

ALL CREATION WILL BE "RECAPITULATED" IN CHRIST

General Audience of Pope John Paul II February 14, 2001

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1. God's saving plan, "the mystery of his will" (cf. Eph 1: 9) for every creature, is described in the Letter to the Ephesians with a distinctive term: to "recapitulate" all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (*Eph 1: 10*). *The image could also refer to the roller around which was wrapped the parchment or papyrus scroll of the volumen* with a written text: Christ gives a single meaning to all the syllables, words and works of creation and history.

The first person to take up this theme of "recapitulation" and develop it in a marvellous way was St Irenaeus of Lyons, a great second-century Father of the Church. Against any fragmentation of salvation history, against any division of the Old and New Covenants, against any dispersion of God's revelation and action, Irenaeus extols the one Lord, Jesus Christ, who in the Incarnation sums up in himself the entire history of salvation, humanity and all creation: "He, as the eternal King, recapitulates all things in himself" (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 21, 9).

2. Let us listen to a passage in which this Father of the Church comments on the Apostle's words concerning the recapitulation of all things in Christ. The phrase "all things", Irenaeus says, includes man, who was touched by the mystery of the Incarnation when the invisible Son of God "became visible, the incomprehensible became comprehensible, the impassible became passible, the Word became man. He recapitulated all things in himself, so that, just as the Word of God has primacy over heavenly, spiritual and invisible beings, so he does over visible and corporeal beings.

Assuming this primacy in himself and giving himself as head to the Church, he draws all things to himself" (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 16, 6). This coming together of all being in Christ, the centre of time and space, gradually takes place in history, as the obstacles, the resistance of sin and the Evil One, are overcome.

3. To illustrate this movement, Irenaeus refers to the difference, already presented by St Paul, between Christ and Adam (cf. Rom 5: 12-21): Christ is the new Adam, that is, the Firstborn of faithful humanity, who lovingly and obediently welcomes the plan of redemption which God designed as the soul and goal of history. Christ must therefore cancel the work of devastation, the horrible idolatries, violence and every sin that rebellious Adam sowed in the age-old history of humanity and in the created realm. By his total obedience to the Father, Christ opens the era of peace with God and among men, reconciling dispersed humanity in himself (cf. Eph 2: 16). In himself he "recapitulates" Adam, in whom all humanity can see itself, transforms him into a child of God and restores him to full communion with the Father. Through his brotherhood with us in flesh and blood, in life and death, Christ becomes "the head" of saved humanity. St Irenaeus writes again: "Christ has recapitulated in himself all the blood shed by all the just and by all the prophets who have lived since the beginning" (*Adversus Haereses*, V, 14, 1; cf. V, 14, 2).

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4. Good and evil, then, are considered in the light of Christ's redemptive work. As Paul shows us, this involves all creation with the variety of its elements (cf. Rom 8: 18-30). Indeed, nature itself, since it was subjected to the senselessness, degradation and devastation caused by sin, thus shares in the joy of the liberation achieved by Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the full realization of the Creator's original plan emerges: that of a creation in which God and man, man and woman, humanity and nature are in harmony, in dialogue and in communion. This plan, upset by sin, is restored in the most marvellous way by Christ, who mysteriously but effectively carries it out in the present reality, waiting to bring it to fulfilment. Jesus himself said he was the fulcrum and point of convergence of this saving plan when he said: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12: 32). And the Evangelist John presents this work precisely as a kind of recapitulation: "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (Jn 11: 52).

5. This work will reach its fullness at the end of time when - as Paul again recalls - "God will be all in all" (cf. 1 Cor 15: 28).

The last page of the Book of Revelation - proclaimed at the start of our gathering - depicts this goal in vivid colours. The Church and the Spirit are waiting and praying for the moment when Christ will "deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.... The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his [Son's] feet'" (1 Cor 15: 24, 26-27).

At the end of this battle - described on marvellous pages in the Book of Revelation - Christ will complete the "recapitulation", and those who are united with him will form the community of the redeemed, which "will not be wounded any longer by sin, stains, self-love, that destroy or wound the earthly community. The beatific vision, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace and mutual communion" (CCC, n. 1045).

The Church, the loving Bride of the Lamb, with her gaze fixed on that day of light, raises the ardent prayer: "*Marana tha*" (1 Cor 16: 22), "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rv 22: 20).

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I extend a special greeting to the students from Kagoshima, Japan, and from the University of Dallas. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present, and upon your families, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.