

Session 14: Supernatural Life

HYMN: O Holy Spirit, by Whose Breath



O Holy Spirit, by Whose breath
life rises vibrant out of death,
come to create, renew, inspire;
come, kindle in our hearts Your
fire.

You are the seeker's sure resource,
of burning love the living Source,
Protector in the midst of strife,
the Giver and the Lord of life.

In You, God's energy is shown;
to us, God's varied gifts made
known.
Yours is the tongue and Yours the
ear;
Teach us to speak; teach us to hear.

Flood our dull senses with Your
light,
in mutual love our souls unite.
Your pow'r the whole creation fills;
confirm our weak, uncertain wills.

From inner strife grant us release;
turn nations to the ways of peace;
to fuller life Your people bring
that as one Body we may sing.

(Bow) Praise to the Father, Christ,
His Word,
and to the Spirit, God the Lord.
To Them all honour, glory, be
both now and for eternity.

PRAYER: See Eph 1:17-19.

Let us pray: O God,
grant us a spirit
of wisdom and insight
to know You clearly.
Enlighten our innermost vision,
that we may know the great hope
to which You have called us,
the wealth of Your glorious heritage
to be distributed among the members
of the Church,

and the immeasurable scope
of Your power
in us who believe.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
— Amen

READING:

Jn 3:14-16

The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*A Reading from the holy Gospel
according to John— *Glory to You, O Lord*

Jesus said,

"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent
in the desert,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
that all who believe
may have eternal life in Him.

"Yes, God so loved the world
that He gave His only Son,
that whoever believes in Him
may not die,
but may have eternal life."

The Gospel of the Lord

— *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

In the Apostles' Creed,

we say,

"I believe in life everlasting."

By that,

we mean that the good
shall live for ever
in the glory and happiness
of Heaven.

It was to purchase this life
for us —
supernatural life —
that our Saviour suffered.

BIBLE READING

Ps 108-150

This week

you will finish reading the Psalms.

But you should come back to them
whenever you want to talk to God
and do not know what to say. —

Session 14

Here is what Pope Benedict says:

"In his *Rule*,
St. Benedict said,
'Our mind must be
in accord with our voice.'

"Normally,
thought precedes word;...
but praying the Psalms...
is exactly the other way round:
the word, the voice,
goes ahead of us,
and our minds must adapt to it.

"For on our own we human beings
do not 'know how to pray
as we ought' —
we are too far removed from God;
He is too mysterious
and too great for us.

"And so God has come to our aid:
He Himself
provides the words of our prayer
and teaches us to pray.

"Through the prayers
that come from Him,
He enables us
to set out toward Him.

"By praying together
with the brothers and sisters
He has given us,
we gradually come to know Him
and draw closer to Him."

Thus we participate in
"The Communion Among the Saints
in the Body of Christ,"
our topic for next week.

Supernatural Life

Introduction

When the Church first welcomes unbaptized people in the Rite of Acceptance, the priest says, "What do you ask of God's Church?" and they answer "Faith." Then he asks, "What does faith offer you?" and they answer, "Eternal life."

"Eternal" means "everlasting," with no end *or beginning*. In fact, eternal life is not a matter of time at all; it is existence in which "duration" disappears.¹

"Eternal life is not an endless sequence of moments, in which we would have to try to overcome boredom and anxiety in the face of what cannot be ended," says Pope Benedict XVI. It is "a new quality" of life, in which we are free from "the fragmentation of existence in the accelerating flight of moments."

Nor is eternal life simply the life that comes after death. "It can be already present in the midst of this earthly life and its fleeting temporality² as something new and different and greater."³

"Begotten" vs. "made"

Eternal life is also called *supernatural* life, *spiritual* life, *divine* life, or *God's* life. It is the kind of life God the Father has by nature.⁴ And "just as the Father possesses life in Himself, so He has granted it to the Son to have life⁵ in Himself."⁶ God the Son has supernatural life by nature because He is begotten by God the Father: "begotten, not made,"⁷ and therefore "consubstantial⁸ with the Father"⁹ — of the same nature.

Everything God makes is like Him, for, ultimately, there is nothing else for it to be like. Space is like Him in its hugeness; matter, in its energy; plants, because they are alive; insects, in their activity and fertility; and the higher mammals, in their affections. Humans — whom God made deliberately "in His image"¹⁰ — are even more like Him, for besides being alive, active, and fertile, we can also *reason* and *love*.¹¹

But even humans do not have supernatural life by nature. We are not *begotten* by God, but *made* or *created*,¹² so we are not the same *kind* of being as He is: we are not consubstantial with Him.

In fact, human life is only a dim shadow of God's life. Trying to compare them is like trying to compare the life of two-dimensional creatures confined to the surface of a card table with the life of the person playing the cards,¹³ or the life of an insubstantial ghost with the life of a living person.¹⁴

It is misleading even to call them both "life," says C.S. Lewis, for they are as incommensurable¹⁵ as the "greatness" of space and the "greatness" of God. Instead, he suggests using the distinct names that John gives them in the Greek of the New Testament:¹⁶ *Bios*¹⁷ for human life and *Zoë*¹⁸ for divine life.¹⁹

1 See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity," Appendix 1.

2 "Timefulness" or "subjection to time," from the Latin *tempus, temporis* ("time").

3 Pope Benedict XVI: *God is Near Us*, "My Joy Is To Be in Thy Presence," 2

4 He is the "living God" (Ps 84:3). See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity" and its Appendix 1.

5 Here, in the Greek, "life" is *zoë*.

6 Jn 5:26

7 See the Nicene Creed.

8 "Of the same substance or nature."

9 The Nicene Creed. See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity."

10 See Gn 1:26-27. Also see the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

11 See CCC 356, 375.

12 See Jer 18:1-6; Rom 9:20-21.

13 See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

14 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*.

15 There is no unit that can be used to measure them both (like distance and time in Physics); or one is immeasurably greater than the other (like the finite and the infinite in Mathematics); or one is not worthy to be measured in the same terms as the other.

16 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 2. See also Pope Benedict XVI: *God is Near Us*, My Joy Is to Be in Thy Presence, 2.

17 The "course of life." It appears in the English "biography," "biology," "bioengineering," etc.

Mortals can become gods

Now "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die, but may have eternal *Zoë*."²⁰ God the Son became Man so that we too "might have *Zoë*, and have it to the full."²¹

Only Jesus can give us *Zoë*. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the *Zoë*," He said.²² "Whoever possesses the Son possesses *Zoë*; whoever does not possess the Son of God does not possess *Zoë*."²³

John says he wrote his Gospel "to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have *Zoë* in His name."²⁴

"This is what we proclaim to you," he says: "the eternal *Zoë* that was present to the Father and became visible to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share *Zoë* with us."²⁵

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that God became Man

- so that we might become "sharers of the divine nature."²⁶
- so that man "might become a son of God."²⁷
- so that God, "made Man, might make men gods."²⁸
- "so that we might become God."²⁹

In fact, the *Catechism* calls God's gift of His own life "deifying:" literally, "god-making."³⁰ Accordingly, we are going to dare³¹ to use "god" (small *g*) for a human who possesses *Zoë*;³² we will use "mortal"³³ for one who does not.

Jesus Himself used "god." When the Jews objected, "You who are only a man are making yourself God," Jesus replied, "Is it not written in your law, 'I have said, you are gods'?"³⁴ He was quoting Scripture: "You are gods, all of you sons of the Most High."³⁵

Is it shocking to call humans "gods"? Father Vince shocked himself once when, after baptizing a baby, he said impulsively, "This child now has as much right to Heaven as Jesus Christ Himself!" However, that is the truth, and no lesser word than "god" can even begin to suggest the difference between those who have *Zoë* and those who do not.

Gods are not just better or holier mortals;³⁶ they are a different *kind* of being. No amount of *improvement* will change a mortal into a god; it takes a *transformation*. God has to do it, for it "surpasses the power of human intellect and will."³⁷ Mortals cannot even *merit*³⁸ the transformation; God's offer of *Zoë* "depends entirely on [His] gratuitous initiative."³⁹

18 "Living." It appears in the English "zoo," "zoology," "zodiac," etc.

19 "In St. John's Gospel *life* refers to the divine life which Christ communicates to us" (Pope John Paul II: *Reflection on Science at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*; see the talk on "A Place For Science in the Catholic Faith," Appendix 1).

20 Jn 3:16

21 Jn 10:10

22 Jn 14:6

23 1 Jn 5:12

24 Jn 20:31

25 1 Jn 1:2-3

26 2 Pt 1:4

27 CCC 460

28 CCC 460

29 CCC 460

30 See CCC 1999.

31 At Mass, we say, "At the Saviour's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say 'our Father.'"

32 Excluding Christ, who has *Zoë* by nature; He is God (with a capital G).

33 From the Latin *mors, mortis* ("death").

34 See Jn 30-36.

35 Ps 82:6

36 Paul called Christians "saints," notably in his salutations (see 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1), where he also addresses those "called to holiness" (see Rom 1:1, Cor 1:1-2). However, "saints" soon came to mean people who are eminently holy (see John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Saints." We will use "god" to mean a person who possesses *Zoë*, regardless of whether or not he is eminently holy.

37 CCC 1998

38 "Earn" or "deserve."

39 See CCC 1998. "With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from Him, our Creator" (CCC

Re-birth

By accepting God's offer, we become "sharers"⁴⁰ of Christ's *Zoë*. We become God's *sons and daughters*,⁴¹ not just His artifacts; "as if born"⁴² to Him rather than simply made by Him;⁴³ "begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man's willing it, but by God."⁴⁴ Henceforth we "are reckoned to be of the stock, not of [our] earthly father, but of Christ, Who became Son of Man precisely [so] that men could become sons of God."⁴⁵

"No one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above," Jesus told Nicodemus. "How can a man be born again once he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Can he return to his mother's womb and be born over again?" And Jesus replied, "No one can enter God's kingdom without being begotten of water and Spirit. Flesh begets flesh; Spirit begets spirit. Do not be surprised that I tell you you must all be begotten from above."⁴⁶

Accordingly, Christians call the transformation from mortal to god a *rebirth*.⁴⁷

As usual, we turn to Lewis to help our imagination.⁴⁸ He says that a mortal who is re-born with *Zoë* undergoes a change as great as — no; infinitely greater than — an animal that becomes human,⁴⁹ a ghost that takes on flesh,⁵⁰ or a statue that comes to life.⁵¹

"I expect you've seen someone put a lighted match to a bit of paper," he says. And for a second nothing seems to have happened; and then you notice a tiny streak of flame creeping along the edge.

"It was like that now. For a second after Aslan⁵² had breathed on him, the stone lion looked just the same. Then a tiny streak of gold began to run along his white marble back — then it spread — then the colour seemed to lick all over him as the flame licks all over a bit of paper." Then he "shook his mane and all the heavy stone folds rippled into living hair."⁵³

Evolution: the next step

Lewis compares re-birth with *Zoë* to the transformations that occur in insects exposed to radiation, or in bacteria exposed to chemicals that make them "superbugs." Let us describe it, then, in terms of *evolution*.⁵⁴

Speaking of biological evolution,⁵⁵ people ask, "What is the next step? What will man evolve into?"⁵⁶

2007). "The fatherly action of God is first on His own initiative" (CCC 2008). "Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace (see the talk on "Grace and the Sacraments"), *no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification*" (CCC 2010). At Baptism, however, God sanctifies and deifies us (see CCC 1999); He makes us "a gratuitous gift" of His own *Zoë* and "introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life" (CCC 1997). He thus "ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merits before God" (see CCC 2010-2011). After Baptism, therefore, we can merit "for ourselves" whatever we need "for our sanctification" so as to respond to our call to holiness (see Mt 5:48).

40 CCC 460

41 See Jn 1:12.

42 The language of British Columbia's adoption legislation 1956-1995.

43 See Appendix 1. Also see the talks on "Mary and Joseph" and "Baptism and Confirmation."

44 Jn 1:13

45 Pope Leo I: *Sermon 6 on the Nativity of the Lord*

46 Jn 3:3-7

47 See 1 Pt 1:3-5,23; Ti 3:5.

48 "I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning" (C.S. Lewis: *Literary Essays*, "Bluspels and Flalansferes").

49 See C.S. Lewis: *The Magician's Nephew*, Chapter 9.

50 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

51 See C.S. Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 16.

52 The counterpart of Jesus in Lewis' imaginary world of Narnia.

53 C.S. Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Chapter 16

54 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 11.

55 The human abilities to make judgements of truth and goodness cannot be fitted in to the naturalistic view of the universe (see the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism"). They cannot, therefore, have developed through biological evolution, but must be direct gifts from God. The same is true, even more radically, about the transformation by which we obtain *Zoë*. See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith," Appendix 1.

56 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 11.

Thousands of centuries ago, Lewis notes, "huge, very heavily armoured creatures evolved." Anyone watching would have expected that evolution would produce "heavier and heavier armour." Instead, it produced "little, naked, unarmoured animals that had better brains," with which they mastered the planet. They had not just more strength, but a new *kind* of strength. The new species was not only different, but different with a new *kind* of difference.

Perhaps we can say, then, that evolution has once again gone off in a new direction. The "first instance" of the new species — Jesus Christ — "appeared in Palestine 2,000 years ago."

And that new species is, indeed, really new. The step up to it is not a change from brainy men to brainier men, but a change from mortals to gods, from things God has made to children He has adopted and endowed with *Zoë*.

It is different from previous steps.

- It happens not by sexual reproduction,⁵⁷ but by Baptism.⁵⁸ Even if a man and a woman are both gods, their child does not possess *Zoë* at his first birth. He must be reborn in Baptism. In Baptism, "the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life" — *Zoë* — "that originates in the Father"⁵⁹ and is offered to us in the Son.⁶⁰
- It is happening very fast. Christ brought it into the human race only 2,000 years ago, and already there are gods all over the earth.⁶¹
- It is critical; the stakes are infinite. Nature is giving birth to gods. "The whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God," Paul said. "Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now."⁶²
- It is voluntary. We cannot take this step by ourselves, but we can kill or stifle our *Zoë*.⁶³

Do we want to be gods?

From the beginning, God planned to make Adam and Eve gods.⁶⁴ They themselves wanted to be gods⁶⁵ — but without God, before Him, and not in accordance with Him.⁶⁶ However, that was impossible. They could not acquire *Zoë* on their own; they had to accept it as a gift from God.

Bios had always been different from *Zoë*, but now, after Adam and Eve's fall, it became actually *opposed* to *Zoë*:⁶⁷ it became self-centered, wanting to be petted and admired, to take advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe.

That is the *Bios* Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants. That is the *Bios* we all have today.⁶⁸

It wants to be left alone, to keep well away from anything better or stronger or higher, anything that makes it feel small. It is afraid of the light and air of God's world, just as people brought up to be dirty are afraid of a bath.⁶⁹ It knows that if it is exposed to *Zoë*, its self-centeredness and self-will are going to be killed, and it is ready to fight tooth and nail to avoid it.⁷⁰

We say we want *Zoë*, and we want it to the full, and "yet," Jesus said, "you are unwilling to come to Me to possess that *Zoë*."⁷¹

57 Just as asexual methods of reproduction like budding or binary fission were superseded by sexual methods, so the way in which the new life is passed on supersedes sexual reproduction.

58 See the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

59 See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity."

60 CCC 683

61 In contrast, biological evolution took millions of years.

62 Rom 8:19,22

63 In contrast, organisms used to have no choice. Evolution was something that happened to them, not something they did.

64 See CCC 375, 398.

65 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

66 See CCC 398.

67 See Rom 8:5-8.

68 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

69 Remember Eliza Doolittle's bath in the film *My Fair Lady*.

70 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 11.

"Did you ever think, when you were a child, what fun it would be if your toys could come to life?" Lewis asks. For example, imagine a tin soldier turning into a real man. The tin would have to turn into flesh. Would the tin soldier like it?

"He is not interested in flesh; all he sees is that the tin is being spoiled. He thinks you are killing him. He will do everything he can to prevent you. He will not be made into a man if he can help it."⁷²

Does a baby want to be born? "It might prefer to stay in the dark and warmth and safety of the womb. For of course it would think that the womb meant safety." But it would be wrong, for if it stayed in the womb it would die.⁷³

Does a caterpillar want to metamorphose into a butterfly? It means being imprisoned in a chrysalis, suffering liquefaction by digestive fluids, undergoing complete reconstruction, and then leaving the security of the chrysalis and learning to fly.

Did the Israelites want to be freed from slavery? As some of them complained, "Far better for us to be the slaves of the Egyptians than to die in the desert."⁷⁴

We can imagine tin finding the change to flesh daunting; a fetus not wanting to become a baby; a caterpillar being reluctant to become a butterfly; a slave being afraid of freedom. Humans can even refuse the transformation from mortal to god.

The great choice

In *The Great Divorce*,⁷⁵ Lewis dreams⁷⁶ of mortals in the world of the gods, where everything is much more solid and real than it is on earth. Against that background, mortals are almost invisible "ghosts";⁷⁷ they cannot breathe the air, drink the water, eat the food, pick up the stones, or even bend the grass. The gods are at home in this world, for they are real people, solid people.

Lewis dreams that the gods approach the mortals, offering to help them get solidified or "thickened up," *begging* them — all but *compelling*⁷⁸ them — to accept *Zoë*.

And almost every mortal refuses. Let us see what they choose instead.

Questions⁷⁹

One of the ghosts, an intellectual, says, "Of course I should require some assurances.... I should want a guarantee that you are taking me to a place where I shall find a wider sphere of usefulness — and scope for the talents that God has given me — and an atmosphere of free enquiry — in short, all that one means by civilization and — er — the spiritual life."

The god replies, "No. I can promise you none of these things. No sphere of usefulness: you are not needed here at all. No scope for your talents: only forgiveness for having perverted them. No atmosphere of enquiry, for I will bring you to the land not of questions but of answers, and you shall see the face of God."⁸⁰

But "there is something stifling about the idea of finality," the Ghost-mortal counters. "What is more soul-destroying than stagnation?"

"You think that, because hitherto you have experienced truth only with the abstract intellect," the god replies. "I will bring you where you can taste it like honey⁸¹ and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom."⁸²

71 Jn 5:40; see Jn 10:10.

72 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 5

73 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 11.

74 Ex 14:12. Also see Ex 16:3, 17:3; Nm 11:4-6.

75 For the origin of the title, see Appendix 2.

76 "Ye are only dreaming. And if ye come to tell of what ye have seen, make it plain that it was but a dream. See that ye make it very plain" (C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 14).

77 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 3.

78 See Lk 14:16-24.

79 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 5.

80 See 1 Cor 13:12. Also see Ex 33:18-23; Hos 2:21-22.

81 See Ps 19:11; 119:103.

"Well, really," the Ghost-mortal answers, "I am not aware of a thirst for some ready-made truth which puts an end to intellectual activity."⁸³

"Listen!" says the god. "Once you were a child. Once you knew what enquiry was for. There was a time when you asked questions because you wanted answers, and were glad when you had found them. Become that child again, even now."⁸⁴

But the Ghost-mortal will not. It prefers questions to answers and its own answers to the Truth.

"Self-respect"⁸⁵

Another mortal, a woman, says, "I don't want help. I want to be left alone.... Do you really suppose I'm going out there among all those people, like this?... among a lot of people with real solid bodies?"

"An hour hence and you will not care," the god assures her.... "Shame is like that. If you will accept it — if you will drink the cup to the bottom — you will find it very nourishing.... Come and try."

Almost the Ghost-mortal obeys. But suddenly she cries out, "No; I can't. I tell you I can't."

"Friend," says the god, "could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?"

"I've already given you my answer," says the Ghost-mortal.

"Then only one expedient remains," says the god, and he puts a trumpet to his lips and blows. A herd of unicorns, horns down, ready for battle, charge through the glade where the Ghost-mortal is. She screams in terror.

"He meant to frighten her," someone explains later. "If it took her mind off herself for a moment, there might, in that moment, be a chance. I have seen them saved so."⁸⁶

Pictures⁸⁷

A third mortal, a painter, looks around him in wonder. "God!" he says. "I should like to paint this."

"I shouldn't bother about that just at present if I were you," says the god.

"Look here; isn't one to be allowed to go on painting?"

"When you painted on earth," the god answers, "at least in your earlier days, it was because you caught glimpses of Heaven in the earthly landscape. The success of your painting was that it allowed others to see the glimpses too. But here you have the thing itself."

"Then there's never going to be any point in painting here?"

"I don't say that. When you've grown into a Person (it's all right; we all had to do it) there'll be some things which you'll see better than anyone else. One of the things you'll want to do will be to tell us about them."⁸⁸ But not yet. At present your business is to see. Come and see."⁸⁹

But the Ghost-mortal will not. He prefers pictures — his own pictures — to the real thing.

My husband⁹⁰

A fourth mortal refuses to stay if it means meeting Robert, who had been her

82 See Is 62:5.

83 "God is not a problem to be solved, not even a solution to be admired, but a Reality to be possessed, contemplated, conversed with, loved, enjoyed: this is fullness of living" (Frank Sheed: *God and the Human Condition*, "Introduction").

84 See Mt 18:3.

85 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 8.

86 C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 9

87 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 9.

88 See Is 6:3. Also see the talk on "Prayer."

89 Bishop Emeritus David Monroe of Kamloops chose these words, addressed by Philip to Nathaniel about Jesus (Jn 1:46), for his episcopal motto.

90 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 10.

husband. "I am ready to forgive him, of course," she says. "But anything more is quite impossible.... I forgive him as a Christian. But there are some things one can never forget."

She explains, at great length, how Robert had countered every effort she had made to mold him into the kind of husband she wanted.

"And yet ... I don't know," she says.... "I will make them a fair offer. I will not meet him, if it means just meeting him and no more. But if I'm given a free hand I'll take charge of him again...."

"What's that? No, give him to me, do you hear? Don't consult him; just give him to me. There's lots, lots, lots of things I still want to do with him.... Please, please! I'm so miserable. I must have someone to — to do things to...."

This Ghost-mortal prefers her imaginary Robert to the real Robert.

My son⁹¹

A fifth mortal is upset that the god who has come to meet her is not her son Michael.

"My dear," says the god, "you'd be totally invisible to Michael. But we'll soon build you up."

"Well, when *am* I going to be allowed to see him?" the Ghost-mortal asks.

"There's no question of being *allowed*," says the god. "As soon as it's possible for him to see you,⁹² of course he will. You need to be thickened up a bit."

"How?" asks the Ghost-mortal.

"You will become solid enough for Michael to perceive you when you learn to want someone else besides Michael," says the god. "It's only the little germ of a desire to meet God that we need to start the process."

"Oh, you mean religion and all that sort of thing?... What do you want me to do? Come on. The sooner I begin it, the sooner they'll let me see my boy. I'm quite ready."

"Don't you see you are not beginning at all as long as you are in that state of mind?" says the god. "You're treating God only as a means to Michael. But the whole thickening treatment consists in learning to want God for His own sake."⁹³

This Ghost-mortal prefers her son to God.

* * * * *

Does it matter?

But it really makes no difference *what* we choose in preference to God. "If the heavenly life, or the kingdom of God, is not grown up in you, it signifies nothing what you have chosen in the stead of it, or why you have chosen it," said William Law.⁹⁴

"Will it really make no difference whether it was women or patriotism, cocaine or art, whisky or a seat in the Cabinet, money or science?" Lewis asks.

"Well, surely no difference that matters. We shall have missed the end for which we are formed and rejected the only thing that satisfies. Does it matter, to a man dying in the desert, by which choice of route he missed the only well?"⁹⁵

The making of a god⁹⁶

In *The Great Divorce*, only one mortal accepts the offer to become a god.

91 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

92 See C.S. Lewis: *Till We Have Faces*.

93 See Lk 14:26.

94 William Law: *An Appeal to All Who Doubt the Truths of the Gospel*, I. Law, born in 1686, became a Fellow of Emmanuel College Cambridge in 1711, but in 1714, at the death of Queen Anne, he became a non-Juror; *i.e.*, he found himself unable to take the required oath of allegiance to the Hanoverian dynasty (which had replaced the Stuart dynasty) as the lawful monarchs of the United Kingdom, and was accordingly ineligible to serve as a university teacher or parish minister. For ten years he served as private tutor in the family of the historian Edward Gibbon, and then retired to his native King's Cliffe. Forbidden the use of the pulpit and the lecture-hall, he preached through his books.

95 C.S. Lewis: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces*, "A Slip of the Tongue"

96 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

All the Ghost-mortals look like smokes, but this one is dark and oily. A little red lizard sits on his shoulder, twitching its tail and whispering things in his ear.⁹⁷

He turns his head to it with a snarl of impatience. "Shut up, I tell you!" he says.

The lizard continues to whisper. The Ghost-mortal ceases snarling and begins to smile. Then he turns and starts to limp⁹⁸ away from the mountains.

"Off so soon?" says the angel who has come to meet him.

(Notice that it is an *angel*. Gods are humans — body and soul — who have accepted *Zoë*, but an angel is pure spirit, with no physical body.⁹⁹)

"Yes," says the Ghost-mortal. "Thanks for your hospitality. But it's no good, you see. I told this little chap" (he glances at the lizard) "that he'd have to be quiet if he came.... But he won't stop."

"Would you like me to make him quiet?" asks the angel.

"Of course I would," says the Ghost-mortal.

"Then I will kill him," says the angel, taking a step forward.

"Oh — ah — look out! You're burning me," says the Ghost-mortal, retreating.

"Don't you want him killed?"

"I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that."

"It's the only way," says the angel, whose burning hands are now very close to the lizard. "Shall I kill it?"

"Well, I'm quite open to consider it, but ... I was only thinking about silencing it because up here — well, it's so damned embarrassing."

"May I kill it?"

"Well, we can discuss it later."

"There is no time. May I kill it?"

"Please — really — don't bother. Look! It's gone to sleep of its own accord. I'm sure it'll be all right now."

"May I kill it?"

"Honestly, I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. The gradual process would be far better than killing it."

"The gradual process is of no use at all."

"Do you think not? Well, I'll think over what you've said. I'd let you kill it now, but I'm not feeling frightfully well today. I'd need to be in good health. Some other day, perhaps."

"There is no other day. All days are present now."

"Get back! You're burning me. How can I let you kill it? You'd kill me if you did."

"No."

"Why, you're hurting me now."

"I didn't say it wouldn't hurt you. I said it wouldn't kill you."

"I know you think I'm a coward. But it isn't that. Let me get an opinion from my own doctor. I'll come again the first moment I can."

"This moment contains all moments."

"If you wanted to help me, why didn't you kill the damned thing without asking me — before I knew? It would be all over by now if you had."

"I cannot kill it against your will. Have I your permission?"

The angel's hands are almost closed on the lizard, but not quite. Then the lizard begins chattering to the Ghost-mortal.

"Be careful," it says. "He can kill me. One word from you and he will. Then you'll be without me for ever and ever. It's not natural. How could you live? You wouldn't be a real man; you'd only be a sort of Ghost. He doesn't understand. It

97 It symbolizes lust.

98 The blades of grass, which he cannot bend, hurt his feet.

99 Nevertheless, the angel is far more solid and real than the Ghost-mortal. To us, with our earth-bound notions, an angel is "a thin, half-real body that can go through walls and rocks; to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are like a cloud" (C.S. Lewis: *Out of the Silent Planet*, 15).

may be natural for him — he's only a cold, bloodless thing¹⁰⁰ — but it isn't for us..."

"Have I your permission?" says the angel to the Ghost-mortal.

"It will kill me."

"It won't. But what if it did?"

"You're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature."

"Then I may?"

"Damn and blast you! Go on, can't you? Get it over with. Do what you like," bellows the Ghost-mortal, but ends, whimpering, "God help me. God help me."

Next moment he gives a scream of agony. The angel closes his grip on the reptile, twists it, while it bites and writhes, and flings it, broken-backed, on the turf.

"Ow! That's done for me," gasps the Ghost-mortal, reeling backward.

For a moment nothing can be seen distinctly. Then there appears, unmistakably solid and growing solid every moment, the upper arm and shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still and stronger, the legs and hands. The neck and the golden head materialize.

A god is made.

But at the same time something happens to the lizard. At first it seems that the operation has failed. The creature does not die, but continues to struggle and even grows bigger as it struggles. And as it grows, it changes. Its hinder parts grow rounder. The tail, still flickering, becomes a tail of hair between huge and glossy buttocks.

Before long it has become a great stallion, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold, smooth and shining, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinnying and stamping its hooves.

The man, the new-made god, turns and claps the new horse's neck. The horse noses his bright, solid body. Horse and master breathe into each other's nostrils. Then, in joyous haste, the man leaps upon the stallion's back,¹⁰¹ nudging it with his heels, and the two ride off like thunder.

And the whole of Nature sings,¹⁰² with a strange, archaic, inorganic sound that comes from all directions at once, rejoicing to have been ridden, and therefore consummated, in the person of the stallion.¹⁰³

Die in order to live

Growth in our *Zoë*, then, involves death in our *Bios* — the lizard has to be killed for the stallion to arise.¹⁰⁴ However, paradoxically, that death *transforms* our *Bios* and makes it capable of entering Heaven along with our *Zoë*.¹⁰⁵

Not even what is best and noblest in our *Bios* can enter Heaven as it is now.¹⁰⁶ Mere flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God¹⁰⁷ — not because it is too unspiritual, but because it is too weak,¹⁰⁸ too ghostly.

However, even what is lowest and most animal-like in our *Bios* will be raised again if it submits to death. We believe in "the resurrection of the body";¹⁰⁹ we "look forward to the resurrection of the dead."¹¹⁰

100 An angel has no physical body.

101 Notice that the man rides the stallion, whereas the lizard had ridden the man.

102 "The Master says to our master, Come up. Share My rest and splendour till all natures that were your enemies become slaves to dance before you and backs for you to ride, and firmness for your feet to rest on. From beyond all place and time, out of the very Place, authority will be given you: the strengths that once opposed your will shall be obedient fire in your blood and heavenly thunder in your voice. Overcome us that, so overcome, we may be ourselves: we desire the beginning of your reign as we desire dawn and dew, wetness at the birth of light. Master, your Master has appointed you for ever to be our King of justice and our high Priest" (see Ps 110:1-4).

103 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

104 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

105 See the talk on "Death and the End of the World."

106 See Appendix 2.

107 See 1 Cor 15:50.

108 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

109 See the Apostles' Creed.

"What is sown in the earth [at a funeral] is subject to decay, what rises [on the last day]¹¹¹ is incorruptible. What is sown is ignoble, what rises is glorious. Weakness is sown, strength rises up. A natural body is put down and a spiritual body comes up."¹¹²

Compare the stallion that rose with the lizard that had been killed.¹¹³ "Lust is a poor, weak, whimpering, whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire that will arise when lust has been killed." And if the "risen body" of sexual appetite¹¹⁴ is so grand, what will the "risen body" of maternal love or friendship be like?¹¹⁵

"Whoever would save his life¹¹⁶ will lose it, but whoever loses his life¹¹⁷ for My sake will find it,"¹¹⁸ Jesus said. "The man who loves his life¹¹⁹ loses it, while the man who hates¹²⁰ his life in this world¹²¹ preserves it to life¹²² eternal."¹²³

If we refuse death in our *Bios*, we will die — both *Zoë* and *Bios*. If we submit to it, we will live — both *Zoë* and *Bios*.

Only what we give away will ever be really ours. Only what dies will ever be raised from the dead. If we look for ourselves, we will find, eventually, only "hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay." If we look for Christ, we will find Him, "and with Him everything else thrown in."¹²⁴

Zoë must grow

Now let us get back down to earth. On earth, we cannot perceive the difference between gods and mortals as Lewis dreams in *The Great Divorce*.

But why not? If Christians live with supernatural life, why are they not obviously kinder, greater, holier, *etc.* than non-Christians?

There are two parts to the answer.

First: what emerges from the baptismal font is a *newborn god*,¹²⁵ not a *fully grown god*. Just as a newborn mortal must learn how to talk, walk, think, *etc.*, in order to maintain his *Bios*, so must a newborn god in order to maintain his *Zoë*. Moreover, he must be *fed*.¹²⁶ Just as a newborn mortal needs food for the growth of his *Bios*, so does a newborn god for the growth of his *Zoë*.¹²⁷

Growth in *Zoë* takes time: from our *Zoë*-birth¹²⁸ to our *Bios*-death.¹²⁹ It also takes effort, for our fallen *Bios* opposes the growth of our *Zoë* at every turn.

In this lifelong struggle,

- we may favour *Zoë* wholeheartedly: whenever the demands of *Bios* and *Zoë* conflict, we favour our *Zoë*, even if it means killing something of our *Bios*.
- or we may favour *Zoë*, but reluctantly: whenever the demands of *Bios* and *Zoë* conflict, we try to favour our *Zoë* without hurting our *Bios*.¹³⁰
- or we may reject *Zoë*.

In the first case, our *Zoë* grows and strengthens continuously. In the second case,

110 See the Nicene Creed.

111 See Jn 11:23-26.

112 1 Cor 15:42-44

113 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11.

114 *I.e.*, the stallion.

115 C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 11

116 In the Greek, *psyche*, referring to natural life.

117 In the Greek, *psyche*, referring to natural life.

118 Mt 16:25

119 In the Greek, *psyche*, referring to natural life.

120 That is, in comparison with *Zoë*.

121 In the Greek, *psyche*, referring to natural life.

122 In the Greek, *zoë*.

123 Jn 12:25

124 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 11

125 A *neophyte*, from the Greek *neophytos* ("newly planted").

126 See 1 Pt 2:2; 2 Pt 3:18.

127 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

128 *I.e.*, our Baptism.

129 See CCC 1013, 1021. God wants us to grow in *Zoë*, so we can be sure that He gives us time enough.

130 Like going into the sea but staying within our depth, clinging to the "lifeline" that connects us with the shore (see C.S. Lewis: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces*, "A Slip of the Tongue").

it grows and strengthens, then weakens and wastes away, then begins to grow again, *etc.* It can even die¹³¹ and be re-animated.¹³²

In any case, the condition of our *Zoë* at the time of our *Bios*-death determines its condition forever.

In the first two cases, we end up as gods for all eternity. But in the second case we end up smaller, weaker, less healthy, less intelligent, less loving, less capable in every positive attribute.

In both cases, we end up completely happy, for happiness comes from the full functioning of all our faculties.¹³³ However, in the second case our faculties are not as great; we are less happy in the sense that a "tiny thimble" is less full than a "big tumbler" even when both are full of water.¹³⁴

So the first reason why Christians are not all obviously nicer, greater, *etc.* than non-Christians is that not all Christians are equally mature in their *Zoë*: some are still babies, while others are teenagers or adults. Alternatively, we could say that they are not all equally healthy in their *Zoë*. Some are weak, sick, or close to death, while others are strong and healthy.

Last will be first

However, there is a second reason, best explained by an analogy.¹³⁵ A certain toothpaste is supposed to give you better teeth. Mary, who uses it often but has inherited bad teeth, has worse teeth than a healthy young aborigine who has never used toothpaste at all. Does that prove that the toothpaste does not work?

No. To decide that, we would have to know what Mary's teeth would be like if she did not use it and what the aborigine's would be like if he did.

Similarly, George, who is a god, is mean and bad-tempered, while Mike, who is a mortal, is good-natured and friendly. That, by itself, tells us nothing about *Zoë*. We would have to know what George would be like if he did not have *Zoë*, and what Mike would be like if he did.

We cannot know — at least not in this world. Only God sees the heart. He sees that Mike's good nature results from natural causes that He Himself created. It is His gift to Mike, part of Mike's *Bios*. Mike's natural, effortless exercise of this gift will not make his *Zoë* grow, while George's desperate, often unsuccessful, attempts to love his neighbour will.

Here there is warning and encouragement.

If I am naturally nice, I must beware. From those to whom much is given, much is expected.¹³⁶ If I am content with being nice, mistaking God's natural gifts to me for my own supernatural merits,¹³⁷ I am living like a mortal. If I do not live like a god, my natural gifts will make my bad example more disastrous, my final end more terrible, my corruption more complete.¹³⁸ "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."¹³⁹

If I am naturally not nice, I need not despair. "Prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you," Jesus told the Jewish elders.¹⁴⁰ "This day you will be with Me in paradise,"¹⁴¹ He promised a convicted thief. "Many who are first shall come last, and the last shall come first."¹⁴²

131 Through mortal sin. See the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

132 See the talks on "Sin and Forgiveness" and "How to Go to Confession." Also see C.S. Lewis: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 6-7.

133 See Frank Sheed: *A Map of Life*, III.

134 See T.N. Taylor: *Autobiography of Ste. Thérèse of Lisieux*, Chapter 2, "A Catholic Household"; or R. Knox: *Autobiography of Ste. Thérèse of Lisieux*, Chapter 7, "Thérèse and her Father."

135 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, 10.

136 See Lk 12:48.

137 See CCC 2010-2011.

138 Satan was once Lucifer; his natural gifts were as far above ours as ours are above those of a chimpanzee.

139 William Shakespeare: *Sonnet 94*

140 Mt 23:31

141 Lk 23:43

142 Mt 19:30

Everyone we meet today — however beautiful, good, popular, annoying, egotistical, or evil — "may one day be a creature which, if we saw it now, we would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as we now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare." We "live in the society of possible gods and goddesses."¹⁴³

Conclusion

"At the heart of the divine act of creation is the divine desire to make room for created persons in the communion of the uncreated Persons of the Blessed Trinity through adoptive participation in Christ."¹⁴⁴

To take our place in this communion, we must be "divinized";¹⁴⁵ we must "come to share in the divinity of Christ, Who humbled Himself to share in our humanity."¹⁴⁶

Is that what we ourselves *want*?

"To His own He came, yet His own did not accept Him. Any who did accept Him He empowered to become children of God.

"These are they who believe in His name — who were begotten not by blood,¹⁴⁷ nor by carnal desire, nor by man's willing it,¹⁴⁸ but by God."¹⁴⁹

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144 International Theological Commission: *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 65, 68 (see the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith, Appendix 2).

145 See CCC 398, 1988, 2670.

146 Prayer during the Offertory

147 That is, by our human descent from Adam and Eve.

148 We cannot become children of God by our own human powers.

149 Jn 1:11-13

Appendix 1

God's Adopted Sons

From C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 6

Why, if God wanted sons instead of "toy soldiers," did He not beget many sons at the outset instead of first making toy soldiers and then bringing them to life?

All Christians are agreed that there is, in the full and original sense, only one "Son of God." If we insist on asking "But could there have been many?" we find ourselves in very deep water. Have the words "could have been" any sense at all when applied to God?

You can say that one particular finite thing "could have been" different from what it is, because it would have been different if something else had been different, and the something else would have been different if some third thing had been different, and so on. (The letters on this page would have been red if the printer had used red ink, and he would have used red ink if he had been instructed to, and so on.)¹

But when you are talking about God — *i.e.*, about the rock-bottom, irreducible Fact on which all other facts depend — it is nonsensical to ask if it could have been otherwise. It is what it is, and there is an end of the matter.²

But quite apart from this, I find a difficulty about the very idea of the Father begetting many sons from all eternity. In order to be "many," they would have to be somehow different from one another. For example, two pennies have the same shape. How are they two? By occupying different places and containing different atoms. In other words, to think of them as different, we have had to bring in space and matter; in fact, we have had to bring in Nature or the created universe.

I can understand the distinction between the Father and the Son without bringing in space or matter, because the One begets and the Other is begotten. The Father's relation to the Son is not the same as the Son's relation to the Father.

But if there were several sons, they would all be related to one another in the same way, and related to the Father in the same way. How would they differ from one another?

One does not notice the difficulty at first, of course. One thinks one can form the idea of several "sons." But when I think closely, I find that the idea seemed possible only because I was vaguely imagining them as human forms standing about together in some kind of space. In other words, though I pretended to be thinking about something that exists before any universe was made, I was really smuggling in the picture of a universe and putting that something inside it.

When I stop doing that and still try to think of the Father begetting many sons "before all worlds," I find I am not really thinking of anything. The idea fades away into mere words.

Can it be that Nature — space and time and matter — was created precisely in order to make "many-ness" possible? Is there perhaps no other way of getting many eternal spirits except by first making many natural creatures, in a universe, and then spiritualizing them?

¹ We describe such beings, events, and things as "contingent," for they depend on other beings, things, and events. Contingency is the source of the "patterns" and the "secondary causes" scientists see in nature. (See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith.")

² We say that God alone is not a contingent Being.

Appendix 2

The Great Divorce

C.S. Lewis explains the title of this book thus:

The English poet William Blake wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. If I have written of their divorce, this is not because I think myself a fit antagonist for so great a genius, nor even because I feel at all sure of what he meant.

But in some sense or other the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable "either-or"; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain.

This belief I take to be a disastrous error. You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind.¹ We are living not in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre;² but rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again — and at each fork we must make a decision. Even on the biological level, life is not like a pool, but like a tree. It does not move toward unity, but away from it, and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continuously more different not only from evil, but also from other good.

I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. [Wrong arithmetic] can be put right, but only by going back until we find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply *going on*. Evil can be undone, but it cannot "develop" into good. Time does not heal it. The spell must be unwound, bit by bit, "with backward mutters of dis severing power"³ — or else not.

It is still "either-or." If we insist on keeping Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven; if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell.

I believe, to be sure, that any man who reaches Heaven will find that what he abandoned (even in plucking out his right eye⁴) was precisely nothing: that the kernel of what he was seeking even in his most depraved wishes will be there, beyond expectation, waiting for him in "the High Countries."⁵

In that sense it will be true for those who have completed the journey (and for no others) to say that good is everything and Heaven everywhere. But we, at this end of the road, must not try to anticipate that retrospective vision. If we do, we are likely to embrace the false and disastrous converse and fancy that everything is good and everywhere is Heaven.

But what, you ask, of earth?

Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to have been, in the end, a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell; and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself.

1 See Mt 5:29-30.

2 As "New Age" claims; see the talk on "The First Three Commandments," Appendix 4.

3 John Milton: *Comus*, line 816

4 See Mt 5:29.

5 See Abraham Cowley: *From the Pindaric Odes: Destruction of the First-Born in the "Plagues of Egypt,"* XIV.