

THE REDEEMED FAMILY OF GOD: A REVIEW AND NOTES ON THE DOCUMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *SELECT QUESTIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF GOD THE REDEEMER*

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1. Introduction

*Select questions on the theology of God the redeemer*¹ is a document of the International Theological Commission (ITC). This Commission is said to have been born from a recommendation made by the Synod of Bishops that met in 1967. In the beginning, it consisted of thirty theologians, selected on the basis of advice from episcopal conferences in different parts of the world. This was to ensure that in their considerations, they would bring in diverse languages, cultural specificities, varying approaches to theological methods, a collaboration between the universal primate and the world episcopate, and an exchange between pastors and teachers. The aim for such a Commission was that there be a rapprochement of scholarly reflection and pastoral responsibility, especially in a period when intellectual problems were becoming ever more complex, and scholarship was leaving its footprint (whether at a sophisticated or a simple level) on the lives of the people in the modern society.² The ITC is a papal creation meant to help the Pope in his divinely appointed task of addressing new questions, dogmatic and moral. The documents of the ITC are issued either *in forma specifica* or *in forma generica*. The first option means that the entire document was approved by the entirety of the ITC (and then later by the Pope, otherwise it would not have been published), including the text, ideas, wording, and presentation. The second option means that the ITC accepts the principal ideas of the text but that

¹ Henceforth TGR.

² Cfr. E. OAKES, *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy. A Catholic and Evangelical Christology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2011, 421.

the individual authors take responsibility for their own section of the text. To this clarification, it could be said that the various statements and documents issued by the ITC, when later approved by the Pope *in forma specifica*, can give theologians a reliable indication of where theological development is likely to be headed.³ Over the years, the ITC took up the specific issues of Christology on four different occasions, which led to the promulgation of four documents: “Select Questions on Christology” (1979), “Theology, Christology, Anthropology” (1981), “The Consciousness of Christ Concerning Himself and His Mission” (1985), and “Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer” (1995). All these documents were approved *in forma specifica*, but the interest of this write-up is on the last document. This document explores selected questions in redemption theology that pose themselves with a particular force to the Church in the modern or contemporary world.⁴ But why the choice of the title: “The redeemed family of God”?

2. A Word on the Title

For the TGR, the Father has made “us” his children in that he redeemed us through Christ. In that Christ obeyed the Father’s will and gave his life for many; his person and his work of redemption acquired for mankind a meaning and dignity beyond comparison by the fact that it established that unique family relationship between God and mankind.⁵ In other words, TGR simply described redemption as God’s relationship with the human race and the whole of the created order; a relationship of the covenant by which God wills to associate human beings with his life, fulfilling more than they can conceive or desire, all that is positive within them, and liberating them from all that is negative within them.⁶ In the OT history of salvation, God had covenants with His people (aside from that of Adam) on four different occasions: With Noah, He swore never again to destroy the earth by flood (Gen 9:8-17), and the sign of the covenant was the rainbow. With Abraham, He pledged that his generation

³ *ibid.*, 420-421. For more on the ITC, see *International Theological Commission. Texts and Documents, 1969-1985*, Forward by J. RATZINGER, edited by M. SHARKEY, Ignatius, San Francisco 1989.

⁴ TGR (Part I) 41.

⁵ TGR (Part IV) 11.

⁶ TGR (Part I) 35.

would increase and bring blessings to all the earth (Gen 12:1-3; 22:16-18), and the sign of the covenant was circumcision. With Moses, He promised to make the Israelites his own people and a holy nation of priests, restoring the inheritance of Abraham and the rights and duties of Adam (Ex 19:5-6), and the sign of the covenant was the Passover. Then to David, He made a promise of an eternal dynasty and the restoration of all people to proper worship (2 Sam 7:8-19), and the sign of the covenant was the dynastic throne of the House of David.⁷ The reason why the covenant at Sinai (with Moses) was decisive and the most significant is because in it Yhwh became Israel's head and Israel became His people (His own possession); and as such having delivered them from slavery, He exacted a pledge of fidelity on them (Exod 20:1-17; Exod 34:28). The Israelites now have the fundamental conviction that they are a people of the Covenant: Yhwh is their God and they are the people of Yhwh (Exod 19:4-6; Josh 24).⁸ In the NT, this covenantal relationship of God and man became more evident in and through Christ. In Christ, man enters into the life of the Family who is God. Man enters into this communion of relationship with God by means of the New Covenant made manifest on the cross of Calvary, but tracing down to the moment of the self-emptying (Incarnation) of Jesus Christ.⁹ This New Covenant also sets a model for man since he now shares in God's life: "The New Covenant demands that people give precisely in the measure that God gives, which means that they give everything. The reward, however, is all-surpassing. The reward is to receive the very life of God, to love as God loves, with "His own glory and excellence" and "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pt 1:3). The reward for our total self-giving is God's total self-giving, in perfect and endless love and happiness. Only if we give as God gives may we live as God lives".¹⁰ By establishing and offering a Covenant to man, to the point of coming into and becoming incarnate in their very human condition, God established for himself a family; whom he redeemed in order to have a participation in the very life of God. This is what this article seeks to demonstrate.

⁷ Cfr. S. HAHN, *First Comes Love. Finding Your Family in the Church and the Trinity*, 58-59.

⁸ Cfr. R. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, 229, 376, 1237.

⁹ Cfr. S. HAHN, *First Comes Love*, 88.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 98.

3. Context and Content of TGR

The document of the International Theological Commission *Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer*, could be traced back to 1992 when the study of the theology of redemption was proposed to the members of the Commission by Pope John Paul II. The General discussions on the theme were held during several meetings of the Sub-Commission, and at the plenary sessions of the International Theological Commission itself, held in Rome in 1992, 1993 and 1994. This text was approved by the Commission on 29 November 1994, and was submitted to its President, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who approved it for publication. The document was eventually published on 7 October 1995.

The document is structured in four different and well vast parts. The *incipit* connects immediately the discussion to the human family by insisting that an adequate consideration of the theology of redemption (at least from the Christian perspective) must have its bearing on the condition of humanity. It held that the doctrine of redemption concerns what God has accomplished for mankind in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, namely, the removal of the obstacles lying between God and the human family, and the offer to mankind to participate in God's life.¹¹ Part I, described the actual situation of man which necessitated the need for a redeeming and transforming love. In a bid to show that the human family excludes not those of other faiths, this part also considered the various world religions (apart from Judaism) in relation to the theme of redemption (or salvation) and some contemporary movements that promise salvation to their followers. Part II on its own is an excursus on the biblical notion of redemption; from the OT and down to the NT. This biblical excursus reflects a never-ending search for the ultimate significance of the human condition.¹² Part III, dwelt on the historical perspective of the theology of redemption. That which the OT and NT portrayed, how they were being understood and interpreted down the history lane; beginning with the Patristic Fathers both in the East and in the West, to the modern interpretations of the redemptive act of God in Christ. The last part, which offers the soul of this article, reflects on the theology of redemption but with particular reference to the

¹¹ TGR (Part I) 1-2.

¹² TGR (Part II) 1.

Church and the modern world (or simply as the article calls it the “redeemed family of God).

Part I, laid emphasis that as in creation, redemption is first of all about the goodness of God – the author of redemption – before it is about man. This way redemption would truly mean the liberation of mankind and can be for all time and at all times the Good news of Salvation. A reverse of this, in which redemption begins with human need, would simply create a situation where every age creates its own Redeemer-God according to its need.¹³ Such creation would definitely destroy God’s work,¹⁴ and a look at the creation story helps in understanding this: In creating, God saw that every creation was “very good” (Gen 1:31); however, beginning with human history, his activity did not turn out to be as unambiguously “good” as God’s creation.¹⁵ This is why the Christian faith teaches that human beings are as a matter of historical fact alienated from the holiness of God because of sin. However, the divine initiative in moving in love towards sinful humanity, shows how God continually deals with mankind before and within history, and this is the underlying presupposition of the doctrine of redemption. This explains why the internal logic of the Christian view of the human condition demands that God be the author of redemption since what is in need of being healed and saved is nothing less than the very image of God in mankind.¹⁶ Thus, the image of God in man’s nature is indestructible because it is rooted in God, so also the reality of redemption has been won by God in Christ also forever. Both creation and redemption are rooted in God’s graciousness, goodness and freedom.¹⁷ Because the reality of redemption is solely the work of God, the ITC maintained that its full understanding is not possible. However, it acknowledges also that some understanding of the doctrine of redemption is possible; otherwise, the reasonableness of faith would be undermined, and would simply lead to fideism.¹⁸

¹³ TGR (Part I) 2.

¹⁴ Despite man’s activity, the image of God in him, although often concealed or twisted in history as a result of the Original sin and its effects, the Church teaches that it has not been completely eradicated or destroyed, mankind has not been abandoned by God, but rather that God, in his redeeming love, intends a glorious destiny for it. TGR (Part I) 3.

¹⁵ TGR (Part I) 3.

¹⁶ TGR (Part I) 10

¹⁷ TGR (Part I) 11.

¹⁸ TGR (Part I) 12.

If redemption implies liberation, then the question would be, from what is mankind being liberated or redeemed? To this TGR noted that primarily, mankind is liberated from sin which disfigures the human condition, and which human beings believed is the cause of fragmentation, inadequacies and frustration in their lives at many levels. However, if this is so, what about those evils which threaten and destroy human existence; such as famine, pestilence, natural disaster, physical and mental suffering, and even death? If mankind yearns to be liberated from these, then they also speak eloquently of the human need for redemption. Thus, for a full picture of the need for redemption, both *malum culpa*e (moral evil due to man's sin) and *malum poenae* (suffering) must go together as necessitating factors.¹⁹

In order not to have just a theology of redemption, the TGR proposes that the truth of redemption which illuminates the human condition must be complemented by an assessment of men and women of today see their actual historical situation. To this effect, it engaged in an incarnational theology by discussing side by side, the Christian doctrine of redemption and the modern world. Here, TGR recognizes that one major challenge of presenting the Christian doctrine of redemption to the men and women of today is that apart from the pluralism of religions with their different doctrines on redemption, there also exist contemporary alternative movements and lifestyles which promise salvation to their followers. These are becoming each passing day a force to reckon with, as they appear to offer solutions that appeal to the common man.²⁰ In this modern context, there are two dominant ideologies²¹ and two dominant poles between which the modern people are in fact torn. With regards to the "two poles", there is in every individual an eradicable desire for life, happiness and fulfilment, and on the other hand, there is an inevitable experience of limitation, dissatisfaction, failure and suffering. These experiences are also evident in the public sphere where on the one hand there is immense progress due to breakthroughs in science and technology, and the spread of the means of communication; but on the other hand, there is an experience of so many catastrophes in the world, evident in the

¹⁹ TGR (Part I) 13.

²⁰ TGR (Part I) 29.

²¹ These ideologies are not exhaustive of the contemporary time, there is what the TGR called the cultural and intellectual pluralism, hedonism and stoicism which seem to offer man temporary solution to their existential problems. However, the two listed above are the dominant ones.

terrible oppression and exploitation people suffer; in which they see themselves as helpless victims of a cruel fate. In this contemporary context of widespread injustice and lack of hope, the need for a [re]presentation of the doctrine of redemption becomes very urgent.²² This is because the Christian faith sees that contemporary human beings are not simply looking for an explanation of their condition but are waiting or hoping for an effective deliverance from evil, and a confirmation and fulfilment of all that is positive in their lives.²³ From the point of view of ideological categories, there is the self-confident modernity; which happens to be a belief in the possibility of auto-redemption, and the disenchanted post-modernity; which implies an attitude of despair of any improvement in the human condition; an attitude in which one believes that salvation must be from without and not within – the human person cannot in any way help himself.²⁴ With regards to these ideological categories, TGR insisted that the redemptive message should be grounded on the two key Christian doctrines of Christology and the Trinity; for in these doctrines there is the ultimate rationale for the Christian understanding of human history, and of the human person, made in the image of the Triune God, a Unity in Community, and redeemed out of love by God's only Son, Jesus Christ, for the purpose of participation in the divine life, for which mankind was created. This participation is testified to by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body when human beings in their total reality share in the fullness of divine life.²⁵ Here one sees that no one could lay claim (like the Pelagians) to any sort of auto-redemption or self-realization of salvation; it is the work of God through Jesus Christ His Son; a work with which man is expected to cooperate. Equally, no one can claim (like the Gnostics) that the body is evil and inhibits the soul from attaining salvation; as such that the soul would need redemption from the body. This position makes a mockery of the Incarnation of Christ, the fact that human beings are created in God's image, and the teaching of the Church (rooted in the scriptures) on the resurrection of the body.

²² TGR (Part I) 30-31.

²³ TGR (Part I) 33.

²⁴ A similar argument was made by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in its letter *Placuit Deo*, in what it calls Neo-pelagianism which is the tendency to believe that salvation is of human might and power, and has nothing to do with the transcendent; and Neo-gnosticism which is the tendency to believe that salvation implies a relationship with the transcendent, and a negation of relation with other human beings or corporeal world.

²⁵ TGR (Part I) 34.

4. Biblical Perspective and the Familial Character of Redemption

Part II is basically a biblical reflection on the theology of redemption. In the OT, among the major consideration of TGR, is the figure of a “redeemer” (*gō’ēl*). From its root, the term bears an inherent familial character, and it goes also to show how mankind has become “the redeemed family of God”. In Israel, families could pay the ransom for a relative, in order to preserve the solidarity of the family (Cfr. Deut 25; Lev 25; Num 35:9-34.). Israel’s law allows for a condemned person to be bought back. The payment of the *kofer* frees the guilty person, his or her family, and the whole community, as the conflict is resolved.²⁶ This function of the *gō’ēl*, is also attributed to Yhwh, and it shows him as the father who cannot renounce his obligation towards His family (cfr. Ps 79:10).²⁷ This OT idea of *go’el* would resurface in the NT where Jesus appropriated the role of liberator to Himself in launching his public ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free ...” (Luke 4:18-19).²⁸ One notable fact about the two instances – the Exodus event and the salvific work of Christ – is that the object of God’s redemptive activity is always the people rather than individuals.²⁹ God is

²⁶ TGR (Part II) 3.

²⁷ Cfr. M. CIMOSA, *Redenzione e salvezza nell’Antico Testamento*, 29.

²⁸ G. O’Collins argues for Jesus’ role as the *Go’el* by making a connection between his redemptive work and the exodus from the slavery in Egypt: When he was executed, Jesus had to come to Jerusalem for the Passover, which was the Jewish family feast celebrated in the spring at the time of the full moon which commemorates the original exodus (Exod. 12:1-28; Deut. 16:1-8). Secondly, it was on the afternoon of the 14th of the Jewish first month of Nisan, which overlaps with March-April that the paschal lambs were sacrificed; and lastly, it was also the evening at the Passover meal itself when the unleavened bread was eaten with roast lamb, that Jesus died. O’Collins then concludes that, whether it was a Passover meal (the Synoptic Gospels) or not (John’s Gospel), the Last Supper, followed by Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, coincided with the Passover and its associated week-long Feast of the Unleavened Bread (Mark 14:1-2, 12-16). And this is why Christians quickly came to understand how Jesus’ dying and rising had fulfilled the original exodus and its commemoration in the Passover festivals. Cfr. G. O’COLLINS, *Jesus our Redeemer. A Christian Approach to Salvation*, 119.

²⁹ Pope John Paul II similarly used such line of argument to demonstrate the universality of Christ salvific work. He argued that salvation wrought by Christ is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Him, but to all. This is why he insisted that it should be made concretely available to all as much as possible through missionary activities of the Church. This universality of salvation implicitly acknowledges the fact that many people do not have the opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church due to

said to ‘ransom’ His people and be their *go’el* (redeemer).³⁰ The actions of God in the Exodus (Cfr. Exod 1-15) and the redeeming love of His Son Jesus Christ, show how freedom comes from the unselfish gift of self for a nation or a family.³¹ His people are His family, and He liberates them and looks out for them at all times.

One of those ways through which God looks out for his people could be seen in His provision of a means or liturgy of expiation. It was the symbolic act of homage by which the guilty person covers and repays a debt to Yhwh. A dominant part of this celebration is the animal or blood sacrifices. Here, Yhwh provides for his people, blood for the rite of forgiveness. The sacrificial blood represents life being poured out and expresses the gratuity of forgiveness that Yhwh accords His people.³² Like *go’el*, the rite of expiation equally possesses a familial character. Firstly, in every OT sacrificial victim, there is a sort of threat coded into the sacrifice. It is like a warning that contains blessings and curses in its respective fulfilment or nonfulfillment. As for the blessing, the blood of the animals creates a new family bond that was established through the covenant thereby making the partners become “blood kin”.³³

Secondly, the sacrificial victim has also a substitutionary or representative significance, given the fact that it served as a proxy. When a father entered the courtyard of the Temple and lay down the Passover lamb for his family, he was as well laying down his life for his family. This attests to why the Passover sacrifice was so dramatic, solemn and purgative or purifying for its participants. The drama was in the offering which is being represented in all that life laid down – all the sin forgiven, and all the tomorrows redeemed.³⁴ For the modern generation, animal sacrifice may seem like an empty ritual and the satisfaction of a primitive impulse – violent, and wasteful; but for Israel, it was an action laden with significant meaning. It was the principal way of ratifying, renewing and repairing the

the fact that the social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit such, and the fact that they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which comes from Christ; it is the result of his Sacrifice, which is communicated by the Holy Spirit. RM 10.

³⁰ Cfr. J. JENSEN, *Redemption*, 137.

³¹ TGR (Part II) 6.

³² TGR (Part II) 7.

³³ Cfr. S. HAHN, *The Fourth Cup*, 44.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 47.

relational bond between God and his people.³⁵ This is why TGR advised that sacrifice (though no longer in the form of animal sacrifice) should not be regarded as just the relic of an outmoded religiosity. This is because the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the Cross which has fulfilled and made obsolete the animal sacrifice retains its value at all times and for all people.³⁶

A third dominant feature in the OT theology of redemption is the figure of the Suffering Servant of God in Isaiah 53:4-12. A figure with intercessory and vicarious significance.³⁷ This vicarious significance calls forth its embedded familial character; this is because in his suffering he bore the sins of his people and by his wounds, they were healed. Here, is being presented in a new and original manner the salvific value of suffering and of death accepted by one in favour of others (which could include one's family members), and more precisely in expiation of their sins and in the renewal of their relationship with God.³⁸ J. Ratzinger gave a Christological interpretation to this servant. For him, Isaiah's Song of the Suffering Servant is a gaze into the future in search of the one who is to come; a mock king who is related to the figure of the "scapegoat". Whatever was afflicting the people is offloaded onto him and in this way, he is to be driven out of the world. Here, one sees the picture of Jesus: the soldiers who crucified Jesus, actually accomplished what was foretold and represented in the picture of the suffering servant: "Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes, we are healed" (Isa 53:5).³⁹

³⁵ *ibid.*, 43. Similarly, modern generations have problems understanding the blood realism of sacrificial practise. But for the Jews, blood is a life-carrier; the blood in sacrifices represents life being poured out. Even in secular sciences, experience teaches that the human person lives as long as blood flows in the veins. In addition to being a life-carrier, blood is equally transferable; for when the Israelites are being sprinkled with animal blood, such atones in place of their blood being shed. Even in the secular parlance, till the 19th century, clumps of blood were placed on an epileptic with the hope that this blood would regenerate him, a medical precursor of modern blood transfusion. Thus, it could be said that the sacrificial practise operates with a certain logic based on these 2 fundaments of blood as life-carrier and as transferable. TGR (Part II) 4.

³⁶ Cfr. TGR (Part II) 12.

³⁷ Cfr. TGR (Part II) 5.

³⁸ Cfr. G. PULCINELLI, *La morte di Gesù come espiazione. La concezione paolina*, 126-127. In pages 123-130 Pulcinelli exposed the import of Isaiah 53 in the discussion of the Suffering Servant.

³⁹ J. RATZINGER, BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. Holy Week*, 173, 199.

These OT themes of redemption as already highlighted in their various considerations are brought to a sharper focus in Jesus Christ. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; which echoes both in the Paschal lamb of Exodus which served as a *go'el* that saved the firstborn of the people of Israel in Egypt; the praxis of the tamid sacrifice in the temple of a one-year-old lamb without blemish whose blood had expiatory value; and the Suffering Servant of Yhwh in Isaiah who carries “the sins of many” (Isa 53:12). Thus, it could be said that Judaism already had provided these models of expiatory death, but this is carried further in the NT because of the decisive significance given to “the blood of Christ”. This blood shed on the Cross of Calvary was regarded as effective in establishing a new and perfect covenant between God and the New Israel – the redeemed family of God.⁴⁰

5. The Familial Character of the Patristic Understanding of Redemption

In part III, the Biblical themes on redemption formed the basis of the patristic reflection upon redemption. In the reflection of the patristic Fathers, the gulf between the human condition, and the hope for freedom to be sons and daughters of God, are clearly understood and presented; God’s initiative bridges the gulf through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his resurrection. Though there are many schools of thought, these elements form the basis of their thought. Thus, basic in their thought is the fact that men and women became members of God’s family (sons and daughters of God) through the sacrifice of Christ. They are now incorporated into the New Covenant with God, made possible by the blood of Christ.⁴¹ Later on, Anselm will see this sacrifice as vicarious satisfaction, in which he explains that it is only Christ who is God and man that can satisfy the sin of mankind which offends the infiniteness of God and His love.⁴² Peter Abelard sees this sacrifice as the revelation of God’s love, and as an example that stirs men to imitation. So just as Christ’s sacrifice reveals God’s love, men and women in imitation of Christ similarly reveal to one another the depth of God’s love.⁴³ Augustine and Aquinas both see in Christ and in his sacrifice a representative head of regenerated humanity; the family of God. They also see the Church as the

⁴⁰ TGR (Part II) 12.

⁴¹ TGR (Part III) 13.

⁴² TGR (Part III) 16.

⁴³ TGR (Part III) 17.

family of God, and maintain “that Christ is the head of the Church, and that the grace that he possesses as the head is passed on to all the members of the Church because of the organic conjunction that obtains with the Mystical Body”.⁴⁴ In this understanding of Christ’s sacrifice as representative headship, the opposition between the redeemer and the redeemed is overlooked, as its emphasis lies in the way in which Christ identifies himself with fallen humanity: he is the new Adam, the progenitor of redeemed humanity, the Head or the Vine into whom individuals must be incorporated as branches or members of God’s family.⁴⁵ The theory of representative headship understands redemption as God’s gracious intervention in which the Incarnate Word becomes the gathering point for the constitution of a reconciled and restored humanity – of God’s family. This intervention reached its culmination in the paschal mystery, in which Christ through his loving submission to the Father’s will, seals this new covenant family relationship⁴⁶

6. The Heritage of the Redeemed Family

Part IV speaks on the identity of the redeemer and the heritage of the redeemed family: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” (Gal 4:4-7). By virtue of this adoption through Jesus into the family of God, men and women have become heirs of God, and are entitled to the spiritual inheritance of their Father. “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ....” (Rom 8:12-17). Even from the moment of creation man has never been consid-

⁴⁴ TGR (Part III) 18.

⁴⁵ TGR (Part III) 38.

⁴⁶ TGR (Part III) 39.

ered son of God, he was simply a creature made in God's image and likeness but not a son. This disqualifies him of laying any claim of inheritance to God. However, in Jesus man now enjoy this rare privilege of inheritance as son. Jesus has become the first-born of all creation (Col 1:15), a brother to many brothers (Heb 2:11), and so man can dare to call God *Abba* (Rom 8:15). He [Jesus] is the heir of God (Heb 1:2) who has made man co-heir, and so allowed him to share in what God had kept for him [Christ] (Rom 8:17). Man has become a sharer of God's heritage through Christ. This clearly justifies the position of TGR that Christ represents more of a "beginning" than Adam himself; given that "Originating" *Love* is more that "Original" *Sin*.⁴⁷ Even before Adam's fall man had not the privilege of sonship, but in Christ's self-giving love, man has become a son in the Son. The TGR affirmed that the notion of self-giving of the Redeemer both on the Easter mystery and on the mystery of Incarnation is an invitation to men to live as "*fili in Filio*" (sons in the Son).⁴⁸ This implies that they are invited through Christ (in the Holy Spirit) to share in the divine life of the Trinity.⁴⁹ In the self-giving love of Christ, man could now be able to experience a share in the divine life by way of an exchange or interchange.

When the Scripture speaks of Christ's mediation, it also makes an appeal to the term of exchange (between God and man).⁵⁰ This exchange tells of the great effect or benefit of the self-giving love of Christ to man. It gives man the opportunity of enjoying those things that on his own alone could not have been possible. The nature of love this exchange portrays lies on the fact that Christ had to experience man's pitiable and precarious condition, while man enjoys the glorious benefits that were Christ's. But in what manner exactly does this exchange happen? Are there limitations to things that were exchanged or was it

⁴⁷ TGR (Part IV) 39.

⁴⁸ In refusing God's invitation from the beginning, humanity deviated from its true destiny, and embraced an alienation from God and from his plan of love, man is again called to communion with God. TGR (Part IV) 41.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁰ Although related to the theme of mediation, this exchange, however, expresses communion more directly than unity. The Son not only joins humanity to God by his divine and human nature and by his redemptive work; he also brings about a complete exchange between himself and humanity, an exchange both ontological and existential. The ontological aspect of this exchange is expressed in the well-known patristic dictum: God the Word became man so that man might be made god (by sheer grace and not in any way by nature). Cfr. R. KERESZTY, *Jesus Christ*, 212.

a total exchange of everything belonging to Christ? Firstly, there is a major limitation; this exchange is not formally an exchange between Christ's divinity and man's humanity. It was not as if Christ became man thereby losing his divinity, so that man can become divine thereby seizing to be human any longer. Rather it could be said that it was an exchange between Christ's richness and man's poverty: "you know the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich though he was, was made poor for you, so that you become rich from his poverty" (2 Cor 8:9). In the lowliness of man and in his precarious situation (poverty situation), Christ nevertheless deemed it necessary to become like him and to bear the burden of his fragility, and in doing so elevates man into communion with God (position of richness). Secondly, it was also an exchange between his power and man's weakness; "He was crucified for his weakness, but lives for the power of God. And we who are weak in him, we will live with him for the power of God towards you" (2 Cor 13:14).⁵¹ Thirdly, it was an exchange between Christ's fullness and man's nothingness. This is because the love of Christ which supersedes any knowledge, filled man with "total fullness of God" (Eph 3:19). This communication of fullness comes to man from he who was first abased or reduced to nothing, and who annihilated "himself becoming similar to men and being obedient even till death and death on the cross" (cfr. Phil 2:7-8). Fourthly, in terms of the Son's relationship with the Father, there are two other exchanges: the first is the exchange between man's sin and Christ's justice; "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we could become the justice of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). The expression "He was made sin" becomes a metonymy which tells of an action through its effect. Thus, the torn face of Christ on the cross refers man to the image of his sin, but at the same time communicates to him God's justice and stirs him to conversion. The second is the exchange between curse and blessing: "Christ ransomed us, liberating us from the curse of the law, becoming for us cursed, as it is written, 'cursed is he who hung on the wood', and that the blessings of Abraham come to the Gentiles in Christ, in a way that we receive the spirit, object of promise, through faith" (Gal 3:13-14; cfr. Deut 21:23). In exchange for the curse, the love of Christ communicates to man the blessings of God which is his own Spirit.⁵² That is why man can now cry *Abba* Father because in Christ and through the Spirit he has received adoption to sonship; he now shares in the very life of God.

⁵¹ Cfr. B. SESBOUÉ, *Gesù Cristo l'unico mediatore*, 101-102.

⁵² *ibid.*, 102.

7. The Redeemed Family of God: Identity and Action

In the world, one might still hear certain inhibitions: I need my free space; I do not want to sacrifice my life for my children; I want to actualize myself and nothing more, etc. But on the contrary, in self-giving love, Jesus' followers have discovered their lasting and redeemed identity as people and family of God.⁵³ Its effect lies in the fact that this redeemed fellowship transcends all the old religious, social and cultural divisions. United in the love of Christ they now share themselves and what they possess with one another as Christ had equally done for them.⁵⁴ In their fellowship, the uniting power of Christ's redemptive love breaks down barriers and goes beyond the boundaries that so often isolate individuals and entire groups. St. Paul testified to the impact of this love in the new post-resurrection community, "Baptized into union with him, you have all put on Christ like a garment. Now there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free person, male or female; for you are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:27-28). This implies that redemption is realized not simply in individuals in their restoration to the divine image, but also in a restored and revived human community or assembly.⁵⁵

In this ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) made possible through Christ's self-giving sacrifice of the cross, the union between members are fostered and sustained through the Eucharist; which is the ever-living presence of that sacrifice. And without the Eucharist there is no 'blood' relation among the children of God and hence no Church of Christ,⁵⁶ but in the Eucharist, they find the fullness of a family life and communion with the Redeemer. In it, they unite themselves to the self-offering of Jesus, and are nourished and transformed into the Body of Christ.⁵⁷ In the communion of flesh and blood with Jesus they receive the grace and the power to live as He lives, to love as He loves, and to give themselves completely in self-donation for the sake of others (and for Christ's sake). In the Eucharist, they

⁵³ Cfr. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus our Redeemer*, 193.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁵ Cfr. B. DALY, *He Himself is our Peace (Ephesians 2:14). Early Christian Views of Redemption in Christ*, in *The Redemption* (149-176), 169.

⁵⁶ Cfr. C. UZONDU, *The Hypostatic Union as the Principle of the Eucharist*, 85. As L. Schökel would say, "Giving us his blood to drink, he makes us his blood relations and establishes a new blood circulation in his body which is the Church. We should feel this blood beating in the organism of the Church". L. SCHÖKEL, *Celebrating the Eucharist. Biblical Meditations*, St. Paul's Publication, London 1988, 76.

⁵⁷ TGR (Part IV) 66.

receive the grace to live as Jesus lived and to die by laying down their lives as Jesus laid down his life.⁵⁸ The Eucharist makes them new people, an assembly or a community committed to Christ's way of life and living in his Spirit.⁵⁹ The presence of the Spirit leads the entire humanity in the truth of the New Covenant.

In the New Covenant, "becoming a disciple of Jesus means accepting the invitation to belong to God's family", where members are now siblings in a close-knit bond, where one denies himself for the sake of others, gives up one's comforts and leisure so that others will have comfort and leisure, and looks upon others in love even when they do not reciprocate the love.⁶⁰ Such a life of self-giving and self-denial marks the way of integration into every family, and this is why it is not odd for family members to make sacrifices for the sake of one another. A dad "puts to death" the things that keep him from loving his children as he should. A mom "puts to death" her comforts, her cravings, so that she can be free to raise children who are happy, wise, and strong. A child over time learns to subdue bodily cravings and impulses for the sake of healthy family life. The child in turn grows into an adult, a caregiver who must give time and attention to Mom and Dad as age and illness take their toll. All of these are natural acts of self-denial that people offer spontaneously for the sake of love,⁶¹ which find an echo in the words of Jesus Christ, "If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).⁶²

⁵⁸ Cfr. S. HAHN, *First Comes Love*, 92.

⁵⁹ This is the reason why Christianity is a radically incarnational faith, which means that grace becomes visible, enfleshed, and present in history in the living testimony of the community of believers. It is also a radically social faith, binding men in the Spirit to Christ and to one another. Cfr. T. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 196.

⁶⁰ Cfr. S. HAHN, *First Comes Love*, 128-129. S. Hahn argues here that such love does not in any way entails tolerance of sin. But on the contrary, that one finds occasion to correct, admonish and even punish those under one's care. However, these must be done in love, for the good of the other, and not for revenge or desire to satisfy one's desire for power or control. It must be aimed at helping another find his way back to the right path. And this demands self-sacrifice and self-giving; for one denies himself the wish to vent the rage that wells up within, he also denies himself the pleasure of responding inappropriately, and one gives himself entirely to winning the other who strays from the right path. *ibid.*, 129.

⁶¹ Cfr. S. HAHN, *First Comes Love*, 106.

⁶² In his self-denial on the cross, the crucified Jesus become the most apt symbol for the Christian, for he too must die to sin, to the self that turns from God, to all that is not God, and finally, in that final passage he must go through, to life itself, clinging only on God, for the gift of eternal life. There is no salvation without the Cross, without pain, without a dying. That is why taking up one's cross is a condition for following Jesus. Like Jesus, each Christian is called

8. Conclusion

Redemption in Christ could be said to be characterized by two aspects; self-giving love; through which were being liberated, and the communion of family bond it established and fostered. The notion of the self-giving of the Redeemer for all is undoubtedly for Christians, an invitation and example to living their lives as a family of God.⁶³ In this sense, they journey towards the one and only Lord, the Redeemer, in order to be more fully united with him. Thus, the uniqueness of the Redeemer is revealed in the life of believers here and now. In this world, Christians try, by their imitation of Christ, to live out and propagate redemption. Their virtuous living and the example of a Christian lifestyle make it possible for people to come to know who the one and only Redeemer of this world is. This is what evangelization is all about – bringing in people, so that they may become part of the family of God through self-giving love established by Jesus and propagated now by his disciples.⁶⁴

and enabled to enter into the paschal mystery, to that mystery of self-denial, the mystery of the faithful love of God that sustains man in Christ. Cfr. T. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 194.

⁶³ TGR (Part IV) 12.

⁶⁴ TGR (Part IV) 13.