



The Catechism of the Catholic Church – 29th November 2023

Commentary 12 on the CCC

The ancient account of bishop Polycarp's martyrdom in 155 AD is truly inspiring. He was brought before a Roman governor who said to him "revile your Christ." Polycarp's reply was, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?... I am a Christian; and if you want to know the meaning of Christianity, you have only to name a day and give me a hearing." Shortly afterwards, Polycarp was burnt at the stake because of his faithfulness. His heroic witness was the kind of fidelity Jesus had in mind when he said: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Mt 10:32).

Instead of concentrating on what scripture says about Jesus, I want to focus on what some well-known historical figures have said about him.

- Surprisingly, Napoleon Bonaparte, wrote: "Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him, and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison.....I search in vain in history to find the similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the gospel. Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer anything with which I am able to compare it or to explain it. Here everything is extraordinary. The more I consider the gospel the more I am assured that there is nothing there which is not beyond the march of events, and above the human mind."
- Albert Einstein, a Jewish scientist, said: "As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene....No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."
- Mohandas Gandhi, a well-known Hindu politician, stated: "What then does Jesus mean to me? To me, He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To his believers he was God's only begotten son.... Is all the grandeur of His teaching and of his Doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so. To me it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key to his nearness to God; that He expressed as, as no other could, the spirit and will of God."

While all these quotations about Jesus Christ are impressive and full of admiration, it is arguable that all of them failed to appreciate the fact that rather being God like, Jesus was God made man, full of the Holy Spirit, and saviour of all who believe in him through the forgiveness of their sins. Rather than being one of the many outstanding religious figures in human history, like Lao Tzu, Confucius, Buddha, and Mohamed, 1 Tim 2:5-6 says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men."

- Napoleon, a nominal Catholic said, "I do not see in [religion] the mystery of the incarnation, but the mystery of social order."
- In 1954 Einstein said in a letter, "The word god is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honourable, but still primitive legends."
- While Gandhi admired the ethics of Jesus, he did not believe that Jesus was the unique son of God.

On one occasion Jesus asked the apostles: "Who do you say I am?" (Mt 16:15). The CCC says that he is

- Jesus, i.e., the one through who we are saved
- The Christ, the Messiah, the one anointed with the Spirit of God
- The only begotten Son of God
- The Lord, the one who exercises divine sovereignty

We modern day Catholics need to be willing to openly confess our faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, our Saviour and Lord, with firm conviction, and without equivocation or compromise. We do this by means of evangelisation. As 1 Pet 3:15 says: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."