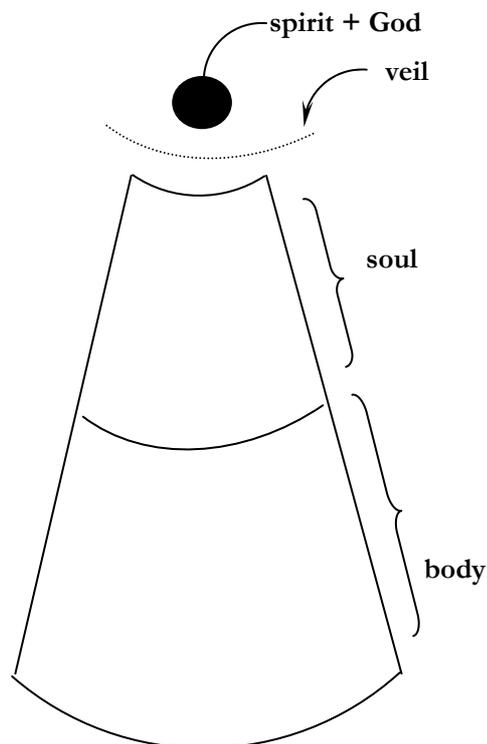
c) The son "prays" the Father from all Eternity, in the Holy Spirit

If we put ourselves in the Place of the Son, we may understand the root of prayer: we receive all our being from the Father and with the Father, in awe, we Love (the Holy Spirit).

2) Creation of the human being, out of love

God is love. Our of Love, His own nature, He creates the human being to share his own life, and participate into his divine operation.

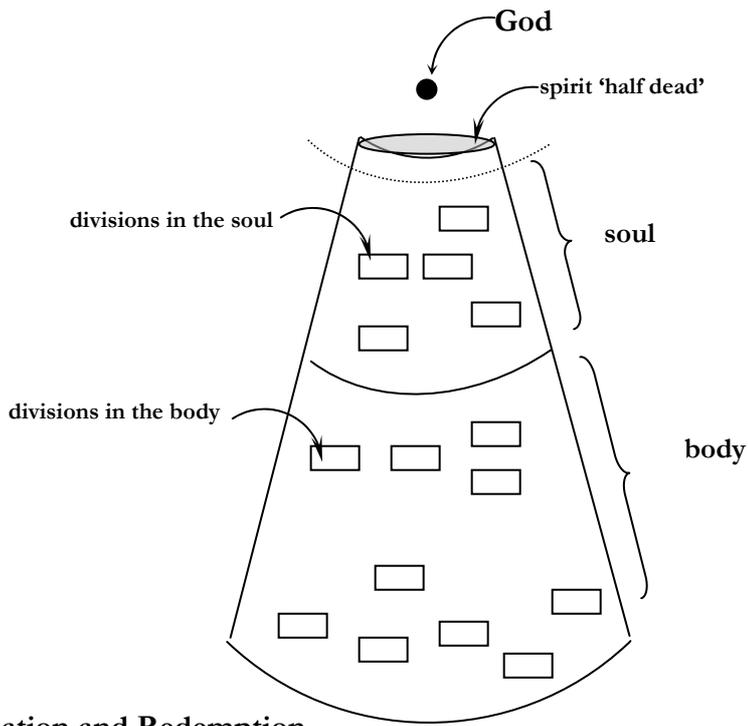
The human being has a spirit (mind and will, supra-conscious, passive, capable of bearing the uncreated nature of God), a soul (mind and will, conscious, active + emotions) and a body (brain, senses,...).



3) The Fall

The act of disobedience in Genesis contains the triple level: she saw (body), she desired (soul, emotions), and she took from the fruit.

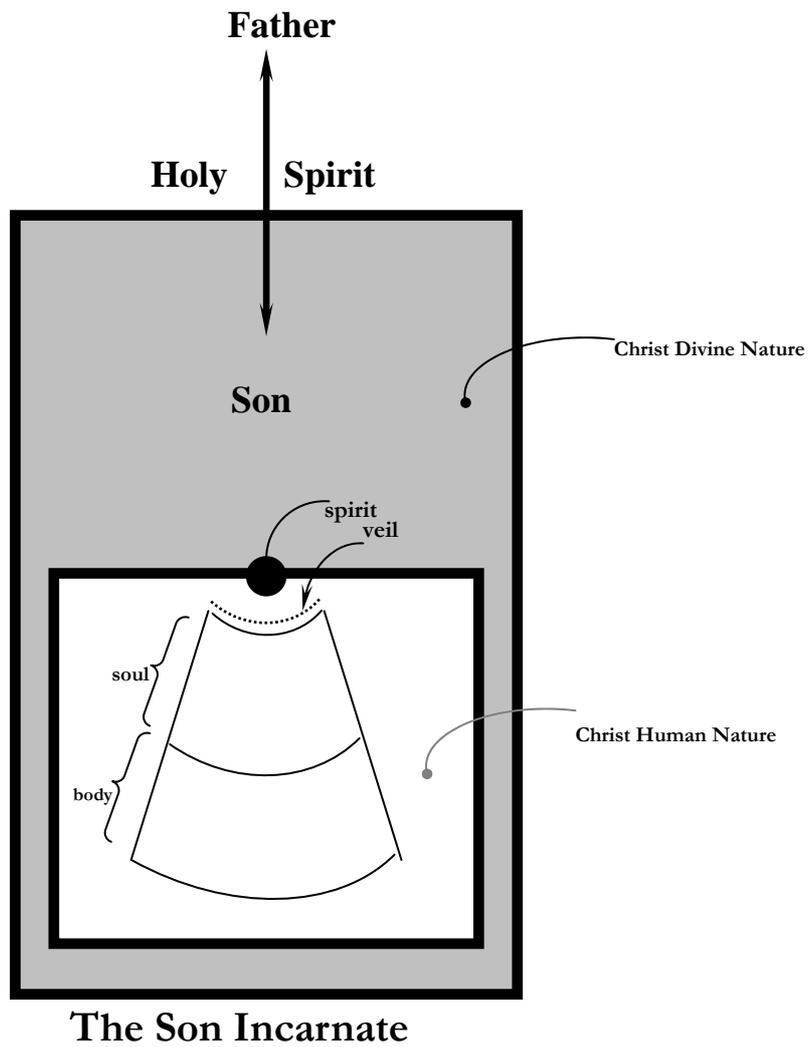
We could draw the human being after the fall this way:



4) Incarnation and Redemption

a) The Son Incarnate

We can represent the Son Incarnate this way (this representation is inspired by the Jerusalem Temple):



b) What Jesus realises on the Cross: Redemption

On the Cross, Jesus, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, crosses the longest distance that can exist: between God, the Holy, and us, "who dwelt in the land of deep darkness" (Isaiah 9:1).

c) Jesus shouting loudly on the Cross

When Jesus shouts on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) shows how much he was imbued totally by our darkness in his soul, and the veil between his soul and his spirit became opaque. He was united to us, and made sin (2 Co 5:21), He who never sinned.

d) Meaning of the Cross

The Cross has three layers: 1- Jesus' body is suffering, 2- Jesus' soul is suffering, 3- Jesus' spirit is rejoicing in his Divinity. We can hear Christ saying to us, on the Cross: "I loved you, and have been united to you on the Cross. This is what I can do. Would you like to realize that in your life? Would you like to receive all that I obtained for you on the Cross? Do you want to apply it to you and to your brothers during your lifetime?"

III) New perspectives

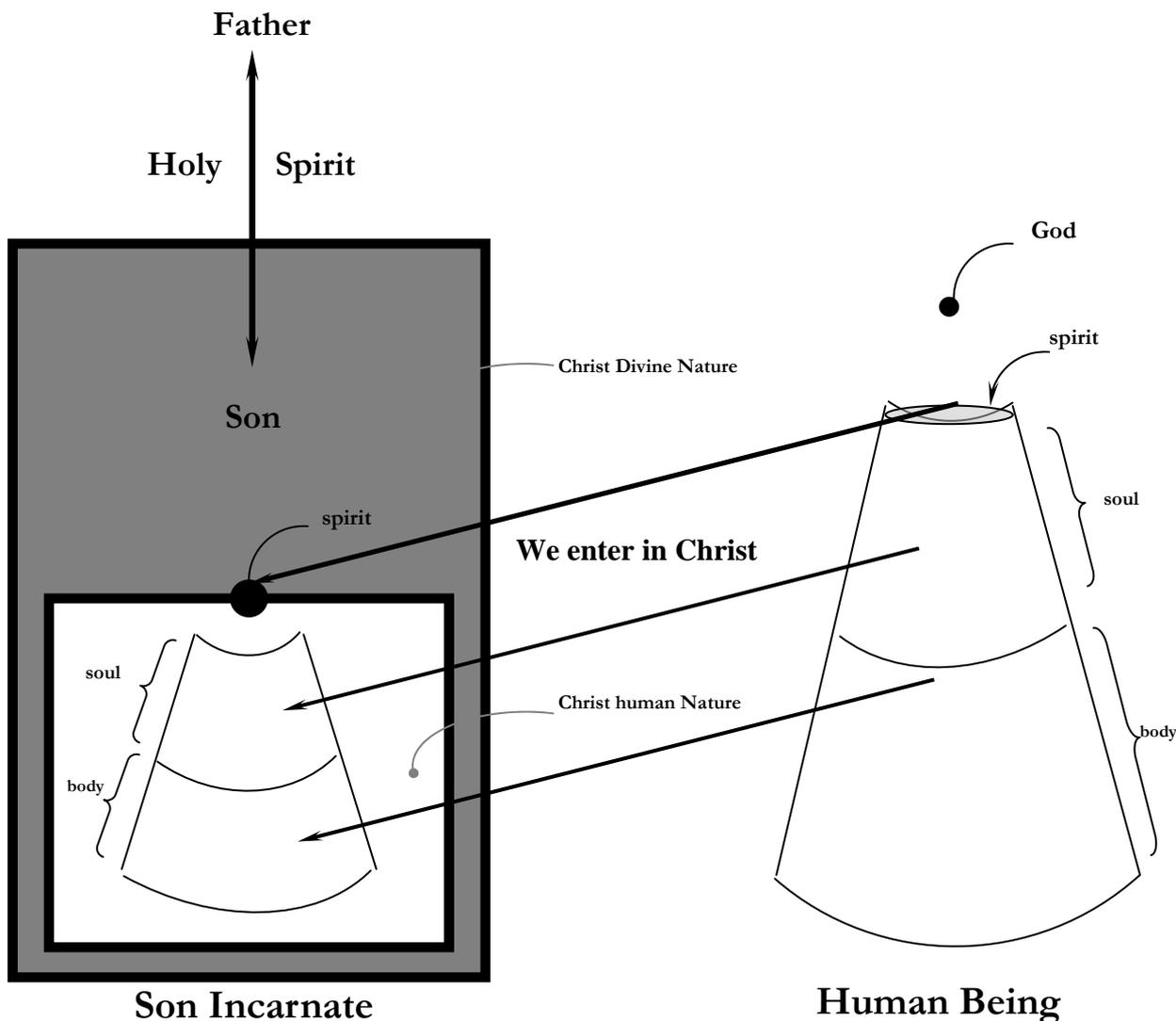
1) The perspective of the Spiritual Journey opens

2) The first archetypal diagram of our Faith

This is our place in Spiritual Life, in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23-24): We are in the Son, in front of the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

3) Our relationship with this first Diagram

Our Call, our vocation is to enter, step by step, inside of the Son.



4) "Transformation" as a Dogma

We can now see in a clearer way that the consequence of this journey of contemplating all the essential Dogmas that we believe in "Transformation", or better said: "Sanctification" / "Divinisation". This will explain all what comes afterwards. All the rest of the Formation will provide us with the necessary tools in order to use them, grow, and be transformed in Christ.

Jean Khoury

Text: Newman and the Creed

In his book, *Grammar of assent* John Henry Newman reminds us that the Creed is a Prayer:

"Break a ray of light into its constituent colours, each is beautiful, each may be enjoyed; attempt to unite them, and perhaps you produce only a dirty white. The pure and indivisible Light is seen only by the blessed inhabitants of heaven; here we have but such faint reflections of it as its diffraction supplies; but they are sufficient for faith and devotion. Attempt to combine them into one, and you gain nothing but a mystery, which you can describe as a notion, but cannot depict as an imagination. And this, which holds of the Divine Attributes, holds also of the Holy Trinity in Unity. And hence, perhaps, it is that the latter doctrine is never spoken of as a Mystery in the sacred book, which is addressed far more to the imagination and affections than to the intellect. Hence, too, what is more remarkable, in the Creeds the dogma is not called a mystery; not in the Apostles' nor the Nicene, nor even in the Athanasian. The reason seems to be, that the Creeds have a place in the Ritual; they are devotional acts, and of the nature of prayers, addressed to God; and, in such addresses, to {133} speak of intellectual difficulties would be out of place. It must be recollected especially that the Athanasian Creed has sometimes been called the "Psalmus *Quicumque*." It is not a mere collection of notions, however momentous. It is a psalm or hymn of praise, of confession, and of profound, self-prostrating homage, parallel to the canticles of the elect in the Apocalypse. It appeals to the imagination quite as much as to the intellect. It is the war-song of faith, with which we warn, first ourselves, then each other, and then all those who are within its hearing, and the hearing of the Truth, who our God is, and how we must worship Him, and how vast our responsibility will be, if we know what to believe, and yet believe not. It is

"The Psalm that gathers in one glorious lay
All chants that e'er from heaven to earth found way;
Creed of the Saints, and Anthem of the Blest,
And calm-breathed warning of the kindest love
That ever heaved a wakeful mother's breast,"

For myself, I have ever felt it as the most simple and sublime, the most devotional formulary to which Christianity has given birth, more so even than the *Veni Creator* and the *Te Deum*. Even the antithetical form of its sentences, which is a stumbling-block to so many, as seeming to force, and to exult in forcing a mystery upon recalcitrating minds, has to my apprehension, even notionally considered, a very different drift. It is intended as a check upon our reasonings, lest they rush on in one direction beyond the limits of the truth, and it turns them back into the opposite direction. Certainly it implies a glorying in the {134} Mystery; but it is not simply a statement of the Mystery for the sake of its mysteriousness.

[The Nicene Creed is celebrated like the triumph of our Faith]
[The Creed is entrusted to the future Baptised like a Treasure]
[we call the Creed, symbolon (symbol) because he gathers everything in it, the totality of what we believe in]

What is more remarkable still, a like silence as to the mysteriousness of the doctrine is observed in the successive definitions of the Church concerning it. Confession after confession, canon after canon is drawn up in the course of centuries; Popes and Councils have found it their duty to insist afresh upon the dogma; they have enunciated it in new or additional propositions; but not even in their most elaborate formularies do they use the word "mystery," as far as I know. The great Council of Toledo pursues the scientific ramifications of the doctrine, with the exact diligence of theology, at a length four times that of the Athanasian Creed; the fourth Lateran completes, by a final enunciation, the development of the sacred doctrine after the mind of St. Augustine; the Creed of Pope Pius IV. prescribes the general rule of faith against the heresies of these latter times; but in none of them do we find either the word "mystery," or any suggestion of mysteriousness.

Such is the usage of the Church in its dogmatic statements concerning the Holy Trinity, as if fulfilling the maxim, "Lex orandi, lex credendi." I suppose it is founded on a tradition, because the custom is otherwise as regards catechisms and theological treatises. These belong to particular ages and places, and are addressed to the intellect. In them, certainly, the mysteriousness of the doctrine is almost uniformly insisted on. But, however this contrast of usage is {135} to be explained, the Creeds are enough to show that the dogma may be taught in its fullness for the purposes of popular faith and devotion without directly insisting on that mysteriousness, which is necessarily involved in the combined view of its separate propositions. That systematized whole is the object of notional assent, and its propositions, one by one, are the objects of real." (John Henry Newman, *"Grammar of assent"*, 1870, pp. 132-135)