

The Texts of the Convivium

**GOD'S INCARNATION IN JESUS CHRIST
AND THE COLLECTIVE PRE-INCARNATION
WHICH PREPARES IT**

The coming of Jesus Christ closes the long epoch of the Old Testament and starts Christianity.

Jesus calls many people to join him in the closest way to form with him a mystical collective body, where they must grow up all together until they reach the same stature of their divine Master.

So they form all together what we may call a collective Christ. By growing all together in divine grace and power, they are more and more enabled to spiritualize, to transform, to deify all realities, the whole universe at any level.

It cannot escape our attention that something really new, something wholly new appears on this earth with the advent of Jesus Christ.

But we have also to keep in mind that the incarnation process shows a continuity and seems to be a common work to which mankind takes part as a whole.

We cannot say by any means that Jesus Christ comes down from heaven like something wholly new who finds here a quite unprepared setting.

Jesus will set a very close tie with his disciples. He represents himself as a vine whose shoots they are. But he feels also tied with many other people, we might say with the whole mankind.

In the day of the Last Judgement the Son of Man will say to all the righteous: "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me".

Then the righteous will say: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and made you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?"

The King will answer: "Truly I tell you: in so far as you did it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25, 34-40).

Jesus identifies himself with each man. An even closer link is the one which ties him to each man "who was born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (Jo 1, 13).

According this same John's Gospel, Jesus says somewhere else: "Whoever is from God, hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God (Jo 8, 47).

Coming back for a moment to the very beginning of the Gospel of John, it is said that "to all who received him, who believed in his name" the incarnate Word "gave power to become children of God" (Jo 1, 12).

All this means that in some way to become a son of God is a goal, but from a different point of view the man who will become a son of God is already such in a certain measure.

If we may say that God's incarnation realizes itself in Jesus in its proper sense, we may also say that something alike happens – to some minor extent, of course – also in those people who will accept and follow him. So there is a preparation to the coming of the Messiah. Many people have been called to help Jesus' mission, to support it.

Many people have been called, but only few have answered and so have been elected. Election depends not only upon vocation, but also upon acceptance.

The Hebrew prophets have been called to announce the future coming of the Messiah and the final renewal of all things.

John the Baptist has been called to preach conversion and recognize the Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The historical development of the people of Israel as a whole is a preparation to the coming of Jesus.

The historical environment has been prepared by the evolution of the whole mankind, and particularly by the Hebrews and those other peoples that influenced it, and also by the Greek civilization, by the conquests of Rome, by the formation of a common Mediterranean world with languages of common use – Greek and Latin – with roads, with a political unity, with all conditions which enabled Christianity to spread in such a short time.

We may make another consideration about the way in which God's Spirit pours into the human person of Jesus as a God's incarnation. During his childhood and adolescence Jesus was growing not only in stature and wisdom, but also “in divine favour” (as well as in “human” one) (Lk 2, 52)

Grace is given to him more and more in the course of his earthly existence, particularly in certain special moments: baptism, resurrection, ascension to heaven: but the first beginning of his earthly life already proves itself to be the fruit of a special divine intervention. Jesus' conception and birth are prodigious. By telling us that Jesus was born from a virgin, the Gospel reveals that a very special grace of God has intervened to bring Jesus into being as the God incarnate.

A similar intervention of divine grace takes place also in the generation of Isaac (Gen 18, 9-15; 21, 17), Samson (Judg 13, 2-25), and Samuel (1 Sam 1, 1-23). In these three cases a woman who cannot give birth to any children has a son by a special grace of God in a miraculous way. It is, substantially, just what happens to Mary, mother of Jesus.

God's incarnation realizes itself at its maximum in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, it seems that the coming of the Messiah is prepared by a large collective process. In order to avoid any confusion with what is called “incarnation” in its proper theological sense, I prefer to coin a different word: pre-incarnation. It indicates something imperfect and germinal, but essential, at the same time, for the process of incarnation as a whole, which at any rate shows itself as a collective phenomenon of historical and cosmic extent.