

## *The Texts of the Convivium*

### **THE SUPREME SALVATION THAT COMES TO US FROM THE CHRIST AND DEIFICATION**

An aspiration dominating the thoughts and acts of Christians is “salvation”: i.e. “saving one’s soul”.

Salvation from what? In one word: from damnation. To put it more bluntly: saving oneself from the danger to fall down far from God and from all good things into those terrible afflictions without redemption that characterize the infernal state.

According to an extremely widespread way of thinking, this salvation is obtained by commending oneself to the man - God Jesus Christ, as if, in a way non-Christian religions had no words of hope for mankind’s salvation.

“Outside the Church there is no salvation” is a sentence that may sound both harsh and unjust in that it protects from eternal damnation only those who believe in Christ, excluding non-believers.

There are those who remedy this by assuming a way of being “in the Church” based on a certain adhesion to the will of God, even though not combined with explicit faith in the dogmas.

The “religious” man, defined as such in general terms, would supposedly save himself, regardless of whether he embraces Christianity. But if this is the case, what is the point of becoming Christian?

Judaism has its “righteous”, Islam has its “approximates” to Allah, or “friends” of Allah. Paganism has its Elysian Fields, the ultramondane abode of the wise and the heroes. Confucianism has its “ancestors”. Shintoism has its “kami” or gods. The wise, good and brave men of other religions have their paradises. On the basis of their psychic experiences, the Anglosaxon “spiritualists” and those who share their experiences tell us about an “aetheric world” where the desincarnated souls who come to the “light” have a dream life, a sort of collective dream, that can have its extremely pleasant and rewarding aspects.

What more does Christianity, the Christian faith, give us? What does it offer us that is more specific?

I am trying to give myself an answer. Here I guess there is one: the good news of christianity, the *Eu Anghélion* or Gospel, is that the ultimate end of human evolution is to become God. Man is a being who is – so to speak – “learning to become God”.

It is a supreme objective which he pursues not out of his own choice, like Adam or later those who built the Tower of Babel (a very tall building which was meant to reach up to heaven) but by God’s will.

This perfective goal is made possible by incarnation. Cur Deus homo? Why did God become man? Saint Maximus the Confessor, an eminent father of the Eastern Christian Church, replies: God becomes man so that man can become God.

If we really want to emphasize all that is implicit in this “becoming God” we must conclude that deification entails not just holiness, but omniscience together with any possible and conceivable perfection.

These words try to give an idea of the extent to which God – in the Christian view – loves his creatures and is generous and self-giving.

Put it down to my ignorance, but with all due respect and appreciation, I have for them, I can't find in other religions a suggestion for a loftier ultimate goal for man.

By becoming man, God implements perfect humanity. Here nature prolongs humanity, therefore the perfection of mankind extends to nature, to the whole universe, which is its collective body. By becoming man God therefore makes not just humanity perfect in its spiritual aspects, but also the whole of creation.

The perfection of creation stems from the perfection of the Creator who cannot but work perfectly. Similar statements seem to be contradicted sometimes by so many appalling evils rife in the world.

One might object that divine action for the time being seems to be thwarted by several counterforces. They are the famous "gates of hell" which, however, "shall not prevail" (Matthew, 16-18).

On the contrary final victory belongs to God. In this sense God is almighty, with virtual allmightiness.

In the end God shall be recognised and His "name" shall be sanctified by all creatures. His "reign" will extend everywhere to all levels of the being. And His "will" shall prevail universally – "in earth" "as it is in heaven" which is His own Kingdom. On earth - where that divine Kingdom "which is not of this world" yet (John, 18-36) will finally prevail.

God becoming incarnate in man – in Jesus of Nazareth – extends to all other human beings until God becomes incarnate in the whole of humanity.

This is how a divine-human society, the Church, comes about, the human aspect of which takes the form of a collective body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ef. 1, 22-23). The whole body has nourishment ministered (Col. 2, 19). So in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2, 21).

Turning again to the Christians, Paul exhorts the Christian to have the strength to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ so that they may all attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 3, 18-19; 4, 11-16).

The second letter of Peter (1,2-4) shows to the disciples of the Lord the goal of becoming partakers of the divine nature.

These disciples, Paul goes on to say, with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3,18).

Upon his glorious return on earth Jesus comes to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed (2 Thessalonians 1,10).

When Christ who is our life shall appear then shall you also appear with him in glory (Colossians 3,4).

And the Lord shall transfigure the bodies of his disciples shaping them to his body of glory and with the strength through which he can bring all things into his submission (Philippians 4, 20-21).

When what we will be is made known, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is - John writes in his first epistle (3,2).

We are destined to achieve the perfect knowledge of God and of Jesus, become partakers of the divine nature, Peter, or someone in his stead, repeats in the second letter attributed to him (1, 2-4).

In other words, as in Paul's letter to the Colossians, we are destined to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ (Colossians 2, 1-3) and to partake of all the fulness of divinity in Christ (2, 9 ff).

Having been united with him in a death like his, Christians will certainly also be

united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 1); Christians are heirs to God and co-heirs in Christ (Ro. 8, 14 ff). He is to them the firstborn among many (Ro. 8, 29). And around him gathers an assembly of firstborns who are enrolled in heavens – adds the letter to the Hebrews (12,23).

The parable of the “prodigal son”: this is what the Father says to his good son who has always been faithful: “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours” (Luke 15,31). It is a sentence that clearly defines the relationship between the Divine father and the only-begotten Son, between the Father and the countless children begotten through the Church.

Addressing the Father at the beginning of the Last Supper Jesus pleads with him that the apostles may be one as the Father and Son are one (John 17,11). And then he adds: My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am” (John 17, 20-24).

The Apocalypse (3,21) reads: “I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne”.

Kingship is fully taken on by the “thousands upon thousands of his holy ones”, by the boundless multitude of resurrected humans that accompany the Lord in his final return on earth to judge everyone (1, 14-16).

Those who believe in Jesus will do the works He has been doing, and they will do even greater things than these. They will have such power as they will draw energy from the Lord who is now united with the Father and seated at the right hand of the Father (John 14,12).

Together with Jesus the whole triumphant Church will act upon creation deifying it at all levels. The image in Apocalypse (21,ff) of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven on earth to make all things new is evocative.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth” says the author of this final and concluding book of the Bible “For *the first heaven and the first earth was gone*, and the sea is now no more. And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away.”

The description of this sight can refer to the manifestation of the sons of God, that is to say to the saints in heaven who shall accompany Christ in His last return to earth.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” writes Paul to the Romans (8, 19-22) and “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now”.

The deification coming from God affects the whole creation - along with human beings.