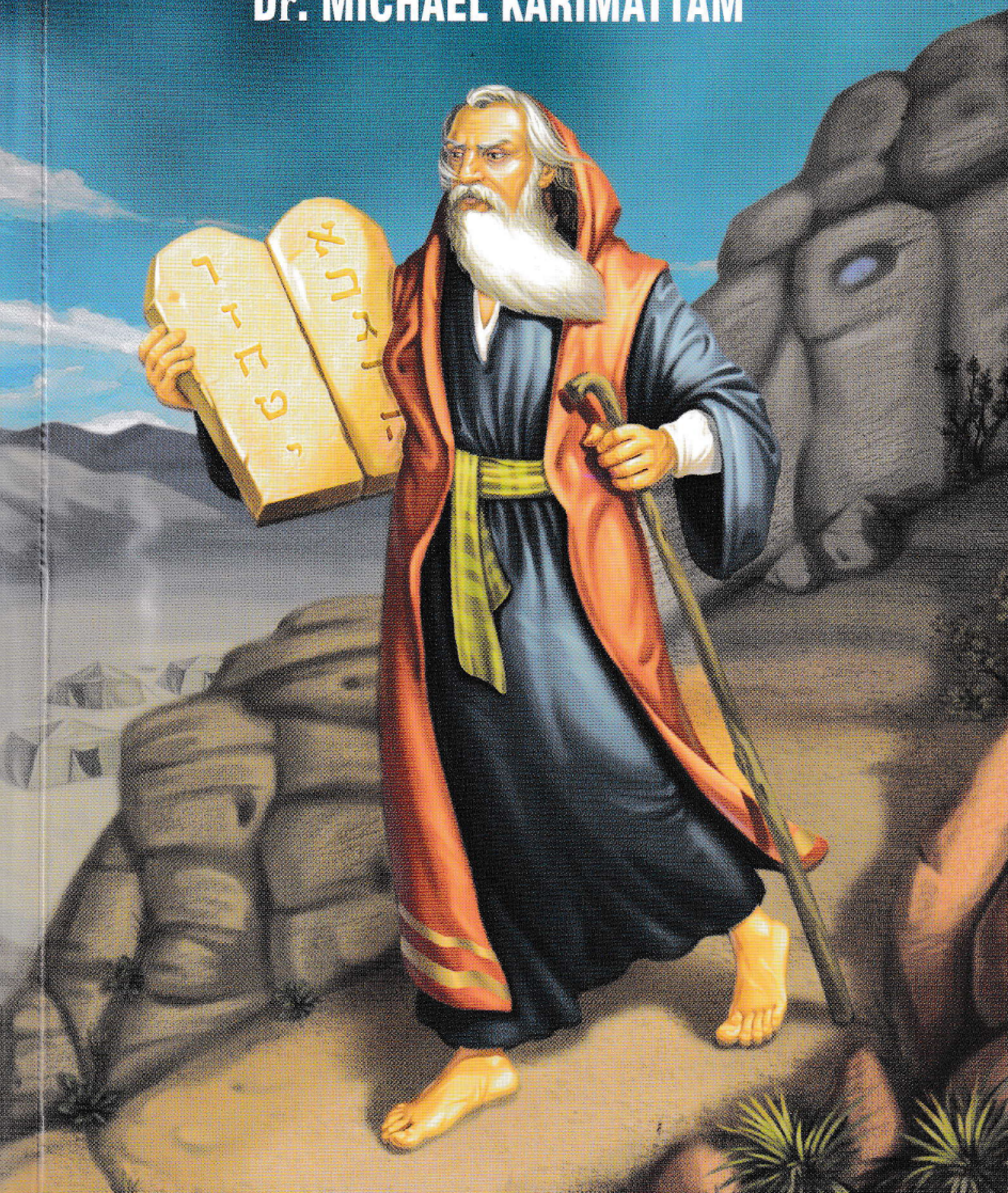


**CATHOLIC FAITH CHALLENGED - 2**



# **PROPHET LIKE MOSES**

**Dr. MICHAEL KARIMATTAM**



# PROPHET LIKE MOSES

**Dr. Michael Karimattam**

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119, 105). In our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God, the Word of God is the light to our path and the guide for our lives. However, when the Word of God is misinterpreted, it would spread darkness instead of light and cause us to stumble and go astray. Such incidents and experiences are plenty today.

Four themes that would cause a lot of doubts and raise many questions are discussed in this book, Prophet like Moses, Anti-Christ, Idol Worship, and Life after Death. An attempt is made to respond to the questions regarding these topics in the light of Bible and the official teachings of the Catholic Church, in a simple and clear language,

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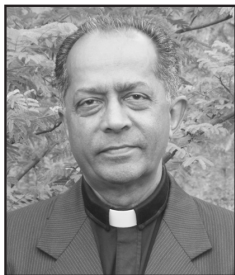
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Scripture

**Catholic Faith Challenged - 2**

# **PROPHET LIKE MOSES**



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# PROPHET LIKE MOSES

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English

*Prophet Like Moses*

(Scripture)

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# Introduction

*“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Ps 119, 105). In our journey toward heaven, it is the Word of God that sheds light on our path. However, when the Word of God is misinterpreted, it would darken the path and lead us astray. The teachings of the Catholic Church are rooted in the Word of God, but they are often questioned and misinterpreted. Therefore, the Church has the responsibility to give clear and right answers to the questions concerning faith and morals. The series of books published under the title “Catholic Faith Challenged” is an attempt in this direction.

This is the second book in the series. The first one, published under the Title “Who is your God?”, received great appreciation from the authorities of the Syro-Malabar Church and the general public, which points to the need and relevance of dealing with such a subject today.

Four themes that create doubts and are frequently questioned are presented in this book

**1. Prophet like Moses (Dt 18, 15-18)** This is a promise God gave through Moses. Who is this prophet? There are some who claim that it is a promise concerning a particular prophet who is to come at the end of the world, namely, the eschatological prophet. Some Muslims interpret this prophecy as pointing to Mohammed, the founder of the Islamic religion. The question, who is this promised prophet, is discussed in the first chapter.

**2. Anti-Christ and False Prophets** The theme ‘Anti-Christ’ is relevant at all times. Who is he? The Bible speaks

also of false Christs, false prophets and the man of lawlessness. Who are they? Are they all the same or refer to different characters? The second chapter of this book is a detailed discussion of this question.

**3. Are the Catholics idol worshippers?** The second of the Ten Commandments forbids the making and worshipping of idols. Is not the keeping and venerating statues in churches and homes to be considered a violation of the second Commandment? Is it not to promote idol worship, that the Catholic Church has cancelled the second Commandment from the list of Ten Commandments? The third chapter discusses these questions in detail.

**4. What happens after Death?** Is the heaven envisaged by the Catholics and Muslims the same or are they different? Is there any basis in the Bible for the Catholic teaching about purgatory? This is the topic of the fourth chapter.

For all the above questions, responses are given on the basis of the Bible and the official teachings of the Catholic Church. We have tried to keep the discussions as simple and clear as possible. Of course, there are still more questions, and we hope to answer them one by one. This book is presented to the readers with the hope that those who read it with open minds will be able to find satisfactory answers, and it would help Catholics to be proud of their faith in the Catholic Church.

The English edition of this book was prepared by Sr. Glorista Arackal SABS. The Atma Books, Calicut, has done a great job in printing and publishing this book. I am grateful to the Press Manager, Rev. Fr. Jibin OFM, Cap, his co-workers, and to everyone who helped me to publish this book.

**Rev. Dr. Michael Karimattam**

# Chapter 1

## PROPHET LIKE MOSES

### Question:

The Bible clearly states that God will send a prophet like Moses. *“For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you so to do. **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren ... him you shall heed ... just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him”** (Dt 18, 14-18).*

Some Muslims claim that Muhammad is this prophet promised by God. Their claim is based on the promise, *“God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, **from your brethren**”* and for them, Muhammad is the fulfillment of this promise, because the Israelites are the children of Isaac and Muhammad is one of the sons of Ismail, brother of Isaac. Besides, like Moses, Muhammad also was married and, like Moses again, he led battles and gave the people the law. Such details are presented as the proof of this claim.

Is Muhammad the prophet like Moses that God Promised? Or is it someone else? What do Bible and the official teaching of the Catholic Church say?

## **Answer**

This claim is a challenging one. If this is correct, all those who accept the Bible as the word of God, and so as the foundation of faith, must accept Muhammad as the last prophet sent by God, and embrace the Islamic religion. Hence there is an urgent need for a clear response to this claim.

First, let us study the circumstances, meaning and goal of uttering such a prophecy, and then see if what the Bible says it was fulfilled.

It is commonly agreed that Moses lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.; and Muhammad came after about 19 centuries (A.D. 570-632). During this long interval, did not God send a prophet like Moses? Hence, we have to consider the claim that Muhammad is the last prophet sent by God. If he is the last prophet, there should be no other prophet after him.

### **1. The Prophecy (Dt 18, 14-21)**

When we try to understand a saying or an incident in the Bible, first of all we have to consider the context in which it was written. If it is taken out of context, we might not get the meaning intended by the Bible. Not only has the context of the saying or incident in the Bible but also the historical background needs to be considered to get a real picture of the situation. The Bible is the Word of God through which God reveals Himself and His salvific plan. Hence, we have to search for what it is that God is communicating through this word or incident.

In this search, three things need to be taken into consideration: 1. The Context in which God spoke through the prophet; 2. the historical situation of the word or incident;

and, 3. what God is telling me through this today? Rather than going into the details of this process, only the most relevant matters shall be discussed here briefly.

### **a. The context of Moses**

The people of Israel had reached the threshold of the Promised Land. The book of Deuteronomy is presented as the farewell discourse of Moses to the people of Israel encamped in the plains of Moab. When they come to the Promised Land, Moses will not be there to guide them. Hence the book of Deuteronomy is presented as the final message of Moses.

During the last 40 years it was Moses who conveyed the message of God to the people. After they enter the Promised Land who will reveal to them the will of God? The native people, the Canaanites used various methods to know the will of God, such as soothsayers, witches, necromancy etc. The Canaanites worshipped Baal; they did not know Yahweh, the true God. Seeking their advice using those devices would be equal to idol worship and so are forbidden for the people of Israel. Then how would they know the will of God? Here is the role and relevance of prophets.

### **b. Prophet, spokesperson of God.**

According to the Bible “prophet” is the spokesperson of God whom God has chosen, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, equipped with the word of God, and sent to the people to tell them who God is, what He wants from them and what He promises them. After the death of Moses, God will keep sending prophets to teach them the will of God to the people. They would lead the people of Israel as Moses did and they will be from among the Israelites.

It is quite strange and unacceptable to say that a prophet for the Israelites has to be one of the children of Ismail. When talking about the kings also the same qualification

is used. *“You may indeed set as king over you him whom the LORD your God will choose. **One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother**” (Dt 17, 15).* Hence the prophet God would send will be one of the Israelites. That is what we understand from the context of the prophecy. That, however, does not point to just one prophet alone. God will keep sending prophets to let the people know the will of God and guide them according to God’s plan.

God will send Prophets to lead the people as Moses did; to help them walk in the ways of God; to correct them, and to bring them back on the right path if they went astray. But all those who spoke in the name of God were not true Prophets. There were many false prophets who claimed to reveal the will of God. This caused doubts and spread confusion among the people. Foreseeing this possibility God has revealed the guidelines to discern true prophets.

### **c. Criteria to discern true prophets**

#### **1. Fulfillment**

While promising to keep sending prophets to the people, God Himself has given certain norms and criteria to enable the people to discern true Prophets from false ones. One of the criteria was the fulfillment of the prophecy. *“The prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. ‘And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ ... when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, **if the word does not come to pass or come true**, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him” (Dt 18, 20-22).*

The norm is very clear. Only when the words spoken by the prophet are fulfilled can we acknowledge him as a true prophet. But this led to many problems: the first problem was that they had to wait until the prophecy was fulfilled. Many prophecies were fulfilled only after centuries. Some of them might never be fulfilled. Prophet Jonah could be seen as an example. Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed after forty days (Jonah 3, 4). But Nineveh was not destroyed because the people repented and did penance. Hence the fulfillment of the prophecy is not always an acceptable criterion.

## 2. Fulfillment only for Promises

Prophet Jeremiah, pointing out the inadequacy of the norm of fulfillment, put forward another criterion. *“As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.”* (Jer 28, 9). Jeremiah was a true prophet who had to stand alone against many false prophets. At the moment of his call God had warned him about this: *“Behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze wall, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you”* (Jer 1, 18-19). Throughout his life Jeremiah experienced this bitter truth.

The army of Babylon captured Jerusalem in B.C. 598. Great many people were taken captives and led away to Babylon. The kingdom of Judah was ordered to pay a great amount as tribute. In the meantime, there broke out a civil war in Babylon. Thinking that Babylon will be ruined in this civil war and will never be able to come back, the people of Judah decided to stop paying the tribute. A large number of false prophets under the leadership of Hananiah announced

that the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, will end soon and the captives will return to Jerusalem. Jeremiah was the only one who opposed this unanimous proclamation of all the prophets and priests. It was in this context that Jeremiah announced a new criterion to distinguish true prophets from the false ones.

The King and the leaders did not accept the words of Jeremiah and they stopped paying the tribute. They made a treaty with Egypt. The prophecy of Hananiah was not fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar returned. Egypt did not come to help. Jerusalem was destroyed and the Temple was burned to ashes. It was proven that those who made the unfulfilled prophecies were false prophets. It became evident that Jeremiah was the true prophet. But that also could not be used as a totally valid and satisfactory norm and so a third norm was presented.

### **3. Fidelity to the traditional faith**

In the book of Deuteronomy, we can find the norm that is more convincing and acceptable. *“If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him, and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and cleave to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk” (Dt. 13, 1-5).*



The people learned through experience that the fulfillment of prophecies is not a norm sufficient to discern true prophets. Hence God gave them a more credible and acceptable norm to identify true prophets, namely, fidelity to the faith in God who liberated Israel from bondage in Egypt, accepted them as His own people through a Covenant at Mount Sinai and settled them in the Promised Land. A true prophet will be the one who encourages the people to obey the will of God expressed through the commandments of the Covenant of Sinai. Those who encourage the people to worship other gods will not be true prophets even if they perform miracles and their prophecies are fulfilled. They must be rejected as false prophets.

#### **4. Witness by Life**

The above three norms to discern true prophets are suggested in the Old Testament. But Jesus taught through His words and deeds that even these three are not sufficient. The Jewish leadership saw Jesus of Nazareth as a false prophet. Jesus had performed miracles; what He said was fulfilled. But His words and activities that claimed equality with God the Father were contrary to their pre-conceived ideas and expectations. The fact that the High Priest condemned him to death points to the need of yet another dependable criterion for recognizing a true prophet.

*“Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, “He has uttered blasphemy”. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy”* (Mt 26, 65). The proclamation of Jesus being against the traditional faith of Israel, the highest Jewish authority, the Sanhedrin, approved and announced the punishment, prescribed to the false Prophets, in the Bible: He must die! It was the misinterpretation of the norms to determine the true prophet that led them to accuse the Son of God of blasphemy and condemn him to death. What then is the true norm? Did Jesus utter blasphemy?

The criterion Jesus set for true prophets is the witnessing by life. *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will know them by their fruits”* (Mt 7, 15-20). These words of the Lord give a warning and at the same time a clear sign to recognize true prophets. The fruits are the most important sign or the testimony that each person gives through one’s own life. What are the fruits? Jesus has said what the fruits were by which to recognize the true prophets. Other parts of the Bible have confirmed it.

The signs of a true prophet can be seen in the strong warning Jesus gave at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It is presented in the short description about the Last judgment. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock”* (Mt 7, 21-24). Even though they performed miracles and signs, they were rejected as false prophets for the only reason that they acted unjustly. A person should be judged as a true or false prophet on the basis of his life according to the norms of justice.

The life of a person should be the criterion for judging whether one is a true or false prophet. According to the Bible, fulfilling one’s responsibility to God, to others as one’s brothers and sisters, to the universe and to one’s own self,

according to the will of God manifested through the commandments, is considered as the norm of a just life. The peace (**shalom**), one experiences is the fruit of a just life. The failure to live a just life will be considered as injustice. In Psalm 15 we have a comprehensive description of a just life. The one who lives a just life and motivates others to do so is a true prophet. But there are still more signs to decide the quality of the tree.

Going one step further, Jesus taught that God desires people to love and to show mercy to those in need. This would be the fruits God desires from the people. In the words of Jesus, as the branches that abide in the vine bear fruit those who abide in Jesus will produce the fruit desired by God. ‘Abide in’ means, living according to the word of Jesus. *“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”* (Jn 15, 10). That fruit is called love or mercy. Jesus told his disciples to love one another even as He loved them, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another”* (Jn 13, 34). In the description of the Last Judgment this is depicted in great detail (Mt 25, 31-46). Seeing Jesus in those who are suffering from need and helping them: this is the fruit God desires from us.

John the Baptist, who started his work proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, declared that the norm for justice and the mark of a true prophet is the sharing motivated by love (Lk 3, 11-14). The Prophet proclaims the Word of God. In the New Testament, the content of the proclamation of the prophets can be summarized as **“The Kingdom of God”**. The true prophet would proclaim and live the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. What does it mean? St Paul explains: *“The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14, 17).

The true prophetic message is summarized by Micah: *“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6, 8). Jesus confirmed it, *“Justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done”* (Mt 23, 23). In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul listed the fruits of the Holy Spirit and explained what God expects of the faithful. *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Gala 5, 22-23). The true prophets would possess these qualities. These are the norms to decide if one is a true or false prophet.

## **5. Summary**

The norm for discerning a true prophet can be summarized as follows. Fulfillment of the prophecies is not necessarily a norm of a true prophet. The one who calls for repentance and conversion have a better chance of being a true prophet than the one who promises a prosperous future. A true prophet will always remain faithful to the traditional faith of the people of God. A prophet without justice, mercy, humility and fidelity will be a false prophet. If his word and action do not conform to each other, he should be considered as a false prophet. If any one considers the Word of God as means of accumulating wealth (1 Tim 6, 15) or distorts the Word of God (2 Cor 2, 17) that one should be considered as a false prophet.

## **2. The Eschatological Prophet**

We have seen that the promise “God would send a prophet like Moses” refers to a person whom God would choose from the people of Israel and send to them with His word to communicate His Will to them. After the death of Moses, a number of such prophets were sent to Israel. Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah are some of the examples. These prophets were sent in fulfill-

ment of that promise. However, after the Babylonian Exile, the number of such prophets dwindled.

Prophet Malachi who came toward the middle of the fifth century B.C. is considered to be the last Prophet. After that there were no true prophets. The priests and lawyers under Ezra guided the people. The situation came to such a state that if anyone would dare to present himself as a prophet he would be considered only as a false prophet. *“If any one again appears as a prophet, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD’; and his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies”* (Zach 13, 3).

Where priests wield the supreme power, prophets have no place. However, the people expected that God would send yet another prophet. The expectation of a Prophet like Moses began to take on a new interpretation pointing to a particular prophet who will come at the end of times, **“The Eschatological Prophet”**. Gradually the hope that God would send a prophet to teach the people His Will and call them to conversion before He comes to execute Justice and punish this world that is under the dominion of evil, became very strong. This hope was similar to the hope in the coming of messianic king as son of David that gained strength during the post-exilic period when there was no king in Israel.

One of the expectations about the Eschatological Prophet was that Elijah who was taken in a chariot of fire will come back (2 Kg 2, 11; Sir 48, 9-10). The hope that God will send a prophet like Moses also became strong (1 Mac 4, 46). The Jewish leadership that questioned John the Baptist bears witness to this hope. When John clearly said that he was not the Christ, the leaders asked him, *“Are you Elijah?”* He said, *“I am not”*. *Are you the prophet?”* And he answered, *“No”* (Jn 1, 21).

Their question “**Are you the prophet**” shows that they were expecting a prophet who would be different from Elijah. In the Greek original the word prophet is presented with the definite article: “*Ho Prophetes*”. This would indicate that they are referring to a specific prophet whom they were waiting for, namely the Prophet like Moses. This Eschatological Prophet would liberate the people from foreign domination and slavery as Moses did; he would teach with authority and guide them on the right path. This was the picture of the Prophet like Moses that was prevalent during the New Testament times.

### **3. Jesus, the Eschatological Prophet**

The four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus Christ, categorically affirm that the expectations concerning the Eschatological Prophet are fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. The faith of the people, conviction of the Apostles and the words and deeds of Jesus himself bear witness to this conviction.

#### **a. Jesus, the Prophet like Moses**

The Gospels, especially the Gospel according to Mathew, depict Jesus as the prophet like Moses. The very structure of the Gospel reveals the similarity between Moses and Jesus. The Gospel according to Mathew, after the introduction (1-4) is divided into five parts, each containing a sermon (5, 1-7, 45; 10, 1-42; 13, 1-52; 18, 1-35; 24,3-25,46) followed by a narrative section, a structure that clearly imitates that of the Pentateuch, generally known as the five Books of Moses. Not only that, the ten miracles narrated (Mt 8-9) immediately after the sermon on the Mount remind us of the ten miracles in Egypt (Ex 7,14-12,36).

This comparison is evident in Herod’s attempt to kill Baby Jesus, the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt and the return from Egypt. This flight to and return from Egypt gives an indication that as Moses liberated the people of Is-

rael from the slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land, Jesus would liberate the people from the dominion of sin and lead to the Kingdom of God. God made a Covenant with the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai and Moses taught them the Commandments of that Covenant. Parallel to this stands the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus explains the New Covenant and its laws. The mountain on which Jesus sat is parallel to Mount Sinai where Moses spoke with God.

### **b. In the popular opinion**

All four Gospels have recorded that the common people saw Jesus as a prophet. Towards the middle of His public ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do the people say that I am?” The first three Gospels record the response in the same way. *“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* (Mk 8, 28; Mt 16, 14; Lk 9, 19).

The people thought the series of prophets that ended with Malachi was starting again with Jesus. One step further, some considered Jesus as the Prophet they were awaiting. When Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain, the people acclaimed, *“A great prophet has arisen among us! and “God has visited his people!”* (Lk 7,16). This incident has a clear similarity with the Prophet Elijah raising the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17, 8-24). The people saw Jesus as a great Prophet like Elijah.

The Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well of Jacob in the town of Sychar said, *“Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet”* (Jn 4, 19). The blind man who received his sight said the same thing when he was questioned by the Jewish authority: *“What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?”* He said, *“He is a prophet”* (Jn 9, 17). When Jesus entered Jerusalem in the midst of acclamation

the inhabitants of Jerusalem asked who it was, to which the people who accompanied Jesus replied, *“This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee”* (Mt 21, 11). The Jewish leadership realized that the parable of the vineyard targeted them, but they could not arrest Him because *“They feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet”* (Mt 21, 46).

### c. The Opinion of the Disciples

Though Peter as the spokesperson of the disciples, had confessed Jesus as The Christ, their faith in Jesus as a prophet was much more deep-rooted as it becomes evident from the conversation of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. On the Sunday following the crucifixion of Jesus as the two were walking sad, discussing and disputing with each other, a stranger joined them to whom they poured out all their sadness and bitter disappointment. Not knowing that it was Jesus, they told him, *“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people... But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened”* (Lk 24, 19-21). **A prophet mighty in deed and word and, hopefully, someone who would redeem Israel**, these two qualities present Jesus as the Prophet like Moses.

On the day of Pentecost after receiving the Holy Spirit, the disciples became courageous and proclaimed Jesus Christ who was crucified but rose on the third day. When Peter healed the crippled man, the people were wonderstruck, and quoting the subject under discussion, Peter proclaimed, *“The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people”* (Acts 3, 22-23). In the words of Peter there is no



doubt that Jesus is the prophet promised through Moses; the crippled man who was healed stood there as a proof.

While speaking in the house of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, Peter presented Jesus as the Eschatological Prophet. *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest”* (Acts 10, 38-40). Jesus of Nazareth was a Prophet, anointed with the Holy Spirit, one who revealed himself and his message through miracles. In these characteristics again, we see the picture of the **“Eschatological Prophet”**.

#### **d. Testimony of Jesus**

The general public as well as the disciples saw Jesus as a great prophet who was to come into the world. How did Jesus respond to this faith? Did Jesus see Himself as a prophet and his mission as prophetic? Is there any proof for it in the Gospels?

Jesus of Nazareth revealed Himself as the Son of David, the Son of Man whom Daniel saw in his vision (Daniel 7, 13-14; Mt 26, 64), the Suffering Servant proclaimed by Prophet Isaiah (Is 52, 13-53. 12; Mt 12, 7-21; 16, 21) and above all as the Son of God. At the same time His anointing, mission, goal, activities and death were the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the “Eschatological Prophet” in the Old Testament.

### **1. Prophetic Life**

Jesus revealed his prophetic call and mission, for the first time, in the episode, often named as **“Nazareth manifesto”** (Lk 4,16-30). After being anointed by the Holy Spirit

at Jordan, Jesus defeated Satan in the wilderness. Then he went to his home town, Nazareth. On a Sabbath day in the Synagogue he stood up to read the Word of God. He opened the Bible and read a part from Prophet Isaiah. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”* (Lk 4, 18-19).

The passage Jesus read was Isaiah 61, 1-2. There is a general understanding that 11 chapters of the book of Isaiah (56-66) belong to the post exilic period, and are attributed to the prophet called Trito Isaiah. The prophet is addressing a disillusioned people who on their return from Babylon, contrary to their great expectations of peace and prosperity, encountered poverty, famine and enslavement in Jerusalem. What the prophets said was not fulfilled at that time but it remained as a source of hope. The people thought that it would be fulfilled only when the Eschatological Prophet comes at the end of the world. Therefore, Jesus’ proclamation after the reading *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (Lk 4, 21) caused wonder and amazement among the people. There was no doubt in what He meant by it. Jesus proclaimed that He was the “Eschatological Prophet” whom God had announced through the Prophets and the people had been waiting for centuries. They had to accept His proclamation.

The qualities of that Prophet are described in the passage read. He is a prophet anointed by the Holy Spirit; he was sent to proclaim the Good News to the poor; he will give liberty to the oppressed and will enable them to see everything in a new light or he would enable them to see everything as God sees. Above all he was sent to **proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord**. This was the proclamation Jesus made in the Synagogue in Nazareth. A prophet

like Moses and at the same time one greater than Moses, he would make the Kingdom of God a reality on earth. In short, Jesus is the Eschatological Prophet. The prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus; his words and deeds bear witness to that.

John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus about his identity. They asked Him, are you the one to come or should we wait for another? The response Jesus gave to this question gives clear evidence to his identity. Jesus told them: *“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receives their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them”* (Lk 7, 22). In this episode Jesus proves his identity as the Eschatological Prophet presenting his words and deeds in public as unquestionable evidence. The people were waiting for a Prophet like Moses and Jesus proved that He is the fulfillment of that expectation. There is no royal splendor but the Good News being proclaimed to the poor and the miracles of healing he performed announced the presence of the Kingdom of God. The words and deeds of Jesus present him as the prophet like Moses, the Eschatological Prophet. More than that, Jesus himself has presented his own death as proof of His Prophetic mission.

## **2. Prophet as Martyr**

King Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, felt threatened by the popularity of Jesus due to His words and deeds. He had not gotten over his guilt feeling of killing John the Baptist and the popular protest against that murder had been haunting him. Before the turmoil caused by that murder subsided, Jesus of Nazareth came on the scene with greater popularity by His proclamations and performance of miracles. Hence Herod planned to do away with Jesus as he did with the Baptist. When the Pharisees asked Jesus to leave the area as Herod was planning to kill Him, the response Jesus gave

clearly states that He was a prophet. *“Some Pharisees came, and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you. And he said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem’”* (Luke 13, 31-33).

Jesus was aware that not only in words and deeds but also in death he would prove to be a prophet. His activities were not controlled by Herod or any other political leaders but only by God the Father and so he would continue his activities and his end would be in Jerusalem. *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”* (Lk 13, 34). Thus, he lamented over Jerusalem and stated that His end will be like that of the prophets who came before Him.

Jesus knew that the fate of the prophets who were killed by their own people was waiting for Him also. He proclaimed this publicly. Knowing exactly what his end would be, without fear, he addressed the Pharisees and scribes as hypocrites and unmasked their pretension before the people. He clearly predicted the kind of death, namely martyrdom that he would receive at the hands of the Jewish leadership. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus, you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.”* (Mt 23, 29-32).

## Summary

Moses was the prophet sent by God to liberate the people of Israel from the slavery in Egypt with the mighty hand and outstretched arm of God, to teach the people the will of God and to lead them on the right path. The first and evident meaning of the prophecy is that after the death of Moses God will keep sending a series of prophets to continue the work of guiding the people after the death of Moses. As a fulfillment of this promise God kept sending prophets until the Babylonian captivity.

After the exile, the people of Israel were led by Priests. Prophets became rare and by the middle of the fifth century there was no prophet any more. Malachi was the last prophet to speak to the post exilic community. However, the people believed that at the end of time, before God comes to judge the world the “Eschatological Prophet” will come to call the people to conversion. With the passage of time this hope and expectation became stronger, that this was the prophet that God promised through Moses (Dt. 18, 15-18). They began to conclude that the prophet like Moses is the “**Eschatological Prophet**”.

In the course of time, as many people began speaking in the name of God claiming to be prophets, there arose the need of finding proper criteria to distinguish true from false prophets. Gradually four criteria were accepted as the signs of true prophets, namely, fulfillment of the prophecy, call to repentance, fidelity to the traditional faith of the people of God and the testimony of personal life.

The New Testament clearly testifies that all these four criteria are found in Jesus. The common people, the disciples and Jesus Himself confirmed this truth. The proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God, authoritative interpretation of the laws given through Moses, confirmation of the same through miracles and signs, and

above all the death in Jerusalem like all the prophets before him, prove that Jesus is the prophet like Moses, promised by God. Hence the Eschatological Prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18, 15-18 is nobody else but Jesus of Nazareth.

Even when Jesus is called the “Eschatological Prophet”, it should not be forgotten that He is more than that. The title the Prophet like Moses is only one among many titles that reveal and define the personality and mission of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ; he is the Son of David for whom Israel awaited; he is the Son of Man Daniel saw in the vision; he is the suffering servant foretold by Prophet Isaiah. Jesus is the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek; He is the only Savior who fulfilled all the sacrifices through His self-sacrifice and above all He is equal to God or He is God. He is the Word of God and Son of God. Hence when we use any one of these titles and say that is Jesus, we must not lose sight of the total picture

#### **4. Is Muhammad the Prophet like Moses?**

There are certain Muslims who claim and teach that Muhammad, the founder of Islamic religion, is the prophet like Moses, promised in the Bible. In support of this interpretation the qualification of the prophet, namely the similarity with Moses “*God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren*” is cited. This claim is based on the argument that the brothers of Israel are the children of Ishmael, on the ground that both Ishmael and Isaac were sons of Abraham and the Israelites are the sons of Jacob, son of Isaac, whereas the Arabs from whom Muhammad has his origin, are the descendants of Ishmael. However, this argument and conclusion are disproved by the same book of Deuteronomy where the prophecy is reported.

In the instruction given about electing a king, the book of Deuteronomy says, “*One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over*

*you, who is not your brother” (Dt 17, 15).* According to the Bible, Ishmael is the son born to Abraham in his servant Hagar, while Isaac was born from his wife, Sarah. The Israelites are the descendants of Isaac. It would be absurd to argue that God had asked the Israelites that they should elect a king for them from the Arab tribes.

In the book of Genesis, Ishmael is mentioned three times. While Hagar was pregnant, she ran away and in the desert she encountered God who promised her a great nation from her son, *“I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude”*. And the angel of the LORD said to her, *“Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen”* (Gen 16,10-12). This is a promise similar to the one given to Abraham, numerous children. However, the character of wild ass and enmity to every man depict the character of the future generations. Is it from such a people that Israel was to select a king or expect a prophet? Such a conclusion can be qualified only as wild fantasy.

The Bible tells that Abraham after the birth of Isaac, compelled by Sarah, sent away Hagar and her son Ishmael to the desert. When exhausted by thirst the child cried for water and Hagar was desperate, an angel appeared and comforted her with the promise: *“The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation”* (Gen 21, 17-18).

Genesis 25, 12-18 tells how God fulfilled those promises. Just as the 12 tribes of Jacob, the children of Ishmael formed into 12 tribes. From this, one thing is clear that the

Israelites and the children of Ishmael, the Arabs, are cousins. They must live like brothers. It does not mean that the King to rule over Israel and the prophet who would reveal to them the will of God would come from among them. The other things said about Muhammad cannot be considered as the fulfillment of the prophecy under discussion. Hence the claim that the “Prophet like Moses” is Muhammad has no support in the Bible.

### **Is Muhammad a prophet?**

When one claims that Muhammad is the Prophet like Moses, promised in the Bible, the first question one should ask is whether Muhammad is a prophet at all. We have already seen that the Bible has given very clear norms, in fact four decisive criteria, to true prophet from false prophets (PP 4 -7).

When one analyses the life, teaching and activities of Muhammad it is impossible to say that according to the criteria of the bible he was a prophet. He did not perform any sign or miracle in order to prove himself to be a prophet. He did not make any prediction or prophecy that was fulfilled. His teachings are not in conformity with the traditional faith of the people of Israel. The last and most important criterion of a true of prophet, given by Jesus, namely testimony of life, cannot be found in Muhammad.

Marriage, in the traditional teaching of Bible, is the union between a man and woman till death. Unity and indissolubility are two essential characteristics of marriage. The life of Muhammad who married and divorced women as he wanted, gives a very negative testimony. He had eleven wives at a time, among whom there was a girl of six years, with whom he had sexual relations when she reached just nine years. He had also given provision to marry a woman for just a couple of days and then divorce her.

Many of the teachings of Muhammad are different from



and contrary to the teachings found in the Bible. The teachings about the nature of God, holy Trinity, divinity of Jesus, the Son of God, are some examples. Hence, in the light of the Bible, Muhammad cannot be considered as the Prophet like Moses, not even as a true and authentic prophet.

## **Conclusion**

Prophet is one who faithfully communicates the word of God to the people. According to the Bible, a prophet is one who has been called by God, sanctified, equipped with the word of God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and sent to proclaim the word. In the Old Testament, the time of preparation for the coming of the Savior, Moses was the most important prophet. After the death of Moses, God sent many prophets to the people of Israel to communicate His will. All of them were prophets like Moses, also from the people of Israel like Moses. It is evident beyond any shadow of doubt that the expression ‘from among your brethren’ meant, from your own people.

In the history of Israel there came a time when there were no prophets any more. Then the prophecy about a prophet like Moses began to be interpreted as a promise about a particular prophet to come at the end of time, namely the Eschatological Prophet. He would explain the laws of Moses and teach the people with authority; he would liberate the people from all bondages as Moses once did. He will be the fulfillment of the prophecies. Through his call to conversion, warnings about punishment, promise of salvation, and above all, through his words, deeds, life and death he would prove to be a prophet. This was the picture which was rooted in the hearts of the people regarding a “Prophet like Moses” during the time of Jesus.

All these expectations are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The people recognized, approved, and accepted Him as a prophet. The leadership rejected Him for they were jealous and

scared. The disciples accepted him and followed him. Jesus proved through his words, deeds, life and death that He is the Prophet the people had been waiting for. Hence if someone else comes claiming to be the prophet like Moses, that claim will not have the support of the Bible.

The greatest proof for this is the teaching of Jesus. By re-interpreting the law and leading it to perfection, Jesus not only manifests similarity with Moses but also an authority that goes beyond Moses and beyond all the expectations of the people. Prophets usually proclaim the word of God with the preface *“Thus says the Lord or this is the word of the Lord”*. Jesus on the other hand proclaimed with another preface, **“I tell you”**. It shows that he was not the spokesman of God but was God Himself. Jesus was not only a prophet like Moses, he was greater. Even when all the attributes such as the greatest of all the prophets and the Eschatological Prophet, are accepted, we have still to keep in mind that, according to the Bible and the official teachings of the Catholic Church, Jesus is above and beyond all these titles

With the coming of Jesus, the prophetic mission did not end but took on a new form. In order to preach the Word of God that is revealed and fulfilled through Jesus, to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God, Jesus sent out his Apostles as prophets. Jesus continues to send his disciples as prophets to proclaim the Good News of Kingdom of God that has become a reality in the person of Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate. All these prophets are sent out into the world in order to discern God’s actions in history and to proclaim them to the people with authority.

*“I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town”* (Mt 23,34). This is the promise of Jesus that is still being fulfilled even today. St. Paul teaches that prophets are the great

gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Church (1 Cor 12, 27-28). Hence the fact that the prophecy about a prophet like Moses was fulfilled in Jesus does not mean that the prophetic mission has ended with him. It continues and would continue until the Good News of the Kingdom of God reaches to the ends of the earth. Jesus Christ keeps sending his disciples as prophets to proclaim the Gospel all over the world. The whole people of God and the hierarchy in particular must be vigilant to discern the false prophets from the true prophets. In this context the criterion Jesus gave is the most important one: **“Know the tree from its fruits”**.

## **Chapter 2**

# **ANTI-CHRIST AND FALSE PROPHETS**

### **Question:**

The Bible speaks about an Antichrist who is to come before the end of the world. There are mentions about false prophets as well as false Christs. There are also warnings about a man of anarchy. Do all these bible passages speak about the same person or about different people? Who is he? Or who are they? Have they come already or are they yet to come? If so, when will he/they come? What is the teaching of the Catholic Church about this?

### **Answer**

This is a subject very difficult to understand and so various and often contradictory interpretations have been given to it. The question deals with four things: 1. Antichrist 2. False Christs 3. False Prophets 4. Man of Anarchy. Of these the first and fourth, Antichrist and the Man of Anarchy, are in singular and the other two (2 & 3) False Christs and False Prophets are in the plural form. The first impression one gets is that the statements in singular and plural cannot be about the same person. Each concept needs to be studied separately, leading to a common conclusion.

### **1. Antichrist**

The official teaching of the Catholic Church about

Antichrist can be seen in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CC). The relevant material is quoted below:

*“Before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth, will unveil the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in the place of God and of His Messiah who has come in the flesh. The ultimate religious deception will be that of Antichrist. He puts on the appearance of a divine being and places himself in the place of Messiah and glorifies himself.*

*“The Antichrist’s deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the “intrinsically perverse” political form of a secular messianism” (CCC 675-676).*

The word Antichrist appears twice in this teaching . At the same time the document speaks about the eschatological force of evil that would appear at the end of the world. This needs to be studied in detail.

The Greek word “**Antichristos**” is translated as Antichrist in English. This word appears in the Bible only four times, and all the four instances are in the letters of St. John (1 Jn 2, 18.22; 4, 3; 2 Jn 1, 7). The word ‘**Anti**’ indicates that he stands against Christ or he presents himself in the place of Christ.

The nature of Antichrist is that he is a “**duplicate**”, or he pretends to be Christ, but in reality, he opposes Christ. His

activities and teaching directly oppose those of Jesus Christ. St. John speaks about him as a pretender who tries to corrupt the Christians. “*Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore, we know that it is the last hour*” (1 Jn 2, 18). Here Antichrist and Antichrists seem to be used with the same meaning.

Antichrist is totally opposed to the Christ presented in the Bible. Christ in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, is the manifestation of holiness. He is the Word of God who has become man and reveals the merciful nature of God, making the Kingdom of God a reality on earth. The antichrist, on the contrary, is the embodiment of evil that stands against God, the incarnation of Satan.

Description of conflict between good and evil is as old as humanity. This can be seen in the mythologies of almost all religions. It is depicted as a struggle between God and Satan; life and death; truth and falsehood that appear in various forms. This conflict was evident in the mythology of Mesopotamia, “*Enuma Elish*”. The story tells how Tiamath, the primordial chaotic waters, was split in two by Marduk the leader of gods who thereby created heavens and earth and also the human beings. Behind this story we can see the picture of God who defeats the powers of evil. In many mythologies evil appears like a “dragon” that tries to swallow up all that is good. We can see references to this primordial dragon also in the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

In the narration about the fall of man or the first sin that alienated man from God we can see the first instance of such a reference. In the Paradise the evil appeared in the form of a serpent that came to tempt the first human beings (Gen 3, 1-15) In the prayer of Isaiah we can see the influence of this motif of killing then dragon: “*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not thou that didst cut*

*Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon?” (Is 51, 9). In what is usually called the Little Apocalypse of Isaiah (Is 24-27), we can see another indication to this motif: “In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea” (Is 27, 1). This prophecy points to the total destruction of evil at the end of the world. “By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he smote Rahab. By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent” (Job 26, 12-13). The description of Job points to the creation of the world. The same theme is presented in Psalm 89, 10. “Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass; thou didst scatter thy enemies with thy mighty arm” (Ps 89, 10).*

The power of evil is presented through symbols such as Rahab, Leviathan, Fleeing Serpent etc. All these images in the Bible depict the conflict between good and evil and the ultimate victory of good over evil. Eventually we can see the power of evil being personified, behind which lurks the picture of Satan, the Power of Evil. In certain historical persons who declared themselves as god, enforcing idol worship and prohibiting all the traditional religious practices, we can see such a personification.

## **Antichrist in History**

Antiochus IV, king of Syria (B.C. 175-164), taking on the name Epiphanes, proclaimed himself as god. This name derives from the Greek word “*Ephipanein*” which means ‘to appear’. Hence the adjective epiphanes would mean “*god manifest*”. At that time the people of Israel were under Syrian rule. The king ordered that all the people must worship him as god.

This law affected the Israelites more than any other people. He forbade the practice of all the Jewish religious customs such as circumcision, observation of the Sabbath,

discernment between clean and unclean etc. An altar was set up for Zeus in Jerusalem Temple and the statue of Zeus was placed there. People were forced to worship Antiochus Epiphanes and Zeus, offer pigs as sacrifice and eat pork. Those who disobeyed were severely punished; many were killed. At this time some devout Jews came up with the resolution that they would follow the laws even if they would lose their lives. They called themselves *Chasidim* (holy ones), but the people called them *Perushim* (separated ones) because they stood apart by their life style and dress. *Perushim* came to be translated as Pharisees. It was during this time that the book of Daniel was written. What Daniel said as a prophecy about Antiochus IV who captured Jerusalem, exiled and killed many of the Israelites, deserves special attention: *“Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate” (Dan 11, 31)*. The expression **“abomination that makes desolate”** is repeated again in Dan 12,11, referring to the idol Antiochus placed in Jerusalem Temple. The king is the embodiment of evil and the same is true about the statue also.

The same idea is present also in the Gospels as the words of Jesus: *“When you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place”* (Mt 24, 15; Mk 13, 14). This is a quotation from the book of Daniel. Caligula who ruled Rome from A.D. 37 to 41 was cruel and a megalomaniac who pretended to be god. He decided to place a big statue of himself in the Jerusalem Temple. He issued an order to that effect, but following a great protest, the order was withdrawn. He tried again, and according to Bible scholars, this is the background of the gospel report of the “desolating sacrilege” mentioned above. However, before the statue could be placed in the Jerusalem Temple, Caligula was killed, which led to the failure of his attempt.



## Denial of Truth

Many people in history are being identified as Antichrist. Nero, who made and enforced the law: “It is crime to be a Christian” (*non licet cristianos esse*), and unleashed a severe persecution against the Christians, was considered as the Antichrist. Emperor Domitian who proclaimed himself as god was also considered as an antichrist. Not only persons but also the political institutions and ideologies that deny God and force people to renounce their true faith are considered as instruments of Antichrist. The incarnation of Antichrist is often seen in religious schisms, terrorism, atheistic movements and philosophies that deny the existence of God. There are some who see the founder of Islam, Muhammad as an Antichrist because he denied the Holy Trinity and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. This claim is supported by the statement of St. John, “*Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son*” (1 Jn 2, 22). Behind the present-day attitude “Post Truth Era” which seems to declare that the “Time of Truth is over”, also one could detect the shadow of Antichrist.

## 2. False Christs

St. John, who gave warnings about antichrist, has warned also about many who would come pretending to be the Christ and try to mislead people. “*As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore, we know that it is the last hour*” (1 Jn 2, 18). John’s warning could be understood as referring not to someone who would come at the end of the world, but to the agents of evil that are operating in the world here and now; they could be considered as antichrists. This becomes evident when he continues to say: “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be*

*plain that they all are not of us*” (1 Jn 2, 19). John seems to be talking about some division within the Church. Even before the end of the Apostles’ time, towards the end of the first century, there arose certain erroneous teachings in the Church among which “**Gnosticism**” was a prominent one.

Gnosticism is a world vision prevalent during the NT period, according to which there are two different and separate spheres in the universe, the world of light and the world of darkness. God dwells in the Light, surrounded by luminous beings who are sparks of light. One of such sparks fell off from the sphere of light into the sphere of darkness and turned against God. He is called Demiurge, who is the creator of the visible universe. He keeps human beings in the prison of the body and keeps them ignorant of their true identity as sparks of light.

Under the influence of Gnosticism there were those who argued that Yahweh the God of the Old Testament is Demiurge, the Creator and cause of all that is evil, whereas Jesus Christ is a spark of Light that came from the presence of God whom Jesus called his Father. Jesus, the spark of divine Light appeared in bodily form in order to liberate people from the slavery of Demiurge by imparting them the knowledge, the gnosis, that they are truly divine beings. The body and humanity of Jesus was only an appearance, just an illusion. After imparting the true knowledge Jesus went back to the divine sphere of Light. The Incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, all these were not real, but just appearance or illusion. Now the main goal of the Gnostics was to free the spirits from the prison that is the body, by imparting the only key to unlock the prison doors, namely the secret knowledge (the gnosis) they possessed.

John’s indications about false Christs can be understood under this perspective. It is an erroneous teaching that was creating division among the Christians. Those who deny the working of the Holy Spirit through Jesus and propagate

such teachings are the false Christs. John has pointed out also the way to recognize them. *“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already”* (1 Jn 4, 2-3). The teaching that denies the Incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is that of the antichrist. Nay that is Antichrist.

## **The Last Hour**

The expression last hour reminds us of the end of the world. But in the use of John, “the Hour” has two levels of meaning. *“My hour has not yet come”* (Jn 2, 4). *“The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified”* (Jn 12, 23). In such expressions the “Hour” indicates the time Jesus will be glorified through death and resurrection.

The second level of the meaning can be seen in the words of Jesus given below. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice”* (Jn 5, 25-28). Here the hour stands for the time for man to participate in the new life and the right to be the children of God, made available through Jesus. This is the time between the glorification of Jesus and His second coming. That is the hour we are living in. Nobody, except the Father knows when it will end. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that Antichrist and false Christs are people who come with erroneous teachings to the faithful and try to move them away from God rather than a person who would appear at the end of the world.

## Warnings of Jesus

*“Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray”* (Mt 24, 4-5). Jesus Christ is the liberator and Savior who was promised through numerous prophecies, and for whom the people of Israel had waited for centuries. They saw Him as the king who is the Son of David. People who accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem singing Hosanna were thoroughly disappointed after four days. The death on the Cross was against all their expectations. However, soon after Jesus’ death many others appeared in Palestine claiming to be the Christ.

Jesus had warned that all through the history such false Christs and false prophets would appear. They would lead the people astray and cause many to lose their faith (Mt 24, 10-24). That warning is still very relevant even today. These false prophets and false Christs would exercise great influence on the thinking of the people, spreading erroneous convictions and presenting lies as truths. This will be the work of the false prophets and false Christs. We must keep in mind Jesus’ warning that since these pretenders might even perform signs and miracles people would find it difficult to distinguish the true from the false ones. *“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Lo, I have told you”* (Mt 24, 24-25)

### 3. Man of Anarchy

St. Paul has mentioned about an unknown power that was to come when he wrote to the Thessalonians who were heart broken by religious persecution but were anxiously waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ. They misunderstood his first letter as they thought the Lord would come soon and many began to teach that the Lord has already come. It was in this situation that St. Paul talked

about certain things that must take place before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

*“Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thes 2, 3-4).*

There are different opinions among Bible scholars regarding the identity of this man of lawlessness. Some scholars think that it refers to another ruler like Antiochus IV who placed his statue in Jerusalem Temple and Caligula who tried to place his statue in the Temple. However, there is sufficient reason to think that the apostle is speaking about the power of evil that puts himself in the place of God, rather than to any historical person. The description that follows lends support to this assumption. This statement *“The mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way” (2 Thes 2, 7)* refers to an attitude and life style rather than a particular person. Ultimately it refers to the power of evil.

The Apostle further clarifies the idea in the following statement: *“The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore, God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thes 2, 9-11).*

Usages such as the son of perdition, man of lawlessness, lawless one are part of Semitic usage. This refers to an attitude rather than a person. The man of anarchy need not be someone who has appeared in history or is going to appear some time later but the personification of evil. It could

be situations, teaching, or laws. It is Satan who operates through them. Those activities might be signs and wonders that could influence those who are not rooted in faith.

The statement: *“God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* needs special attention. Even though it is said that God sends the delusion to consider falsehood as truth, one cannot accept that God would lead anybody astray or to evil. On the contrary, those who close their eyes against the truth and on purpose move away from God will lose the capacity to discern truth and deceit. That was what happened to Eve when she disobeyed the commandment of God.

That is the essence of the teaching about the man of lawlessness. Those who refuse to accept the truth would accept a lie as truth; that is the work of Satan. Jesus has warned about Satan, *“He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (Jn 8, 44). St. Paul has discussed it in detail in his letter to the Romans: *“Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ...They were filled with all manner of wickedness, ...Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them”* (Rom 1, 20-32). They became blind to the truth not because God made them blind but because they closed their eyes against the light by the influence of the power of evil.

## Serpent and Beasts in the Book of Revelation

All through the history we can see the operation of the powers of evil. The Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, has depicted the conflicts between good and evil, between God and Satan through various symbols, as is common in the apocalyptic literature. The whole book is written in the literary form called Apocalyptic. It would shed more light into truth about the power of evil that is called the lawless one, man of anarchy and son of perdition.

In the Centre of the book we see the conflict between good and evil (Rev 12 – 13). The beginning of the conflict is depicted in the picture of a pregnant woman clothed with the sun, who is the mother of the Savior and Serpent that is waiting to swallow the baby who is the Savior. The woman crying with labor pain is the symbol of the People of God waiting for the coming of the Savior. After the child is taken to heaven, the woman is subjected to continuous persecution by the Serpent in the desert, but she is protected by God. She is the symbol of the new people of God called the spouse of Christ or the Church of Christ. Behind the picture of this woman one could see also the Blessed Mother of the Messiah. However, Bible Scholars prefer to see this primarily as the symbol of the “People of God”.

The great dragon, the Serpent, is the embodiment of evil as he rejects and opposes God. He is the antichrist who bears royal symbols like the lamb, that stands for Christ (Rev 5, 6; 14, 1; 19, 12). The dragon with seven heads with crowns on them and ten horns appears to be a very powerful Emperor. His terrible power is expressed by the symbolic action, *“His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth”* (Rev 12. 4). This can be seen as an interpretation of the origin of Satan as a fallen angel who took with him many angels and is trying to establish his rule on earth.

The Book of Revelation goes on to present two groups that stand facing each other. On the one side there is God, the Lamb, and the woman (People of God); on the other side is the Dragon and two beasts that are his instruments. It is important to note that the Serpent who set out to fight the woman in the desert, who is the symbol of the people of God, stood on the sand of the Sea shore (Rev. 12, 17). This symbol points to the weakness of the evil as one cannot be safe standing on the sand (Mt 7, 26-27).

The two beasts are the agents of the dragon. The first one is rising out of the sea with seven heads and ten horns with ten crowns on the horns. It can be seen as the agent and reincarnation of the dragon. This beast is the symbol of the Roman Empire that had dominated the seas and was ruling over the whole of the then known Western world and much of the East. Its blasphemous name (Rev. 13, 1) contains an implied allusion to Domitian who became the opponent of God by proclaiming himself as god. This could be seen as the symbol of Emperor Domitian. In this picture the Roman Empire becomes the symbol and instrument of Satan. In the following description (Rev. 13, 2-9) it is stated that the beast that denies God and persecutes the people of God is given power for forty-two months which could point to two things.

The indication of time such as 42 months, 3½ months, and 1260 days point to a long but limited period. During the time of Elijah there was famine in Israel for 3½ years (1 Kgs 18,1; Lk 4, 25). The persecution of Antiochus IV lasted for 3½ years (B.C. 167-164) and that under Nero also lasted the same length of time (A. D 64-67). These three historical events might have influenced the symbolic presentation of the time element. At the same time this could also point to the long but limited time from the glorification of Jesus to His second coming. The statement that there was a place in the desert prepared to protect the woman from the dragon, for 1260 days. Rev 12, sheds further light on this concept.



The beast is the symbol of evil that constantly tries to destroy the people of God by using weapons; at the same time, it is also an instrument in the hands of Satan. The conflict would last for a long time but the beast would not win.

The second beast that rose out of the earth (Rev 13, 11-18) stands for the provinces of the Roman Empire. This beast called also “the false prophets” (Rev 16, 13; 19, 20), entices the people to worship the first beast by performing signs and wonders. The foul spirits like frogs that came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet stand for propaganda of falsehood in the garb of truth. Here we see an evil trio in the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. The beast that dominates all the activities of man is the symbol of Satan. The number 666 representing the beast (Rev 13,18) is an indication to this interpretation. Seven is a number that signifies perfection whereas a number that is one less of this or a fraction thereof would symbolize the embodiment of evil.

According to the Book of Revelation it is not any particular individual or an ideology or a phenomenon that appeared once in history and vanished, but it is the power of evil that appears all through the history of humanity. They are kings, rulers or philosophies appearing in various names at various ages. But, all of them have one thing in common, they portray evil as good.

#### **4. False Prophets**

False prophets play a great role in misleading the people and bringing about their destruction. He is the instrument of the Serpent in the book of Revelation. In the other books of the Bible the term is used in the plural as ‘false prophets’. It is not someone who would come at the end of the world but they are actively involved in misleading the people all through the history of humanity. It is not easy to distinguish them from the true prophets.

False prophets are like a curse on the people of God. Warnings about them could be seen both in the Old and New Testament. Since the norms to recognize a true prophet have been discussed in detail in the first chapter “Prophet like Moses” they are only listed here. Mainly four norms are used to recognize a true prophet. 1. Fulfillment of the prophecies (Dt 18, 21-22). 2. Fulfillment only for promises of prosperity; one who calls for conversion can be a true prophet even if the punishments announced are not fulfilled (Jer 28, 8-9). 3. Fidelity to the heritage of faith Dt 13,1-5). 4. Witnessing by life. The fourth one is the most important norm to discern a true prophet.

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will know them by their fruits” (Mt 7, 15-20).* This warning Jesus gave at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in which he explained the nature of the New Covenant and the value system as well as the conditions of the Kingdom of God that are relevant for all times as it points to a temptation and danger the faithful encounter all through their lives, namely false prophets.

Even if someone claims to be proclaiming the will of God and even performs some miracles to prove the claim, but if his words and life do not match, or the teaching does not conform with the official teaching of the Catholic Church, that one should be considered as a false prophet. *“On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I*

*declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you evil-doers” (Mt 7, 22-23).*

False Prophets are not only those who misinterpret the Word of God. All those who knowingly or unknowingly lead the people away from God are also false prophets. True prophets are those who proclaim God’s message faithfully in order to help the people to lead a life according God’s will. Those who present their own thoughts and ideas as the Word of God are false prophets.

The false prophets operate mainly in the conscious mind of the people. This need not be the working in a single individual or groups of people. This could be the thoughts, attitudes and lifestyle that would affect the entire society. In the Biblical language it could be called denial of God, denial of the Incarnation of God as man, presenting Jesus as a mere human being, erroneous eschatological views and many such forms. The wrong convictions would lead to wrong life style and ultimately to total destruction. That is the tragedy created by false prophets.

## **5. Summary**

We have been discussing the themes Antichrist, false Christs, man of anarchy, and false prophets. Antichrist is one who stands against Christ or one who pretends to be the Christ. This could refer to persons who have already appeared in history or will be appearing in the future. More than that, the expression Antichrist points to the incarnation of evil that can appear in various forms.

The power of evil that appears in the Bible in various forms could be summarized as follows: 1. He would claim to be god and force others to worship him (2 Thes 2, 3-4) 2. Will Blaspheme against God (Rev 13, 6). 3. Will show great power by performing signs and wonders (Rev 13, 13). 4. Will appear as if rising from the dead (Rev 13, 5-7). 5. Will exercise great authority (Rev 13, 5-7). 6. Will control

the world economy (Rev 13, 16-17). 7. Will desecrate the Temple of the Lord (Mt 24, 15-21). 8. Will try to destroy the people of God (Dan 9, 27; 11,- 40-44). 9. Will gather all the powers in the world against those who believe in Jesus Christ (Rev 19, 19). 10. At the end, he (they) will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19, 20; 20,10).

From this point of view the false Christ and false prophets are the manifestations of similar ideas. They might be called the men of Anarchy, lawless one, son of perdition etc., but they all act like antichrist. The temptation that started in the Paradise continues in the history in various forms emphasizing different aspects of evil. Hence Antichrist is to be understood not only as a terrible figure that would appear at the end of the world; it could be considered as a force that brings about total destruction by distancing people from God and from one another. This theme has much relevance for us today.

## **6. Antichrist today**

The power of evil was active in the world all throughout history. Today those activities have become more diverse and forceful. Some of the contemporary manifestations of the power of evil are presented below.

### **a. Rejection of God and hatred against Religion**

Atheistic ideologies and movements that prohibit all religious practices, try eradicate faith in God and persecute people on account of their religious faith come as the first among the various manifestation of evil today. There is an intrinsic hatred toward all religious functions and an attempt to wipe out faith in God by all means. It could be the Nazi movement of Hitler, the Communist movement of Stalin or other political ideologies that try to eradicate faith in God from nations. Those who place politics and the ruling party in the place of God could be considered as Antichrist and sons of doom.

## **b. Religious Fanaticism - Terrorism**

Where divisions are created among people, putting one against the other in the name of God and religion, inducing to kill people belonging to other religion, Satan appears wearing the mask of God. Many of the countries that were once almost 100 % Christian have been totally turned into Islamic religion, by using the sword, the official symbol of that religion. This could be seen as a very good example of religious terrorism. The duplicity and hypocrisy in pretending to desire and establish peace on the one side while on the other side support and instigate religious terrorism unveil the mask of the power of evil.

Jesus has clearly stated that Satan is the source of falsehood and murder: *“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (Jn 8, 44). Hence it is evident that it is not God but Satan that instills hatred in the heart of people towards the believers of other religions and forces to kill them. This is true of any fanaticism and terrorism carried out in the name of God and religion. By shedding the blood of innocent people, they are not worshipping God, who is the Father of every human being, but Satan who is murderer from the beginning.

## **c. Caste and class discrimination – Persecution - Genocide**

According to the Bible, God created man and woman in His own image and likeness and so all people have equal dignity and all are brothers and sisters. It is man that divided the humans into various castes, considering some as high and others as low, according to the color of skin and the work they are engaged in. The force behind this discrimination and division is again the power of evil.

It is not only the caste system that is still prevalent in the Hindu religion in India but also the class discriminations that, to a greater or lesser degree exists all over the world, have become stronger and demand attention. The same tendency can be detected behind the mentality of the white people who considered themselves superior and that it is their right and privilege to capture black people from Africa and sell them as slaves in various markets. The recent murder of a black man by a white police officer that gave rise to the movement “*Black life matters*” can be seen as a sign that casteism and color prejudice is still very much alive and active.

Behind the brutal killings of millions of people and genocide that tries to wipe out the entire population of certain races and castes also one can detect the man of anarchy and Antichrist in whom the face of Satan becomes visible. The class discrimination that exists even among the Christians shows that no one is free from this prejudice. One has to question the motivation of those who made separate churches and cemeteries for the upper class and lower class Christian and if they might be worshiping the Antichrist without knowing it.

#### **d. Uncontrolled Sexual Drive**

The Bible tells us that there are two motivations behind creating human beings as man and woman. 1. Give birth to children and live as a family (Gen 1, 26-28). 2. Help each other and live in a society (Gen 2, 18-24) where both have equal rights and obligations. They are equal and live for the same goal. But over the years forgetting about procreating children and living as social beings, people began to seek sexual gratification with selfish motivations.

The uncontrolled desire for sexual gratification seems to have damaged all the value systems and began to use women as sexual commodities. The atrocities against wom-

en such as gang rape, burning of women and silencing the voice of protest are confirmation of this distorted attitude.

### **e. Media Channels**

Certain contemporary incidents give the impression that the media channels are being dominated by these evil forces as they seem to focus only on sexual issues and add fuel to the sexual drive and violence against women. People do not hesitate to use even small children for their lust and finally kill them. Even some parents have dared to kill their children as they found the children obstacles to the fulfillment of their sexual gratification. The print and more so the electronic media, by projecting such incidents, are not only endorsing such atrocities but also encouraging people to do the same. Here one cannot help wondering if not Satan is behind these perverse propaganda. It is very strange that recently some of the social media channels suggested that establishing brothels or prostitution centers all through the country would eliminate sexual violence. Instead of controlling the sexual drive, advising such solutions also can be seen as originating from the powers of evil.

### **f. Broken Personal Relations**

We used to have solid family relationships that provided security to human life, promoted high ideals and self-control. But for various reasons family relationships are being shattered making each person an island. Rather than seeing the brother or sister standing nearby one searches for a mate somewhere in the virtual space and finally are shocked by the realization of being cheated, and end up with deep depression and eventually suicide. Instead of the Kingdom of God that is *“righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14, 17), the empire of Satan that leads to injustice and depression and death is spreading fast.

## **g. Devaluation of Human Life**

The most important thing in a person's life is life. One would try to protect one's life at any cost. Unfortunately, some people forget that the other's life is as valuable as one's own. At times they consider the other one's life as a threat. The conflict between countries and competition to acquire the most modern and deadly weapons in case of war has become almost an obsession. The sheer repetition by numerous media channels has given the impression of truth to the lie that over population is the greatest problem the world is facing today, which in turn creates a sense of urgent need to enforce birth control. In this context people lose their sense of respect for life and governments go ahead with obligatory birth control policy.

Here it has to be remarked that not only China that enforced the one child policy but every nation and government that endorses artificial birth control and legalizes abortion falls into the trap set by Satan. One has to ask whose agent is the leader who proclaimed in advance that if she is elected, she would give women the right to have the babies aborted. The shadow of Antichrist could be seen in a culture that allows restaurants to serve the aborted fetus fried as delicacies and the fetus to be crushed in order to make cosmetic products.

## **h. Human trafficking**

*"I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect."* (Lev 26, 13). Yahweh who revealed Himself to Moses is one who hears the cry of the oppressed and liberates the slaves. The God of the Covenant assures freedom for all. Going one step further He sent His only Son Jesus Christ in order to adopt all people as children and thus make all of them brothers and sisters to each other in Jesus Christ. The power of Satan is directly the opposite of this. Those



who have become the instruments of Satan reduce people into slaves.

From ancient time onwards, there was the tendency of the strong to enslave the weak. Even though today no country officially permits slave trade, human trafficking has become a very lucrative business. There are well organized groups that promising high salaries and better jobs take people to foreign countries and sell them to companies or individuals who would treat them as slaves. No one knows the exact number of people who have ended up in labor colonies, brothels and terrorist camps. Only when they meet with an accident at sea or on the road does the outer world come to hear about the sad plight of these people.

### **i. Organ Sale**

The growth of science has made wonderful strides in the area of health care. At the same time there is an increase in illnesses. When the internal organs fail to function, they can be transplanted to make the person healthy again. This is a great achievement in health care. But in this area too, the power of evil raises its ugly head. A new business has emerged in many super specialty hospitals: stealing the inner organs of patients and selling them at a high price. Some people sell their organs to make a living, but some lose their organs to thieves. In all these areas the power of evil is thriving.

### **j. Mammon Worship**

*“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon”* (Mt 6, 24). It is Jesus himself who presented mammon as an evil force that demands the worship that should be offered only to God. Luke explains this mammon, by translating it as wealth (Lk 16, 13). More than ever, this mammon has

tightened his hold on man. Many people consider it their right to accumulate wealth by any means. According to the Bible, this earth and its produce belong to all the people in the world. But, without any concern for others, some try to increase their wealth, and a few succeed in this raise, thereby reducing the vast majority of people into utter poverty and even to slavery. St. Paul has warned that *“The love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs”* (1 Tim 6, 10).

Jesus has taught in unequivocal terms that that lust for money would distance people from God (Lk 12, 16-21) and their brethren (Lk 16, 19-31). *“Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”* (Lk 12, 15). But incidents are not rare when, even those who call themselves the disciples of Jesus, fall prey to the greed for wealth. When we construct magnificent churches with high towers and celebrate costly festivals, but neglect the poor and ignore their needs, naturally arises the question: for whom are people doing this? Is *“Satan disguising himself as an angel of light”* (2 Cor 11, 14), and reigning *“in the heavenly places”* (Eph 6, 12).

### **k. Vain Glory – Luxury**

A famous company had an advertisement that said, **“Owner’s pride, neighbor’s jealousy”**. We can see an attitude prevalent today in this advertisement. A tendency to show off, to proclaim **“I am greater than all the others”**, could be seen in many of the structures of homes and even church buildings. A culture of luxury seems to dominate political, social and even religious spheres. When the vast majority of the people is sinking into abject poverty, and the country is being ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, the prime minister of a nation that claims to be the greatest democracy in the world did not have any qualms of con-

science to buy a luxury aircraft paying Rs. 8400 crores for his personal use!. We do not have to make much research to find the evil force behind such luxury. A rather comfortable house could be built for five lakhs. With the amount paid for the luxury plane, 168,000 houses for the poor people could have been built. This is only one of the numerous instances of lavish splurging in our country.

It would seem that political as well as religious leaders are competing among themselves to show off, at the cost of the followers. When people are dying of starvation, experiencing great difficulty having no place to stay and desperate having no money for food and medicine, such lavishness cannot be tolerated. We do not have to look far to find the evil force that motivates such actions.

However, it is encouraging to note that sensitivity for the poor and weak people has not totally vanished from the world. A few days ago, a motor vehicle company donated a luxury car to Pope Francis. He blessed the car, auctioned it out and donated the money to three different charities. Such actions, though rare, are beacons of hope

## **I. Satan Worship**

So far, we have seen how Satan, the power of evil, functions with an open and hidden agenda in various forms. This listing could be continued endlessly. But, with no covering up, Satan exhibits his true nature in Satan worship. This has been in the world for a long time but it has become a shocking piece of news to those who believe in God that lately Satan worship has become much stronger and is spreading all over the world very fast.

Satan worship, that was being conducted in some major cities of the Western world, first in private and then more openly, has now taken root in the Eastern countries also. It shows how fast the power of evil attracts and conquers people. It is believed that the modern form of Satan worship

started in the U.S.A. in the 1960's. Very soon it spread to other countries. It is an open secret that such services are conducted in many cities in Kerala also. Even among the Christians there are people who seek the help of Satan for accumulating wealth and gaining other benefits.

The computer game called "Blue Whale" that started in Russia in 2016 also deserves attention. Behind this game also we can see the evil face of Satan. In this game that lasts for 50 days, the participant is asked to take more and more dangerous risks. After some days they would challenge the person to cut himself and finally to commit suicide. It is being reported that there are people even in India who accept such challenges and finally kill themselves. It is the nature of evil to remain hidden, to take fake names and appear in the garb of something good.

## **Conclusion**

Almost all the religions believe and teach that the power of evil operates in this world in various ways and leads people to total ruin. The Bible calls this power Satan or devil. The power of evil that tempted the first parents and distanced them from God and each other continues to operate in the world, leading people to slavery and eternal destruction.

Jesus defeated this evil force through his life, teaching, activities and above all his death and resurrection and made it possible for human to become the children of God and gain eternal life. Though defeated, the power of evil still operates in the world; through various temptations he tries to lead humanity to eternal damnation. Thus, the power of evil appears as false Christ, a power opposing Jesus Christ and the redemption he made available to humanity.

It is the power of evil, Satan who appears as Antichrist, false Christs, the man of anarchy, the lawless one, false prophets and false Christs. The book of Revelation tells us

through various symbols that Satan is expected to appear at the end of the world with great power to mislead the faithful and bring them to eternal damnation. Here Satan is depicted as forming a rival trinity in the forms of dragon, the beast that comes from the sea and the beast rising out of the earth.

In history many people have been identified as the incarnation of Antichrist. Some People have a tendency to accuse anyone who follows a different faith as instruments of Satan. Thus, leaders of other religions were often considered as the incarnation of evil. Those who caused schisms in the Church or propagated heresies were often labeled as the followers or incarnations of Satan and severely punished. The inquisition, the organ established to defend the Catholic faith, sometimes broke all the limits and burned people alive, accusing them of being witches and the agents of Satan.

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation were considered by some as the agents of Satan. There are some extremists who even depict some Popes as representatives of Satan. The idea of Antichrist is often used to insult and eliminate anyone who opposes one's faith and convictions. However, these misunderstandings and misuses do not eliminate the existence of the power of evil, Antichrist.

At the end of time there will be a severe confrontation between good and evil. Ultimately Jesus Christ will defeat Satan and his followers and throw them into the lake of fire. This is the image the Book of Revelation depicts in the apocalyptic language (Rev. 20, 7-10). However, the activities of Antichrist cannot be limited to the end of the world.

The power of evil operates mainly on the conscious mind of people. All the projects, institutions and philosophies that present good as evil and evil as good should be considered as the operations of Satan. In whatever name they appear, ultimately, they alienate people from God and

from one another. This evil influence could enter into all areas of human life.

The power of evil could be hiding in all the ideologies and practices that make one consider the other as an enemy rather than a brother or sister, in a mentality that allows one to celebrate banquets while the neighbor is starving, to construct huge edifices for God ignoring the poor who “has nowhere to lay his head”, and perhaps even in the collection boxes of religious institutions.

No need to wait until the end of the world for the coming of the Antichrist. He is already here, in our midst. May the Lord illumine our eyes to see him and enable us to resist his influence.

## **Chapter 3**

# **IDOLATRY AND CATHOLIC CHURCH**

### **Question**

The Catholics consider the Bible as the Word of God and therefore as the light in path of life. It is the Bible that teaches the Ten Commandments as the expressed will of God for humanity. The very first Commandment enforces monotheism and the second commandment prohibits making idols and idol worship. But the practice of the Catholic Church breaks these commandments. Is it not to encourage idol worship that the Catholic Church has removed the second commandment from the list?

Do not the idols of saints, of Jesus, and even of God that are kept and worshiped in houses, streets, and more so in the Churches prove that not only the ordinary faithful worship idols, but those in the leadership even encourage such idol worship? Is it not an additional proof for this truth that Pope Francis recently blessed and dedicated the Amazonian idol called “pachamama”?

These and many other similar questions are raised against the Catholic Church. Hence either the Church must stop making idols and idol worship, or answer these questions giving a convincing explanation for these practices

### **Answer**

Mainly three accusations are raised here against the

Catholic Church. 1. The Church has cancelled the second Commandment 2. The Catholic Church encourages idol worship. 3. The Pope himself is giving a scandal by blessing and dedicating an idol for worship. We are trying to answer these questions, taking them one by one.

## 1. List of Commandments

One of the serious accusations is that the Catholic Church dropped one of the Commandments from the list. Those who make the accusation have overlooked a fact, on purpose or by ignorance, that the Ten Commandments, in the original Hebrew called “Ten Words”, are not numbered in the Bible. In the beginning the Bible was written continuously without breaking it into Chapters and verses. It was in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the books in the Bible were divided into Chapters and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Chapters were divided into verses. Hence just by reading the Bible alone one cannot decide which one is the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment and which one is the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.

Another important point is that in the Bible there are two lists of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, 1-17 and Deuteronomy 5, 6-21) with certain differences between the two versions. In the Book of Exodus, the last Commandment is “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s*” (Ex 20,17). Here, the wife and other properties of the neighbor are given the same status, by listing the wife, ass, house and other assets together. But in the Book of Deuteronomy it is divided into two by saying, “*Neither shall you covet your neighbor’s wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s*” (Dt 5, 21). The Catholic Church has taken the list from the Book of Deuteronomy, where the wife is con-



sidered as a person and the other assets are listed as goods that could be bought or sold.

Now let us examine the first Commandment. The Commandments are presented in the catechism classes, leaving out the details and listing only the essentials, in a way that will be easy for the children to remember. The first Commandment has two parts: 1. Worship God. 2. Worship nothing other than God. The first part explains who the God is whom the people are asked to worship. *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me”* (Dt 20, 2-3). The second part forbids worshipping anything else by specifying what or who must not be worshipped. The commandment not to make any graven image is the explanation of the second part. It is not another Commandment but the explanation and practical application of the first Commandment.

From other parts of the Bible we can see that the Commandment forbids making graven images only in case it is made for worship. When the people were wandering in the desert, they often rebelled against God and Moses. Once as a punishment God sent snakes and many died of snakebite. The people repented and asked for forgiveness. *“And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live”* (Num 21, 8-9).

The bronze serpent is an image and it is God who ordered to make it. In the same way, God asked Moses to make two Cherubs on both sides of the seat of mercy, above the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25. 19-19). In the Temple which Solomon built, there were many statues and images. There were 12 oxen under the water tank (1 Kgs 7, 25). *“They*

*had panels, and the panels were set in the frames and on the panels that were set in the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. Upon the frames, both above and below the lions and oxen, there were wreaths of beveled work”* (1 Kgs 7, 28-29). All these were placed in the Temple of Jerusalem. They were mere decorations, not objects of worship.

However, later some of these statues became idols. In memory of the protection that God gave, the people carried the bronze serpent with them during journey through the desert and finally it was placed in Jerusalem Temple. In the course of time people began to consider this statue as a divine and worship it. When this happened King Hezekiah took the serious step of destroying it. *“He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan”* (2 Kgs 18, 4).

From these, one thing becomes clear. The first Commandment forbids not the making of images, but the making and worshipping of any idol. Hence there is no point in saying that the Catholic Church has dropped one of the Commandments or misinterpreted them. Besides, the order not to make graven images to worship is part of the first Commandment. Further, the Commandment that forbids coveting one’s neighbor’s wife or any of his property is given as two Commandments, distinguishing between the person (wife) and things, and thus giving dignity and honor to persons. However, one must understand what worship is and what is idol worship.

## **2. Worship**

The fundamental law of righteousness in the Old Testament and New Testament is the first Commandment that says, *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me”* (Dt 20, 2-3). But what

does worship mean? The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives a clear answer to this question.

*“Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Saviour, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love. “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve,” says Jesus, citing Deuteronomy. To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the “nothingness of the creature” who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name. The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world” (CCC 2096-2097).*

In the light of this teaching, worship is surrendering to the Lord all that one is and one has; acknowledging with intellect that everything belongs to God, and professing it with one’s lips. It is the confession that God is the source and goal of one’s being. Only in God can one find hope, joy, satisfaction and contentment. Such a mind set in words and deeds is worship according to the teaching of the Bible and also the official teaching of the Catholic Church. This is the kind of Adoration or worship that should be offered only to God. If such worship is offered to anything else or anybody else, it would become idol worship and the object of that worship an idol.

### **3. Worship – Honor – Devotion**

Often the word “worship” is used not in the strict sense explained above. For example, expressions such as adoration of persons, hero worship do not really mean true worship. This would include the sense of admiration towards sportspersons, movie stars, and political heroes or religious

leaders. Usually, this does not come within the ambit of worship that is forbidden by the First Commandment.

However, when a person proclaims himself as king and god and demands worship, it would be equal to idol worship. The Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes and the Roman Emperor, Domitian are examples. They forbade belief in God and all the acts of worship, and proclaimed themselves as the supreme authority. There are certain political leaders who do the same and so they also could be counted in this group. The political powers that forbid worship of God and put the state in the place of God make idol worship compulsory. But that is not what is intended by idol worship in common parlance.

Some misunderstand and misinterpret devotion and honor to the saints as worship. Sometimes the words and activities of the devotees may cause this misunderstanding. However, we have to distinguish between worship and devotion. Saints are those who have fulfilled the will of God in their lives and led a life that was pleasing to God. The Catholic Church officially upholds them as the perfect models for the faithful to imitate, and for this purpose, the Catholic Church proclaims them as Saints, after a serious and long process culminating in Canonization. They intercede for the people before God who would accept their mediation. It has to be kept in mind that all the intercessory prayers are presented to God through Jesus Christ who is the only mediator between God and man. No saint can shower any blessing or perform any miracle by themselves. The Catholic Church teaches that the saints offer to God their prayers with the prayers of the people through the Son of God, Jesus Christ and God will hear their prayers and respond.

The mediation of saints and intercessory prayers to the saints are not contrary to clear teaching of the Bible that Jesus is the only mediator between God and man: *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and*

*men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2,5). The saints are only interceding with Jesus Christ for the devotees.

The Gospels narrate several incidents in which Jesus accepted such intercession from the people (Mk 1, 30; 2, 3-4; Lk 7, 4; Jn 12, 20-22). The book of Revelation depicts through symbols that the prayers of those who suffer on earth are presented to God in heaven by the saints and angels (Rev 6, 9-11; 8, 3-4). Abraham had made intercessory prayer before God for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18, 22-32). God said to Jeremiah that if there was just one person who acted with justice rather than took side with evil, God would show mercy to that city (Jer 5, 1). Many such incidents prove that God will accept intercessory prayers. A very convincing example can be seen in Amos 7, 1-8.

There is nothing wrong, therefore, in seeking the intercession of saints, which is not an idol worship that rejects God. Worship and devotion are two different things. Mixing them up would be sheer ignorance.

#### **4. Idol Worship and Veneration to Statues**

Considering anything else in the place of God would become idol worship. It could be a person, a thing or an ideology that is taking the place of God. Hence, we have to see the difference between idols and statues. Idol worship is caused by from superstitions that could affect all the spheres in the life of a person. The official teaching of the Catholic Church concerning superstition deserves special attention here.

*“Superstition is the deviation of religious feeling and of the practices this feeling imposes. It can even affect the worship we offer the true God, e.g. when one attributes an importance in some way magical to certain practices otherwise lawful or necessary. To attribute the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance,*

*apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is to fall into superstition” (CCC 2111).*

One has to ask if superstitions do not creep into some devotional practices. There are some who believe that the scapular, rosary, some pictures of certain saints etc. would give them automatic protection. Just as the Hindus tie magic cords on their wrist, some Christians wear the Rosary and even the priests and religious wear rosary rings as a tool to pray. Such a practice has nothing objectionable in itself, but when these objects are believed to produce miracles in life and grant automatic protection from dangers then there is the danger of superstition. In a similar way when there is a request to recite one Lakh or one Core of Rosaries, we need to question if we are not reducing prayer to a mechanical and magical exercise. When one concentrates on external practices, without caring for inner renewal there is the danger that a business mentality would influence devotion, leading to superstitions.

The teaching of the Catholic Church about superstition and idolatry is relevant here. *“Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example Satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state etc. Jesus says, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6,24). Many martyrs died for not adoring “the beast” (Rev 13-14) refusing even to simulate such worship. Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God; it is therefore incompatible with communion with God” (CCC 2113).*

## **5. Images and Idols**

All the images and statues that man makes are not idols. The intention with which the images are made and the way they are being used are decisive factors in determining

whether a thing is just an image or an idol. The statues and pictures made to honor persons, or commemorate will not be idols. For example, placing the image of the Father of the nation or such great persons in the middle of the city and placing flowers in front of them cannot be considered as idol worship. The statues placed in homes and churches have no other intention than honor them and inspire the faithful to follow their examples in leading a holy life. The people are encouraged to seek the intercession of the saints as part of the veneration offered to them. Lighting a candle in front of them and offering incense need not be seen as idol worship because all that is intended is to honor the saints and inspire people to follow their example. The priests usually bless the dead body and the tomb with holy water and incense. But no one thinks that they are worshipping the dead person.

However, one should keep in mind the possibility that the acts of devotion can go beyond the limits of veneration and turn into adoration. Those who try to attract people making propaganda of the miraculous power of a statue and people go in search of the intercession of certain saints known as “mediators of things impossible” should become aware of this danger. Here it is not the statue but the overemphasis on its miraculous power that would lead to idol worship. The attempt to destroy all the statues by the Byzantine Emperors is called iconoclasm. It was considered as a schism by the Catholic Church. Therefore, the Catholic Church is not against making statues, as the saints could be inspiring models for the faithful.

## **6. Mammon – the Idol**

Even while permitting the manufacturing of images and encouraging people to honor them, and strongly forbidding idol worship, there are certain idols and idol worship that are not given much attention. Here wealth called mammon comes in the first place. The word Mammon, used in Greek,

Latin, and many modern languages, derives from the Aramaic word *Mammona*. It represents all the worldly wealth that takes the *place of God*. That is why Jesus saw it as a force that demands worship, taking the place of God. “*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*” (Lk 16, 13). “*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him*” (Lk 16, 14). Money is the greatest idol today that demands the worship of the people and at the same time enslaves them. So many atrocities are perpetrated in the name of wealth and the greed for money.

St. Paul identifies greed for wealth as idolatry: “*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Col 3,5). He further warns that greed is the root cause of every evil: “*There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs*” (1 Tim 6, 6-10). We are repeatedly reminded to recognize the real idols. Being not able to do it has become the root cause of many of the scandals among the supposedly saintly people, even among the Catholics.

## 7. Muslims and Idol Worship

The Muslims and Christians strictly forbid idol worship because both believe that only God should be worshipped. But often we hear accusations that the Catholics are idol worshippers as they make idols of saints and



worship them. We have seen that for Catholics there is a clear, definite difference between honouring and worshipping, between devotion and adoration. According to the belief in the “communion of the saints”, those living in this world, those undergoing purification in purgatory and those enjoying eternal happiness in heaven together form a family or become one body. The family members love, respect and help each other. The same is applicable for the mystical body of Christ, in which all the members love and respect one another. That is the basis of devotion and intercessory prayer to the saints

The Muslims strictly forbid idol worship but some of their activities seem to go against such a teaching. Their pilgrimage to Mecca and the visit to “Kaaba” could be taken as an example. The centre of Kaaba is a black stone that they consider as the most holy object because it is considered as the house of God. According to the Islamic faith, the Patriarch Ibrahim (Abraham) decided to build a prayer house in the name of God. There was a controversy and conflict in the matter of laying the foundation stone. Ismail argued that it was his right as he was the eldest son but Isaac argued that it was his right as it was not to be done by the son of a slave girl but by the son born of the real wife. When Abraham was struggling to make a decision, God dropped a stone from heaven. That ended the conflict and the stone fallen from heaven became the foundation stone, laid by God Himself. The Muslims claim that stone is “Kaaba”. There is yet another tradition behind this stone.

Jacob running away from Esau was exhausted by fatigue, and devastated by the fear of the brother who might follow him, slept on the wayside. During the sleep he had a vision of God. In the morning he woke up from sleep “*He took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel*” (Gen 29,18-19). Some believe

that the black stone Kaaba is the stone Jacob set up and gave the name Bethel, meaning house of God.

They make great preparations for the pilgrimage, fasting and prayer, shaving the head and wearing a particular belt, and finally walk around Kaaba seven times with great devotion. Seeing all these naturally there arises a question: is it all just expression of piety and devotion or rather adoration and worship.

The Muslims pray facing “Kaaba” the centre of Mecca. No matter where they are on this earth, with the help of GPS they would find out where Mecca is in order to decide to which direction they should stand to pray. This is considered as their obligation and unchangeable custom. Then the question arises if God is living in the stone in Kaaba? Jesus has said, *“Believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth... God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth”* (Jn 4, 20-24). The response Jesus gave to the Samaritan woman calls our attention to the presence of God everywhere that He is beyond time and space. God is present everywhere; not only in Mecca, Jerusalem or Rome and so to which direction one turns when praying becomes absolutely irrelevant.

One has to find the answer to the question if the crescent and star that are placed on the top of mosques are just symbols for deciding seasons and feasts basing on the waxing and waning of the moon or an idol handed down from generation to generation. Almost all the ancient religions, decided the dates of feasts basing on the moon; the same is true about the Jews and Christians. The most important feast of Passover is decided based on the moon. But we need to question if that is all the importance given to the crescent and star by the Muslims.

Christians give great importance to the Cross. The Muslims seem to give even more importance to the crescent in their thoughts and life. Is it not what is being proclaimed by these figures? The crescent is the symbol of the faith of Muslims as they are even placed on the national flags. The inter-national organization called “Red Cross” has been involved in all kinds of activities of charity. In the place of “Red Cross” recently “Red Crescent” has been introduced. The name and sign point to the ardent devotion of the Muslims have to the crescent.

When Muhammad started the new religion, he destroyed all the gods and goddesses worshiped by various tribes but kept one of his own tribal god known as Allatha, the Moon god that was known also as Hubal. It is worth asking the question if Allah whom the Muslims worship as God is not the adapted version of the Moon god Allatha. The idol like importance given to the crescent would seem to support this conclusion.

The Islamic religion strictly prohibits making statues and pictures. The main purpose of this is to avoid idol worship. But when one notices the extreme importance they give to the holy book, Quran and to the prophet, Muhammad one is forced to ask the question: are they not making the Quran and the prophet idols for worship? The law against insulting religion idolatry exist in many Muslim countries. Cases of accusing innocent persons of having committed the crime of breaking this law by insulting the Quran or Muhammad are on the increase. Such “criminals” are imprisoned, tortured and murdered, all in the name of this alleged irreverence to the “holy objects”. The so called law against insulting religion has become a convenient reason for killing people of other religions by accusing them of insulting their sacred objects and persons.

On account of a cartoon of Muhammad, drawn by a cartoonist in in Bangalore there was a severe protest in

which many people were killed. In many of the Muslim countries so many innocent people are being imprisoned and even killed accusing them of insulting their religion. It has not been long since there were violent accusations and demonstrations on account of a passing remark Pope Benedict made in a speech in a university concerning Muhammad that was interpreted as an insult to the prophet and to the Islamic religion.

One has also to ask: why is so much importance being given to the tombs of certain people? Are the tombs also becoming idols? In Arabic language the tombs are called *Makhamah*; it is also called *Dhargha*. "*Makhamah Urus*" is a famous celebration. Even when conceding that it is done to honour those who lived a holy life, the importance given to certain tombs seem to become worship rather than mere devotion. One wonders if they believe that the dead are still in the tomb. This topic will be further discussed when dealing with the belief in the life after death in the Bible and in the Quran.

In a similar way, there seems to be an attitude of worship to certain objects that are considered holy, for example the hair of Mohammad. It was not long ago that violence broke out in many countries following an allegation that a hair of Muhammad that was kept in a Mosque in Kashmir was has been stolen.

In this context it is essential to know what is idol and what is idol worship and also the difference between veneration and adoration. One should think twice before trying to kill someone accusing of idol worship and insulting religion. No doubt, one has to recognize and reject idols and idol worship. At the same time, we need to be careful not to transgress the limits in giving respect and honour to persons and relics, thus turning them into idols. May the Almighty God give the concerned persons the prudence and good will to do the right thing.

## 8. Pachamama and Enculturation

Let us return to the Pachamama mentioned in the beginning. The Amazon Synod met in Rome from 6 to 27 October 2019. Pachamama is a small statue that caused much controversy in the Church in connection with the synod. It is a statue of a pregnant woman. During a prayer meeting Pope Francis blessed this statue which led to protest from many people. The small church near Vatican, “*Santa Maria in Traspontina*” had five such statues placed for demonstration. As a climax of this protest someone at night stole those statues from the church and threw them into River Tiber. The Italian Police fished them out of the river the next day. The Pope asked pardon for the wound inflicted on a people’s feelings by this action, and that caused even more controversy. There are some people who criticize everything Pope Francis does and try to stamp him as an idol worshipper and Anti-Christ. This was yet another occasion for them to criticize him. Could it be that some people are jealous of Pope’s popularity and the general feeling that we have a Pope apt for the time? Certainly, he has boosted the image of the Catholic Church all over the world. This discussion about the idol worship could be concluded with a small explanation regarding the meaning of Pachamama and idol worship.

Amazon Synod was organized to discuss the problems of the Tribal people in the South American countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, French Guinea, Peru, Venezuela and Surinam. There are about 30 million Tribal people living in the vast forest area of Amazon, consisting of more than 400 Tribes who speak 240 different dialects. Their livelihood is from the forest. The problems they are facing through the encroachment of modern culture threaten to push them into utter poverty and starvation. Pope Francis called the Amazon Synod to discuss the problems those people are encountering and to find a creative solutions to those problems.

Pachamama is a symbol of the earth, which those people consider as precious. It is the statue of a pregnant woman carved on wood. The word “Pachamama” means ‘mother earth that provides all that they need to live on’. Like the little children calling their mother “Ma, Mamma etc.”, they affectionately call it “Pachamama”. The Tribal people of Amazon see that statue as a symbol of the mother who gives everything they need. It is not a god but the Mother Nature, mother of all beings.

This is a statue that they used to make from the ancient time as symbol which they could understand and honor. The modern society sees the earth as something they can exploit, sell, buy and destroy as they please. This present-day attitude is endangering the ecological equilibrium and threatening the very survival of life on this planet earth. Pope Francis has never ceased to lament about the damages being done to the earth. Not only in the Encyclical “*Laudato Si*” but also in all his apostolic letters and speeches, we can hear his cry for the protection of the earth. It is against this background that one must try to understand the importance the Pope gave to Pachamama.

Pope Francis did not see it as God, mother of God or Mother Goddess, but the “*Mother Earth*” that is facing total destruction, due to the greed of modern man. Seeing it as a symbol that is most relevant today, the Pope blessed it. How can it be idol worship? Those who are accusing the Pope that he blessed an idol, that he desecrated the church by placing it there and thereby led the Catholic Church into idol worship etc. need to look at some of the symbols we venerate traditionally.

## **9. Customs and Practices of Other Religions in the Bible**

Christians are all familiar with the symbol of the Lamb especially the Paschal Lamb. Pointing to Jesus, John the

Baptist said, “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” (Jn 1, 36). In the book of Revelation, the Lamb is an important symbol. However, not too many people may know that the idea of “Paschal Lamb” came from the ancient culture of nomadic shepherds. Towards the end of March and beginning of April, when the harvest is over, the shepherds would bring their sheep from the desert into the fields that are open for grazing. So, they can pass from the desert over to the “green pastures” (Ps 23, 2). It was also the time when the sheep would have babies (breeding season). It was quite normal that some of the baby sheep die at birth, which the shepherds believed was due to the work of some demons that were sucking out the blood of the baby sheep. To prevent this, they would kill a sheep, put it on pole, and make it stand in front of their Tent. That seems to be origin of the “**Paschal Lamb**”. Later it got a place in the Bible in connection with the liberation from Egypt. From there it became the symbol of Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself to liberate humanity from the dominion of sin and lead to the new life in God. Now nobody sees idol worship in this symbol of the paschal lamb.

There are many examples of this kind. The **Cherubs** guarding the tree of life in the Paradise were borrowed from Babylon. There were huge figures with the face of a man, body of a Lion, legs of a bull, and wings of an eagle, guarding the gates of the city and royal palace. When it was adopted and used in the Bible, they became not only guards but the angels that carry the chariot of God (Ez 1, 4 – 14). There is a story about the **Seraphs** also. Behind the picture of the angels called Seraphim with six wings and human hands, who stand in God’s presence singing praises, and one of whom takes a burning of coal from the alter and purifies the lips of Isaiah (Is 6,1-8) there lurks the image of the Babylonian goddesses of fire called “**Sharapu**”.

The sacred author found nothing wrong in picturing the

Earth as a mother who is being hurt by the abuse of people. It is God Himself that presents the earth as the mother forced to drink her son's blood: "*You are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand*" (Gen 4, 11). Could one deny that here is the beginning of the concept of Pachamama, the mother earth?

It has been scientifically proved that by man's misuse, the earth has lost its equilibrium. Was it not such a truth that was being revealed 2700 years ago through Prophet Isaiah when he accused the people of severe crimes: "*The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again*" (Is 24, 20). The Book of Lamentation presents Jerusalem as a lamenting mother. None of these were considered as idols or idol worship.

There numerous other examples of pagan symbols being adopted, reinterpreted and used by the Jews and later taken over by the Christians. **December 25** was being celebrated as the birthday of sun, (called *sol invictus* = unbeaten sun) by Persians and later by Romans. The Christians took it as the Birthday of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Behind the Christmas tree used in Europe as well as in India, one can notice the influence of Gentile culture. The **two trees** in the Paradise, "*the tree of life*" and the tree of "*the knowledge of good and evil*" also have parallels in pagan traditions. Even in the narration of creation (Gen 1, 6-10) one can notice the influence of a Mesopotamian mythology, called "Enuma Elish". The primeval flood water called Tiamath was split into two by Marduk, who then created the sky with the upper part and the earth with the lower part.

It is however important to note that the symbols adopted from pagan culture were given new meaning and dimensions while using them in the Bible. Many things that were considered as gods were only the creations and the true God



is above all those things created. Against this background, there is nothing wrong in seeing the Pachamama as the symbol of Mother Earth, and the accusation that it is an idol and the pope is encouraging idol worship does not stand.

The statement Paul made at Areopagus in Athens could be a guiding principle in the case of enculturation. *“Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘to an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you”* (Acts 17, 22 - 23). When one rejects all that people of other religions believe in and worship with the accusation that they are not God but only idols and Satan, one has to remember the words of Paul. All the people are led by God who is the Creator and Protector of the universe. There might be difference in attitudes and views; there might be superstitions and confusing ideas. One must be able to discern the truth in them and reject what is not in agreement with the Christian faith. An effort should be made to see what is good in their beliefs and practices and adapt them, when needed giving them new meaning.

The Vatican II had taken a positive approach towards the Non-Christian religions and there is a clear statement in the Document called **Nostra Aetate – NA**.

*“Throughout history, to the present day, there is found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. At times, there is present even a recognition of a supreme being, or still more of a Father. This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense. The religions which are found in more advanced civilizations endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact language to answer these questions. Thus, in Hinduism people explore the divine mystery and express*

*it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which people can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or with divine help. So, too, other religions which are found throughout the world attempt in different ways to overcome the restlessness of people's hearts by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites.*

*“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless **often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women. Yet it proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (see 2 Cor 5:18-19), people find the fullness of their religious life.***

*“The Church, therefore, urges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture”. (NA § 2)*

Over half a century has passed since the Vatican II, but we have still been not able to accept its documents and put them into practice. Very often even at the official level opposite views and stance are taken. Stamping all the Tribal people as idol worshippers and hurting their feelings about

faith and religious practices is a proof for this. Some people seem to have no qualms of conscience in accusing even the Supreme authority of the Church of encouraging idol worship. The Pachamama incident is the latest reminder that there is an urgent need for an honest and creative dialogue with the people of other religions and their cultures.

## Conclusion

People should be given a right understanding about the First Commandment, about what is idol and idol worship. Those who are responsible for imparting the right teaching to the faithful should take the initiative to study and teach these subjects without prejudice, in the light of the Bible and the official teachings of the Catholic Church. Real idols should be unmasked, but one should be cautious not to misunderstand symbols with realities. In this situation Pastoral Prudence is very much in need.

There is only one God who liberates the slaves; only Him should we worship. If we worship anybody or anything else, we would become their slaves. True God gives us freedom, the freedom of the children of God. *“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another”* (Gal 5,13). God does not want us to become the slaves of anything. That is the aim of the First Commandment.

## Chapter 4

# WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH

### Question:

The only thing man can be sure of in this world is death. All those who are living would die someday. There is no doubt in that matter. In the same way, nobody knows when it would happen. To the question, what would happen after death, different religions give different answers. The answers shaped by each one's faith, convictions, dreams and hopes will be different.

For those who do not believe in God who is the Creator of all things, death would be the end of everything. The body without life becomes a corpse that would disintegrate in the soil. If there is no Creator, there is no goal for life. Just like animals and plants humans also die, decay and become manure for the soil. That will be the end. But there are billions of people who are not satisfied with such an explanation.

From time immemorial, people believed in a life after death as they believed that there was a Creator and that the Creator has certain plans that would take man beyond death. But, as far as the nature of the life after death is concerned, opinions differed among religions. There is a belief in Indian religions that people will have to go through a series of re-births until one becomes fully aware of one's own true self, the *atmaskshalkara* as they call it. Based on the Quran, the Muslims believe that after death they would find in heaven

all that they desired and wished for but did not get here on earth.

What do the Christians believe regarding death and life after death? Does it go along with the faith of the other religions or is it totally different? Since no one has come back after death, are not the teachings of the Catholic Church mere assumptions and daydreams? Won't it be more logical to conclude that everything ends with death?

### **Answer:**

The first two statements regarding the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the time of death are correct. It is true that there are different views regarding the life after death. But we cannot accept the statement that no one has come back from the dead, because the resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental truth and the cornerstone of Catholic faith. The words of St. Paul are a proof of this. *“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins”* (1 Cor 15, 14-17).

The Catholic Church has clear convictions about death and life after death, which are taught officially and authoritatively. This teaching is based on the revelations transmitted through written word of God, the Bible and the unwritten but authentic traditions of the Church. Here we are trying first to present the official teaching of the Catholic Church in brief. This will be followed by a short presentation of the teachings of other religions, especially that of Islam, and its similarity to and differences from the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Besides the teaching of the Bible we will consider the official teachings of the Catholic Church presented in **Lumen Gentium** –LG of Vatican II and the Catechism of Catholic Church (CCC) Nos. 596-681; 988-1060. The official teaching of the Church is presented in eight points: death,

particular judgment, heaven, hell, purgatory, resurrection of the body, last judgment, and end of the world.

## 1. Death

*“You are dust, and to dust you shall return”* (Gen 3, 19). This is the first reference to and explanation of death in the Bible. The sacred author has mentioned two elements in the creation of man, namely dust and the breath of God: *“Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Gen 2, 7). These two symbols convey the message that man is alive by the breath of God; he is earthly as well as heavenly, mortal and immortal at the same time. Man is alive only because he carries in himself the breath of God. When that breath is taken away, he will become dust again. That is what happened when the first parents disobeyed the command of God.

Death is the end of man’s natural existence. When the soul leaves the body, death happens. CCC 1005-1018 presents the teaching about death in detail. The Bible as well as the Catholic Church Documents teaches that death is the result of sin. *“Death is a consequence of sin. The Church’s Magisterium, as authentic interpreter of the affirmations of Scripture and Tradition, teaches that death entered the world on account of man’s sin. Even though man’s nature is mortal, God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and it entered the world as a consequence of sin. “Bodily death, from which man would have been immune, had he not sinned” is thus “the last enemy” of man left to be conquered”* (CCC 1008).

*“For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it”* (Wis 2, 23-24). Are these documents talking about the physical death of man or the spiritual death that

distances man from God? The second answer seems to be more acceptable. If we take the first one then we will have to conclude that all those who die are on the side of Satan.

The explanation St. Paul gives to death: *“Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned”* (Rom 5, 12) also seem to refer to spiritual rather than physical death. This is a statement that stands as a basis for the Church’s teaching regarding the original sin.

Basing on the Bible, the Catholic Church teaches that all those who live must go through death; that is not the end but only the beginning of eternal life. For those who believe in Christ, death is not a tragedy that one should be afraid of, but a gift to be accepted with joy, as it takes them to the real home to be united with God for ever. *“Death is transformed by Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to the Father’s will. The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing”* (CCC 1009). That is why St. Paul could say: *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil 1, 21).

*“Death reminds us that the life on this earth is only of a limited duration and that we have to abandon this temporary home and enter eternal life when the time appointed by God comes. Since we do not know when that time will come, we have to be prepared all the time; this is also a message that death gives us. In death God calls man to Himself. Therefore, the Christian can experience a desire for death like St. Paul: “My desire is to depart and be with Christ” (Phil 1,23). He can transform his own death into an act of obedience and love towards the Father, after the example of Christ”* (CCC 2011). We refer to dead usually as “Departed souls”. It shows that death is not an end but a departure and journey to some other place.

A personal experience might further clarify this concept. It happened at 3:30 P.M. on 20 June 2000 while I was in the Heart Hospital in Trichur. I was recovering after a brain surgery. My sister who is a medical doctor and a nephew were with me. Though it was an air-conditioned room, I began to sweat and at the same time I felt numbness at the tip of my fingers and toes. I felt cold and hot at the same time and I began to feel that I was becoming unconscious. I told my sister about it and she called Dr. George Kovoov the neurosurgeon who had operated on me. He came immediately, examining my eyes, I heard him say “I think we are losing him”. After that I do not know what happened.

I entered into another world with no awareness of what was happening around me. I saw a bright light and a human figure with inviting hands in the middle of that light, looking at me with great love and affection. With that I heard a calm, clear voice that said “**YOU ARE WELCOME HOME**”. Though I heard it from outside it was resounding somewhere deep within me. I do not know how long this experience lasted. After about three and a half hours, I opened my eyes. During that time, the news had gone to the Divine Retreat center and to the Bishop’s House in Tellicherry that I was sinking. A lot of people were praying for me.

Even after 20 years the experience remains very vivid in my mind. From then on, it has become absolutely clear for me that death is going home, to my Father’s House, who is waiting to welcome me. Not only for me but for all who believe that God loves them, death is a parting to go home. *“Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father”* (Jn 13, 1).

Jesus who is gone to the Father will return to take me to the Father and that is the moment of death. *“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.... I will come again and will take you to myself, that where*



*I am you may be also” (Jn 14, 1-3). Hence, death is not something to be viewed with fear but it is a door that leads me to the presence of God who is my source of life, goal of my life and eternal happiness. St. Teresa of Avila said, “I want to see God and, in order to see him, I must die”, and St. Therese of Lisieux said, “I am not dying; I am entering life”. (CCC 1011).*

All the same, death is the end of the physical pilgrimage. *“Death is the end of man’s earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When “the single course of our earthly life” is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: “It is appointed for men to die once”. There is no “reincarnation” after death” (CCC 1013). With death ends the capability of man to make choices and decisions. No repentance is possible after death. Therefore, death inspires, should inspire us, to live with hope and responsibility.*

## **2. Particular Judgment**

*“It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb 9, 27). Physical death is the moment when the soul leaves the body. At that moment the person will be presented before God to decide his continuous life based on the way he lived on earth. This is called particular judgment; it should be seen as different from the Last and Universal Judgment that is to take place at the end of the world. Though the Bible, in particular the New Testament, talks mainly about the Last Judgment, there are a few points that refer to the particular judgment.*

The parable of the “Rich man and Lazarus” (Lk 16,19-31) points to such a judgment. Jesus told the repented thief, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23, 43). This also shows that the judgment will be passed on individual persons at the very moment of their*

death. The teaching of the Catholic Church is very clear about the particular judgment. *“Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ. The New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in his second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith. The parable of the poor man Lazarus and the words of Christ on the cross to the good thief, as well as other New Testament texts (Mt 16,26; 2Cor 5,8; 1,23; Heb 12,23) speak of a final destiny of the soul -- a destiny which can be different for some and for others.”* (CCC 1021)

The judgment or decision at the time of death is final. There will be no change to it. It will be difficult to make a decision that is different from the way one lived. Hence putting off conversion to the last moment could be very risky. Nobody knows when death would happen and one might not get time for conversion right before death. Therefore, one has to be vigilant, prepared at every moment.

Jesus has reminded this through many parables. An example can be seen in the warning given through the parable the wicked servant: *“And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful”* (Lk 12, 42-46). The official teaching of the Church clarifies what happens with the particular judgment. *“Each man re-*

*ceives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven-through purification or immediately, -- or immediate and everlasting damnation” (CCC 1022). The judgment will be to send the person to Heaven, Hell or purgatory.*

### **3. Heaven**

Those who lived a perfect life according to the will of God, at the very moment of death, after the particular judgment, will enter into heaven to be with God forever. Seeing God, participating in His life, the person would remain in eternal happiness. It is this state of being with God that is called heaven. This has been further clarified by the official teaching of the Church. *“Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they “see him as he is”, face to face. ... This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity – this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed – is called “heaven”. Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (CCC 1023-24).*

### **Clarity obtained gradually over a period of time**

In the Bible we can see the picture of the life after death gaining clarity gradually. In the beginning it would seem that death is the total end of life. As for every other creature for the humans also everything ends with death. *“You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3, 19).* Even during the time of Jesus such a belief was prevalent. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and life after death. They came to Jesus with the story of a woman who was married to seven brothers one after another with the clear intention of challenging the faith in resurrection and make Jesus look ridiculous (Mk 12, 18-23). The same theme

is discussed in the book of Job also. If everything ends with death, what is the meaning of the suffering of the just? That is the main problem the Book of Job is dealing with.

The Book of Ecclesiastes presents this problem with greater force, *“For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity”* (Eccl 3, 19). In this context, it is difficult to understand the justice of God. If the just and the wicked, the oppressor and the oppressed, rich and poor, all end up with the same fate, how can we find God’s justice?

Even when it was said that with death everything ended, there was a feeling that something remained or the dead entered into eternal rest in the netherworld. *“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost”* (Eccl 9, 5). *“As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up”* (Job 7, 9).

The people of Israel had given great importance to the tombs of their ancestors because that is where the generations were resting. They believed that their lives would continue through the new generations. Once the person dies, he would join the ancestors and rest with them and that is why Abraham paid a large amount to buy a plot of land to bury his wife, Sarah (Gen 23, 17-20). Later Abraham (Gen 25, 7-10) Isaac (Gen 35, 27-29) and Jacob (Gen 50, 13-14) were buried there. This is the reason Naboth refused to sell his land (1 Kgs 21, 1-4).

Even when it was said that the dead are in eternal sleep, gradually there arose a feeling that the way one lives on earth will somehow affect him after death. In the book of Job that seeks the meaning of the suffering of the just, there is a hint about life after death. When Job laments: *“Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a*

*book! Oh, that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”* (Job 19, 23-27).

There are differences of opinion about this passage among Biblical Scholars as to whether it refers to the resurrection after death or the healing he would receive while living on earth. When the book ends, all that Job lost were restored to him and so the doubt persists. However, we can see the beginnings of a hope that everything does not end with death and even after death the justice of God would be executed.

A similar belief is present in the book of Ecclesiastes. The Sacred author warns those who are convinced that as everything would end with death one must enjoy life here and now as much as possible: *“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.... For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil”* (Eccl 11, 9; 12, 14). This warning points to the belief that there is a life beyond death and that life would depend on the way one lived on earth. The book of Isaiah also tells about the resurrection of the dead, *“Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. Oh, dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is dew of light, and on the land of the shades thou wilt let it fall”* (Is 26, 19).

By the second century B.C. there was a clear understanding of the life after death. This is most evident in the book of the Maccabees. During the religious persecution unleashed by Antiochus IV who proclaimed himself as god, a mother encouraged her children to accept death rather than

break the laws of God. Her words proclaim in unequivocal terms faith in life after death, *“I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore, the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws”* (2 Mac 7, 22-23).

In the book of Daniel, written during the same period of persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, we can see the revelation about the life after death in very clear terms. *“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Dan 12, 2). The book of Wisdom, written during the first century B.C., gives clear knowledge about the life after death, *“The righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore, they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them”* (Wis 5, 15-16).

We get the clearest revelation about the life after death through Jesus Christ, Son of God Incarnate. Based on the teaching of Jesus as well as His life, death, resurrection and ascension, the Catechism of the Catholic Church has given a clear teaching about life after death. It is an everlasting life with the Holy Trinity and all the saints in heaven. Heaven is the ultimate desire and final goal of every person. *“This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called “heaven.” Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness”* (CCC 1024). The document further defines heaven in very few words:

*“To live in heaven is “to be with Christ”. The elect live “in Christ” (Phil 1,23; Jn 14,3), but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name (Rev 2,17). For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the kingdom (CCC 1025).*

## **Heaven in Symbols**

When state of being in heaven is defined as being with God, being with Christ, the Church teaches clearly that the individuals do not lose their personality. The awareness of being “I” will be preserved in this union. Thus, heaven is a place where all have a deep relationship with God. It is not an island of individuals but a communion of saints, and they all live as a family. *“By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has “opened” heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ” (CCC 1026).*

Jesus has explained this concept of heaven that is beyond the reach of the senses and comprehension of human intellect, through many parables and similes. *“This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (CCC 1027).* Thus, many examples are used to depict heaven, but none of them should be taken literally. Otherwise, the Kingdom of Heaven will end up being eating, drinking and mating. Marriage, banquet, wine etc. are signs of happiness. Jesus has cautioned against making a literal interpre-

tation of these images. *“When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”* (Mk 12, 25).

The Beatitudes, presented as the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount give some clear indications about heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is filled with comfort, satisfaction, inheritance, vision of God and great reward (Mt 5, 3-12). Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God in a language that the people could understand. *“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear”* (Mt 13, 43). In the heavenly Kingdom the people will be Children of God, participating in the Divine Kingship. *“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Mt 19, 28). They will participate in the wedding banquet (Mt 22, 1-12). They will rejoice with the bridegroom (Mt 25, 1-10). Jesus will tell them, *“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt 25, 34).

To be in heaven means being publicly proclaimed that a person belongs to Jesus Christ (Lk 12, 8). It is being received to dwell in the eternal Tent (Lk 16, 8). It is being consoled in the bosom of Abraham and enjoying eternal life (Lk 16, 23-24). It is participating in the Divine Life by entering into eternal life (Jn 5, 24) and being in the House of God (Jn 14, 3) with God (Jn 17, 21) seeing the glory of God (Jn 17, 24). Thus, no matter how many examples we use, we cannot fully comprehend or express what Heaven is and the joy of eternal life means.

St. Paul taught that one can understand what heaven is only if the Holy Spirit reveals it to him: *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit”* (1 Cori 2, 9-10). It is because he



received such an insight through revelation into this heavenly life that St. Paul was ready to abandon everything that he had till then considered precious: *“Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ”* (Phil 3, 8).

*“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven ... and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses”* (2 Cor 12, 2-5). This is how St. Paul explains his experience of heaven. Basing on this description, some people think that there are many levels in heaven. In fact, there is an Apocryphal book, “The Book of Enoch”, that narrates about ten levels in heaven. But all these are only symbolic descriptions, not to be taken literally. It does not mean that heaven is a huge mansion with 10 stories. The Indian mythology talks about 14 levels of the world, seven underworlds and seven upper worlds. All these are symbolic expressions, trying to describe the invisible and incomprehensible.

*“Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”* (1 Jn 3, 2). To be like God, to be with God, that is what is meant by heaven and beatific vision. The Catholic Church teaches: *“Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is...The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory “the beatific vision”. How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ your Lord and God ... to delight in the joy of immortality in the Kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God’s friends”* (CCC 1028).

More than any other book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation speaks about heaven. The book is written in the literary form known as Apocalyptic that presents the truth in a symbolic language. Hence the images and descriptions should not be taken literally. The second part of the Book of Revelation, Chapters 4-22, is detailed description of heaven, in the apocalyptic language.

There are no words to explain the beauty of heaven. God the Father sits on the throne, with Him is the Son depicted as the lamb. The Holy Spirit appears like seven torches filling the whole heaven with light. Innumerable angels constantly sing praises of God. 24 Elders who represent the people of God sit on thrones with crowns on their heads. Countless saints, dressed in white, stand around the throne singing and praising God. *“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”* (Rev 7, 14-17).

One has to keep in mind that all these are symbols, not to be taken literally. The sacred author is depicting unseen things through images that are familiar. Paradise is another symbol used to depict heaven. Jesus used this symbol in the promise He gave to the repentant thief: *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Lk 23, 43). Three words in this promise deserve special attention: 1. Today; 2. With me; and 3. in Paradise.

1. **Today:** With death man goes beyond time and space. “Today” refers to the moment of death. With that one enters

into eternity. 2. **With me:** This explains what heaven is. It is being with Jesus. 3. **In Paradise:** the literal meaning of the word “paradise” is garden. It was adopted from the Persian word, (*Paradeisos* in Greek and *Paradisum* in Latin), used to refer to the garden of the kings. In English it is called Paradise

Genesis, Chapter 2 describes paradise as a garden where there are rivers filled with water, different kinds of fruit trees and above all a life with God. These were the main features of the Paradise. For a people who lived in the desert the rivers filled with water and trees with fruits were sources of great joy and satisfaction. This worldly picture becomes more meaningful when they are enjoyed in the presence of God. By the sin of the first parents, the humanity lost this paradise. Jesus’ promise to the thief points to the truth that the door of the lost Paradise is opened again for the humanity. In the book of Revelation, we see a description of the paradise. The tree of life is the symbol of Jesus (Rev 2, 7; 22, 2) and the river that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb is the symbol of the Holy Spirit (22, 1). But there are some who literally interpret these symbols of river, tree and Paradise. That is what happened in the Quran, a theme that will be discussed later.

The official teaching of the Catholic Church about the Paradise gives emphasis to the aspect of relationship “*In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfil God’s will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him “they shall reign forever and ever”*” (CCC 1029).

In the Bible, Heaven is used as a synonym for God. What the other gospels present as the Kingdom of God the Gospel of Mathew calls “Kingdom of Heaven”. Because of the overwhelming respect and piety, the Jews would not pronounce the name “Yahweh”. For the same reason they are reluctant even to use the word “God” To refer to God they

would use the words such as “Almighty”, “The one in Heaven”; or simply Heaven. Being in heaven then would mean being with God. While explaining the end of the world, this point will be discussed further.

#### 4. Purgatory

The teaching about purgatory has been a subject of much misunderstanding and disputes. The Protestant churches and denominations do not accept the existence of a purgatory because they see no evidence for it in the Bible. The Catholic Church teaches that those who die in union with God, but not in perfect union, will be given an opportunity for purification before entering heaven.

The official teaching of the Catholic Church gives the following explanation about purgatory in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

*“All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.*

*“The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of the Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire (1Cor 3,15; 1 Pt 1,7).*

*“As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come (Mt 12,31)” (CCC 1030-31).*

In this teaching, the Catholic Church calls attention, besides the Bible, to the teachings of the Council of Florence (A.D. 1431-1445) and the Council of Trent (A. D. 1545-1563).

The purification of the dead and the prayers for the dead are intrinsically related. Since the opportunity to make the decision ends with death, the souls in purgatory can do nothing for their own purification. The Catholic Church teaches that those living on earth and those enjoying eternal happiness in heaven can help them. This teaching is based on the Bible.

Judas Maccabeus and his followers prayed for the forgiveness of the sins of Israelites who died in the war and also sent money to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice for them. The Bible praises this initiative of Judas and his group for their faith that even after death the soldiers could obtain pardon for their minor sins. *“If he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sin”* (2 Mc 12, 45).

The New Testament also talks about the light punishment one gets after death. *“I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter”* (Mt 12, 36). This saying points to a punishment that is less than eternal damnation. The warning given about those who die without reconciling with one’s brothers also talks about a temporary punishment. If one did something wrong without knowing, he would receive only a temporary punishment. *“He who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating* (Lk 12, 48). These words of Jesus also indicate a temporary punishment: *“Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I*

*say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny” (Mt 5, 25-26). St. Paul also points to a temporary punishment when he writes: “If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3, 15).*

The Catholic Church encourages prayers for the dead but has given clear directives. It is a tradition in the Catholic Church that the faithful pray for the dead, offer sacrifices and the Church had announced indulgences for the same. Indulgence for a day would mean the liberation one receives from purgatory for the prayer and fasting of one day. A total release from temporary punishment is called a plenary indulgence.

Though these traditions were started with good intention, in the course of time misuse and superstitions crept in. A business mentality was formed as people began to believe that indulgences can be bought paying money. Therefore, the Church has given clear instructions regarding the indulgence and the most important among them is the one issued by Pope Paul VI taking into consideration the suggestions of Vat. II. This official document, by the name “*Teaching about Indulgence*” (*Doctrina Indulgentiarum*), published in 1967, cancelled all the partial indulgences such as for one day, month and year. Certain definite instructions are given about the plenary indulgence as well. This document emphasizes prayers that would help renewal of life and the “*communion of saints*” that showed the importance of the unity that exists between the various parts of the Church, namely, the militant (those who live on earth), suffering (those who suffer in the purgatory) and triumphant (those who are in heaven) Churches. There is a deep relationship between these three sections of the Church. This document has given instructions to avoid superstitions and empty observations.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has explained

the official teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the purgatory. *“This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in the Sacred Scripture: “Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sin”. From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, in suffrage for them, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead. Let us help and commemorate them. If Job’s sons were purified by their father’s sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead will bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them (Job 1,5)”* (CCC 1032).

## 5. Hell

*“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ... Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Mt 25, 41-46). Being cut off from God, the source of life, forever and being condemned to eternal punishment, this according to the teaching of the Catholic Church is hell.

The Catechism of the Catholic explains further what hell means: *“We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: “He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer*

*has eternal life abiding in him”. Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren. To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell”” (CCC 1033).*

Just as about heaven, Jesus has warned about hell also through many symbols and parables. The essence of hell is being banished from God’s presence. It has been described as furnace, endless fire, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth because of severe pain and despair. *“I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire” (Mt 5, 22). “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Mt 5, 29-30). “Throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13, 42). “So, it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13, 49-50). “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown -into hell” (Mk 9, 43-45). Hell is supposed to be a place of torture, and it is called “Furnace”, “Filled with Darkness” etc.*

Here the word “hell” deserves special attention. It is



the translation of the Greek word “*Gehenna*”. This word is derived from the Hebrew words “Ge-ben Hinnom” which means the valley of the son of Hinnom. Understanding the background of this word will help us get a clear picture of hell as painted in the Bible. This is a valley between Mount of Olives and Mount Zion. Toward the end of the Monarchy in Israel, they had built an Altar on one side of this valley where even human sacrifices were offered to Baal the Canaanite god of fertility and Kemosh the war god.

Prophet Jeremiah condemned this practice in very strong terms: “*They have built the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind*” (Jer 7, 31). While talking about the religious reformation of King Josiah, the Bible mentions this valley: “*He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech*” (2 Kg 23, 10). Topheth indicates the altar that was built for idol worship.

Eventually this valley of Benhinnom became a dumping place for the waste of the city of Jerusalem. As they burned the waste there was always fire and at the same time worms would crawl on the wet wastes that were not burnt. This is the picture of Gehenna that is depicted as a place the symbol of eternal punishment “*where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched*” (Mk 9,48).

The book of Revelation uses the image of “*The lake of fire that burns with brimstone*” (Rev. 19, 20) for hell. Each one will be judged according to one’s life on earth; those who do not have the name in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire, that is the second death or eternal punishment (Rev 20, 12-15; 21, 8). Brimstone, fire, worms etc. should not be taken literally but as symbols that represent a punishment that would create intense pain.

Fire in itself needs not to be considered as an instrument of punishment and torture; there are several passages in the Bible that tell us that God dwells in the midst of consuming fire, and that fire is often shown as the sign of God's presence. When making the covenant with Abraham, God appeared as fire, "*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, to your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates*" (Gen 15, 17-18). God appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex 3, 2). Both symbolize the presence of God. The exclamation of Prophet Isaiah presents fire as the symbol of God, "*Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?*" (Is 33, 14). Fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering Elijah had placed on the altar. It was not the sign of punishment but of acceptance (1 Kg 18, 38 -39). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles as tongues of fire (Acts 2, 3).

At the same time fire appears many times in the Bible as the instrument of punishment. "*The LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven*" (Gen 19, 24). Therefore, the fire in the description of hell must be seen as a punishment. The greatest pain a person feels is when one is burned alive. May be that is why the symbol of "Lake of fire" is used. Beyond the symbols, the Church explains the real meaning and nature of hell. "*The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire'. The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs*" (CCC 1035).

All the explanations, teachings and warnings should help people to stay away from evil and live according to the will of God. *“The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few”. Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth” (CCC 1036).*

God has not predestined any one to go to hell, but has given the freedom of choice as becomes evident in the advice and warning given through Moses: *“I have set before you, life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them” (Dt. 30, 19-20).* God wishes us to choose life but we have the freedom to choose death instead of life. *“God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want ‘any to perish, but all to come to repentance’: Father, accept this offering from your whole family. Grant us your*

*peace in this life, save us from final damnation, and count us among those you have chosen” (CCC 1037). All must remain in the grace of God and live in a way that this prayer would be heard.*

## **6. Resurrection of the Body**

*“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5, 28-29).*

This is the answer Jesus gave to the question as of what would happen after death. At the moment of death there will be the judgment that would decide one’s eternal destiny. However, the fullness of human life would be attained only with the resurrection of the body. The body that had dissolved in dust would regain life and unite with the soul. *“Resurrection of the body”* is part of the Creed we repeat daily or on Sundays, during the Holy Mass. We have seen that the understanding of the life after death in the Bible evolved slowly. The following passages are examples: Job 19, 23-27; Is 26, 18; Ez 37, 1-14; 2 Mac 7, 9. During the time of Jesus, the Sadducees, the priestly aristocracy, did not believe in the resurrection of the body but the Pharisees believed in it. Jesus has given clear teaching about the resurrection of the body.

The response Jesus gave to the question about the seven brothers one after the other marrying the same woman, gives evidence about the resurrection of the body and its nature. *“When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mk 12, 25).* The difference between man and woman exists only in this world and that is intended for mutual love, giving life to children and to live as a family (Gen 1, 26-28; 2, 18. 23-24). After death there will be no such relationships.

The teaching of Jesus gives a rather clear picture about the resurrection of the dead, but the basis of faith in and the guarantee for the resurrection of the body is the Resurrection of Jesus. In a dialogue with Martha at the tomb or her brother Lazarus, Jesus leads her faith to its fullness. *“Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’. Jesus said to her; ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die”* (Jn 11, 24-26).

Jesus is the source of life and those who believe in Him will live forever. Even if the body dies the soul would continue to live with Jesus. While approving the faith of Martha that all will rise on the last day, Jesus revealed Himself as the Resurrection and the Life. As a confirmation of this revelation, Lazarus was brought back to life even after three days in the tomb.

The Catholic Church teaches clearly what resurrection is. *“What is “rising”?* In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection” (CCC 997).

The Catholic Church gives a clear answer also to the further question, who would be resurrected from the dead. *“Who will rise? All the dead will rise, “those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment”* (CCC 998). This resurrection would happen only at the end of the world. The Church teaches that all those who died will come back to life because Jesus came back alive from the dead.

Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the faithful in the Church of Thessalonica who were worried about the dead

not knowing what would happen to them, deals with the theme, resurrection of the Dead. *“We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first”* (1 Thes 4, 13 -16). We will be with the Lord; with these words let us console each other.

The longest and clearest statement regarding the resurrection of the dead can be seen in the first letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. The entire chapter 15 deals with the theme of the resurrection of the dead. *“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep”* (1 Cor 15, 3-6). *“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain”* (1 Cor 15, 13-14). *“As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ”* (1 Cor 15, 22-23). *“Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature*

*must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15, 51-53).*

The Church speaks about three qualities of the risen body: **1. Incorruptible:** This body will not undergo any change. There will be nothing lacking in that body. No more the person would suffer hunger, thirst, or variation of temperature. **2. Weightless:** The body will be beyond the limitations of time and space. **3. Luminous:** As the body would participate in the glory of God, it would be luminous, similar to what is seen at the transfiguration of Jesus *“He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (Mt 17, 2).* St. Paul gives the same message when he writes that Jesus *“Will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3, 21).*

The Catholic Church calls our attention to the resurrection also in a different manner, as if it has already occurred: *“Christ will raise us up “on the last day”; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. “Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (Jn 5, 25).* This life in Jesus is the prelude to and guarantee of bodily resurrection.

St. Paul further clarifies this concept, in his letter to the church in Ephesus. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2, 4-6).* Again St. Paul writes about the resurrection of the boy in his letter to the Colossians: *“For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When*

*Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3, 3-4).*

Those who accept Jesus as the Savior, enter into eternal life through the Sacrament of Baptism. Immersing in the water is considered as a sign of dying to the old life and rising from the water is considered as a sign of being born again into new life. This is a foretaste of the resurrection from the dead that would happen at the end of the world.

*“Christ will raise us up “on the last day”; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ: And you were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 3,3). If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Phil 3, 20) (CCC 1002).* The faith in the resurrection of the bodies should enable us to live in holiness with the awareness that our body is the temple of God and we are members of the Mystical Body of Christ. This would inspire us to view our bodies as well as the bodies of others with respect and protect them with care.

## **7. Last Judgment**

*“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25, 31-34).*

The response to the question, what would happen after



death, leads us to the final step, the Last Judgment. With that history reaches its completion as the next step is eternity. Before that the just and unjust will be separated. All the people who ever lived on earth, regardless of caste, creed and color will be brought before Christ who will judge each one according to their lives. The Bible teaches that this would happen following the resurrection of the dead.

The clearest and most detailed presentation of the Last Judgment is found in the Gospel according to Mathew. It is in the form of a parable. The Son of Man is the glorified Christ. Sheep and goats are only symbols. In the same way having them stand on the right and left also is part of the parable. The Son of Man being seated on the throne and pronouncing the judgment should be understood as symbols. The Divine realities that are beyond the comprehension of the human senses are presented in a language that people could understand.

The Last judgment is different from the particular judgment that happens at the moment of the individual's death. However, the verdict of the particular judgment will not be changed but will only be confirmed at the Last Judgment. The particular judgment will be proclaimed in public. "The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming. Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death" (CCC 1040).

Jesus had set only one condition as the norm of the Last Judgment, namely care for the poor and needy. "*When the*

*Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ....as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life' (Mt 25, 31-46).*

Here no cultic activities are taken into consideration. The only question asked is if one saw the face of God in those in need and help them. The new commandment Jesus gave lies behind the question. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"* (Jn 13, 34). This is the love that enables one to forget oneself even unto death.

The way to heaven goes through the other, especially those in need of our help. This becomes evident in Jesus answer to the lawyer who came with the question, what has one to do to attain eternal life (Lk 10, 25-37). At the end of the parable Jesus tells the lawyer: *"Go and do likewise"*. The man who was hurt, lying helplessly on the verge of death, needed to be helped without any consideration of his caste, creed or color. Only those who practice such compassionate love would enter heaven.

The words of Jesus must inspire people to live according to this norm. At the same time, it should be accepted as

a warning that those who fail to do so will not enter Heaven. This does not mean that there is no need of prayer and religious practices but they should help us to open our eyes to see the needs of the people around us. Those who fail to do will hear that frightening judgment, *“I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers”* (Mt 7, 23).

In the light of the words of Jesus, we have to evaluate the atrocities taking place in the name of religion. Which God are they pleasing by torturing and killing innocent and helpless people? It is not God who demands the death of the innocent. Those who do this are worshipping not God but Satan who is the liar and father of lies. About them Jesus said, *“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (Jn 8, 44). Such cruelties against the innocent could be avoided if they would listen to the warning St. Paul gave about Satan: *“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light”* (2 Cor 11, 14).

The Last Judgment is a promise and at the same time, a warning. All that is done in secret, each person’s desires, plans and thoughts will be proclaimed in public at the moment of Last Judgment *“For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light”* (Mk 4,22). The reward God gives to each individual, reward as well as punishment will be known to all. History would reach its completion with the Last Judgment after which there will be no more history, only eternity, *“They will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Mt 25, 46).

## 8. End of the World

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away’” (Rev 21, 1-4).*

God the Creator has a plan for humanity and for the entire universe. The Bible as well as the official teachings of the Catholic Church testifies that this plan is not for destruction but for eternal life. The Bible sees the end of the world as the completion of the creation and a New Creation that is called a “New Heaven and New Earth”. “Church in the Modern World” (*Gaudium et Spes* -GS) a Document of the Second Vatican Council, as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church Nos. 1046 - 1060 deals with this theme at great length.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans gives some clear teaching about the end of the world: *“The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For, in this hope we were saved”* (Rom 8, 21-24).

The entire creation is moving not to annihilation but to a transformation that is equal to a new creation. When we hear about the end of the world, the image we get is that

of everything coming to an end. But it is not an end but the beginning of a new Creation, the formation of a New Heaven and a New Earth. The apocalyptic literature that was very popular among the Jews and also among the Christians during the first two centuries, considered this world as totally corrupt, and called it **“This Age” (Olam Hazze)**. They believed that God would put an end to this corrupt universe and create a new age which they called **“The Age to Come” (Olam Habba)**. All those who remained faithful to God in this age will be eternally happy with God in the New Age

During the time of Jesus this hope was very strong but people did not know when it would happen. The Gospels have recorded the teaching of Jesus about the eschatological event (Mt 24, 29-31; Mk 13, 24-28; Lk 21, 25-28). The total renewal of the universe is described in the Bible through parables and symbols. *“The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Pt 3, 10-13).

A New Heaven and a New Earth, a total renewal-this is God’s promise. The first of such promises came through the Prophet Isaiah: *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind”* (Is 65, 17). The book of Revelation that presents the salvation history through numerous symbols, in the last two Chapters gives a beautiful description of the New Age: *“He who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new”. Also, he said, “Write this, for these*

words are trustworthy and true” (Rev. 21, 5). This total renewal is the work of God.

The author of the Book of Revelation calls this New Creation **“The Holy City, the New Jerusalem”** and **“a bride adorned for her husband”**. It is depicted as coming down: *“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Rev. 21, 2). Till now it was being told that heaven is above and one ascends to heaven. In contrast to it now it is said that the heaven is coming down, implying thereby that the Presence of God will sanctify and renew everything with His presence.

In the beautiful description of the New Jerusalem there is a striking new revelation. *“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb...And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb....But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (Rev 21, 9-27). In this picture there is no temple because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb is the Temple there. God becomes the Temple. Being in heaven means being in God!

St. Paul interprets the meaning of this symbol: *“According to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”* (Eph 1, 9-10). *“In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross”* (Col 1, 19-20). *“And so, we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thes 4, 17).

The world is being renewed, not destroyed. *“At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Then the just will reign with Christ forever, glorified in body and soul, and the material universe itself will be transformed. God will then be “all in all” (1Cor 15:28), in eternal life”* (CCC 1060). Such a future is depicted in the Bible and the official teaching of the Catholic Church. The faith in the end of the world must prevent us from succumbing to passions and despair, must inspire us to live with hope and fidelity, loving God and one another as Jesus did and taught.

*“Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning --lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch”* (Mk 13, 32-37). The advice St. Paul gives at the end of his teaching about the resurrection of bodies, can be taken as the conclusion to the study and reflection about what happens after death: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”* (1 Cor 15, 58).

## **9. Heaven in the Islamic View**

There are certain similarities between the official teachings of the Catholic Church and the Islamic view of death and life after death; there are more differences than similarities there. We shall see the similarities first and then the differences.

## Similarities

Death happens only once, there is no rebirth. There will be an end to this world and then all the dead will rise again. God will pronounce judgment. Each one would receive eternal happiness or eternal punishment. The place where they enjoy eternal happiness is called Jannah and the place of eternal punishment is called Jahannam. Jannah is also called Paradise and Jahannam is called hell. The relationship between Gehenna in the Bible and Jahannam in the Quran are evident. Not only in the name but also in the explanation there are many similarities. In the same way we can see certain similarities in the explanation of the Paradise also. Since we see the most difference in the presentation of heaven, only the Islamic view of heaven will be discussed here.

## Jannah – Paradise

The word the Quran uses for heaven is Jannah in Arabic which means garden. The relationship between the garden in the Quran and in the Bible might not be accidental. In Hebrew the garden God created for man was called *gan* which means garden. This garden is interpreted as Paradise. One cannot deny the similarity between the names *gan* and Jannah. Not only the names but also the descriptions are similar.

According to the Bible, there were fruit trees in the paradise created by God: “*Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*” (Gen 2, 9). There was also a river that was divided and became four: “*A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers*” (Gen 2,10). Four rivers filled with water, fruit trees filled with fruits. A similar picture is seen in the Quran: “*Announce to those who believe and have done good deeds, glad tidings of gardens under which rivers flow, and where, when they eat*



*the fruits that grow, they will say: 'indeed they are the same as we were given before', so like in semblance the food will be" (Qur 2,25). This garden is called the Garden of Eden in Qur 9, 72: "God has promised men and women who believe gardens with streams of running water where they will abide forever, beautiful mansions in the Garden of Eden". Here naturally arises the question: Is not the Quran borrowing the concept and description of Jannah from the biblical account of the Garden of Eden?*

## **Differences**

So far we have been seeing the similarities in the teachings of the Bible and the Quran about life after death, especially heaven. Next, we shall turn to the differences

## **Four rivers**

The description of the rivers in the Quran was influenced by the biblical picture of the Garden of Eden. The four rivers in Garden of Eden are filled with pure water. The rivers in the garden of Jannah are quite different as can be seen from the following description: *"The semblance of paradise promised the pious and devout (is that of a garden) with streams of water that will not go rank, and rivers of milk whose taste will not undergo a change, and rivers of wine delectable to drinkers, and streams of purified honey"* (Qur 47,15). The description of the Promised Land in the Bible as a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3, 8-17) could be the background of this Quranic picture. These symbols, which were used to depict the fertility of the land, are used literally in the Quran. One could drink the wine flowing through the river in Jannah as much as one wants, but the person will not get intoxicated from it: *"With cups from a flowing stream being passed around, clear, delicious to drink, neither dulling the senses nor intoxicating"* (Qur 37, 43-47).

## Houris

In the picture of the Paradise in the Quran, the word Houris is repeated many times. Those who died after living a just life will get beautiful women in the paradise as mates. They are “*maidens of modest look and large lustrous eyes*” (Qur 37,48), with whom “*they would recline on couches set in rows*” (Qur 52,20). Those young women will always remain virgins. How many Houris will be given to a person is a matter of dispute. Some say they get as many as 72 but some others argue that only those who sacrificed their lives for faith would receive 72 Houris. The picture of these women seems to have been influenced by the description of the Paradise in the Bible. “*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him*” (Gen 2, 18). So, God created a beautiful woman from the rib of the man. God gave Eve as a companion to Adam. Here the question has to be asked if the description of the Houris in the Quran is not a distorted picture of the first woman in the Bible

## Satisfaction of all Desires

The description of heaven in the Quran seems to provide all that one desired on earth, but could not get, to one's full satisfaction. It is a place of endless enjoyment and pleasure. One could have all the delicacies he did not get in this world; on earth he was forbidden to drink but in heaven he could drink as much alcohol as he wanted, enter into sexual relationship with Houris who remain ever virgins and are extremely beautiful. Youthful male servants will be taking care of him all the time. All these are presented as the joys of the Paradise. It is a generally accepted fact that behind the description of the Garden of Eden one could notice certain elements borrowed from the royal gardens of Persian kings. It would be very interesting to enquire if the picture of Jannah is not borrowed from the Garden of Eden and enlarged

and embellished with elements from the palace gardens of the extremely rich lords of Arabia.

### **Certain Questions**

There are some Muslim scholars who argue that all these should not be taken literally but as symbols. However, the description of heaven seems to be a continuation of life in this world. But certain questions remain. Who are the young male servants? Who are the Houris? What is their condition? Did God create them just to satisfy the sexual urge of men? What is the relevance of sexuality in heaven? There are no children being born and so what is the aim of sexual union, just pleasure? It is said that each man who reaches heaven will have the sexual capacity of hundred men on earth. If so what is actually heaven?

### **Not the Same**

Considering these descriptions, we cannot say that the heaven envisaged in the Bible and in the Quran are the same. We cannot say that Christians and Muslims are looking forward to the same heaven. The heaven in the Bible is a state that the eyes have not seen and ears have not heard. There is no eating and drinking, because the resurrected bodies are totally transformed, will have no hunger and thirst and hence do not need food and drink. *“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat”* (Rev 7, 16). They will be eternally happy, seeing God face to face and singing His praises. *“Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”* (1 Jn 3, 2). *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our*

*God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Re.7, 9-10).*

In the Quran heaven is a place of comfort and luxury where they enjoy eating, drinking and mating beautiful women, the Houris, to have sexual satisfaction. God makes all these available for them in Jannah (Qur 2, 25; 52,19-24; 69, 24). In short, it seems to be a continuation of the luxurious life on earth. Thus, it is evident the Christian and Islamic concept of heaven are totally different. There seems to be some truth in the argument that the picture of heaven in the Islamic thought is a projection of the royal gardens of Persia and the luxurious villas of the very rich where all imaginable pleasures were available, with some additions from the biblical picture of the Paradise.

### **Eight Stories**

In the Islamic teaching of heaven there is the description of an eight-story mansion that is above the earth and the sky (Qur 2, 29; 78,12) Allah lives on the top-most floor. In each story below the angels are standing in guard. Those who lived a holy life will be admitted on each level, according to the degree of their holiness. Behind this description there seems to be the influence of the apocryphal books that were in circulation in the first two centuries before and after Christ among the Jews and later also among the Christians. One sees great similarity in this view of heaven to the descriptions in the Book of Enoch which speaks about ten stories of heaven. As the Angel guided Enoch on each level of heaven, the Muslims believe that Muhammad was guided by an angel all through seven levels of heaven and finally he reached the eighth level where Allah resides. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that the Islamic belief in the ascension of Mohammad and the description of the eight-story mansion are based on the vision of Enoch.

## Summary

There are a few similarities in the belief of the Christians and Muslims regarding the life after death, but the differences are much greater. There are similarities in the belief concerning the following: death happens only once, resurrection of the dead, Judgment, eternal punishment and eternal reward. However, there are too many differences in the descriptions of heaven. The description of heaven the Muslims believe in, called Jannah, seems to be a literal interpretation of the Paradise of the Bible or the Garden of Eden with several additions of physical pleasures.

If all these could be interpreted as symbolic descriptions as some Muslim scholars claim, there may be more similarities. However, the difference between man and woman, the low position assigned to women, the importance given to the fulfillment of all types of desire, emphasis given to physical pleasure etc. would continue as differences. Therefore, we cannot accept the assumption that there is not much difference between the faith of the Muslims and Christians.

## Conclusion

The Catholic Church gives clear answers to the questions regarding the life after death, what will happen to the universe, what is the goal of history etc. All people would die, as death came into the world as a result of sin. But through the “Paschal event”, that includes the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, eternal life is made available for humanity. Those who believe in Jesus and live according to the new commandment He has given (Jn 13,14), will receive eternal life. At the moment death, through the particular judgment, the person’s future will be decided forever. One will receive eternal punishment or eternal reward. Those who die without reaching the fullness of love will be purified in the purgatory.

The universe will come to an end, which could be called the end of the world or the eschatological event. The universe will be renewed, which the Bible calls the “*New Heaven and New Earth*”. When that happens, all the dead will be resurrected and will be brought before the glorified Jesus Christ for the Last Judgment, which will be the confirmation and public proclamation of the particular judgment. With this Last Judgment the history will reach its completion. A total transformation would take place in God-man relationship. Man would live in God or participate in the Divine life.

Another name found in the Bible for heaven is Paradise. In heaven there will be no difference between man and woman; no marriage or family life; no food or drink as none will be hungry or thirsty. There will be no pain, no death, no separation. All will live in God and the I-Thou relationship will reach its fullness. All these are described through many symbols, but the reality remains beyond the comprehension of human intellect. The resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ is the foundation for this belief. We need to remain open to the work of the Holy Spirit in each individual and community.

***“In hope we were saved.” (Rom 8, 24)***

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