



# The Holy See

---

JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 29 November 1978*

1. Even if the liturgical time of Advent begins only next Sunday, I wish to speak to you of this cycle from today.

We are now accustomed to the term "advent"; we know what it means, but precisely because of the fact that we have become so familiar with it, we do not succeed, perhaps, in understanding all the riches that this concept contains.

Advent means "coming".

We must therefore ask ourselves: who comes? And for whom does he come?

We find the answer to this question at once. Even children know that it is Jesus who comes, for them and for all men. He comes one night at Bethlehem, He is born in a grotto, which was used as a cowshed.

The children know this, and so do the adults who participate in the children's joy, and who on Christmas Night seem to become children too. There are many questions, however, that are asked. Man has the right, and even the duty, to question in order to know. There are also those who doubt and, although they take part in the joy of Christmas, seem extraneous to the truth it contains.

For this very reason we have the time of Advent, so that every year we can penetrate again into this essential truth of Christianity.

2. The truth of Christianity corresponds to two fundamental realities which we can never lose sight of. Both are closely connected. And this precise link, such a deep one that one reality seems to explain the other, is the characteristic note of Christianity. The first reality is called "God", the second one "man". Christianity arises from a special mutual relationship between God and man. In recent times—particularly during the Second Vatican Council—there have been long

discussions as to whether this relationship is theocentric or anthropocentric. There will never be a satisfactory answer to this question if we continue to consider the two terms of the question separately. In fact Christianity is anthropocentric precisely because it is fully theocentric; and simultaneously it is theocentric, thanks to its extraordinary anthropocentrism.

But it is just the mystery of the Incarnation which, in itself, explains this relationship.

It is for this reason that Christianity is not only a "religion of Advent", but Advent itself. Christianity lives the mystery of God's real coming to man, and throbs and pulsates constantly with this reality. It is simply the very life of Christianity. It is a question of a reality that is at once deep and simple, that is near the understanding and sensitiveness of every man and especially of those who, on the occasion of Christmas night, are able to become children. Not in vain did Jesus once say: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3).

3. To understand thoroughly this double reality with which Christianity throbs and pulsates every day, it is necessary to go back to the very beginnings of Revelation, in fact almost to the beginnings of human thought.

At the beginnings of human thought there can be various conceptions; the thought of every individual has its own history in his life from childhood. However, speaking of the "beginning", we do not intend to deal with the history of thought. We wish, on the contrary, to ascertain that at the very foundations of thought, that is, at its sources, there is the concept of "God": and the concept of "man". Sometimes they are covered up with a layer of many other different concepts (in particular in the present-day civilization of "materialistic" and also "technocratic reification")—but that does not mean that those concepts do not exist or are not at the foundation of our thought. Even the most elaborate atheistic system makes sense only on the supposition that it knows the meaning of the idea of "Theos", that is, God. In this connection the [pastoral Constitution of Vatican II](#) rightly teaches us that many forms of atheism are derived from lack of an adequate relationship with this concept of God. They are therefore, or at least may be, negations of something or rather of Some one other who does not correspond to the true God.

4. Advent—as a liturgical period of the ecclesial year—takes us back to the beginnings of Revelation. And at the very beginning we at once meet the fundamental connection of these two realities: God and man.

Picking up the first book of Holy Scripture, that is Genesis, we begin to read the words: "Beresit bara!—In the beginning he created ... " There follows the name of God, which in this biblical text reads "Elohim". In the beginning he created, and the one who created is God. These words constitute, as it were, the threshold of Revelation. At the beginning of the book of Genesis, God is defined not only with the name "Elohim"; other parts of this book also use the name "Yahweh".

The verb "created" speaks of him even more clearly. This verb, in fact, reveals God, who God is. It expresses his substance not so much in itself, as in relation to the world that is, to all creatures subject to the laws of time and space. The circumstantial adverbial phrase "in the beginning" indicates God as the One who exists before this beginning, who is not limited either by time or space, and who "creates", "gives a beginning" to everything that is not God, and which constitutes the visible and invisible world (according to Genesis: the heavens and the earth).

In this context the verb "created" says of God in the first place that he himself exists, that he *is*, that he is the fullness of

being, that this fullness is manifested as Omnipotence, and that this Omnipotence is at once Wisdom and Love. The first sentence of Holy Scripture tells us all this about God. In this way the concept of "God" is formed in our intellect, if we refer to the beginnings of Revelation.

It would be significant to examine what is the relationship between the concept of "God", as we find it at the beginning of Revelation, and the one that we find at the basis of human thought (even in the case of the denial of God, that is, of atheism). Today, however, we do not intend to develop this subject.

5. We wish on the contrary to note that at the beginning of Revelation—in the same book of Genesis—and already in the first chapter we find the fundamental truth about man, whom God (Elohim) creates in his "image and likeness". We read, in fact: "God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26), and further on: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).

We will return to the problem of man next Wednesday. But already today we must point out this special relationship between God and his image, that is, man.

This relationship enlightens us on the very foundations of Christianity.

It also enables us to give a fundamental answer to two questions: first, what is the meaning of "Advent", second, why precisely is "Advent" a part of the very substance of Christianity?

I leave these questions to your reflection. We will come back to them in our future meditations and more than once. The reality of Advent is full of the deepest truth on God and on man.

Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana