Why did Jesus come?

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The conference *Pourquoi Jesus est-il venu?* was given in French

via Zoom live, on December 4, 2021

Translated by lmhb12/12/2021

This is a summary of Father Henri Boulad's main points during the conference which is available in French on YouTube. Bible quotes are taken from: *The New American Bible* published in 1991 by Saint Benedict Press.

Introduction

55 friends of Father Henri Boulad, S.J., from several countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Lebanon, Switzerland, the United States, and other, including Egypt where Father Boulad resides, participated in the conference, via Zoom live, on December 4, 2021

Father Boulad captivated participants with his positive insight and theological reflection on this timely Advent topic. By Friday, December 10, more than 7,650 growing viewers on YouTube heard his December 4th message based on the Gospels, St. Paul's letters to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, as well as, the Fathers of the Church, and theologians, Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. and Duns Scotus, a Franciscan.

The Conference:

Father Henri Boulad, began by asking *"Why did Jesus come?"* He expressed personal dissatisfaction at the traditional notion often preached in our churches that Jesus came to redeem us and remove the turmoil created by original sin. Father Boulad, has another approach in line with the Fathers of the Church, as well as the Jesuit

theologian, Teilhard de Chardin which does not focus on sin. He explained that there are a lot of questions raised about original sin of Adam and Eve, (a possible topic of discussion for another conference). He agreed with Teilhard de Chardin who stated that "we do not see any trace of the original sin in history" and said that limiting ourselves to the view that Jesus came to redeem us from our sins is an obstacle to receiving the fullness of the Incarnation message.

He proposed five essential potential solutions to the question of *Why did Jesus come?* which, he based primarily on Jesus' own words in the Gospels, the Letters of St. Paul and the writings of the Eastern Fathers of the Church, their position, summed up by St. Athanasius, in the 4th century, who, stated: that "*God became man so that man may become God"*, sometimes translated more clearly as "*that we might be deified* or "*that we might become sharers in the Divine nature"* as the Catechism of the Catholic Church indicates.

Regarding the question *Why did Jesus come?* Father Boulad also cited the views of Clement of Alexandria, St. Augustine. St. Thomas Aquinas, some Western Fathers of the Church, and that of the Franciscan theologian, Duns Scotus, who affirmed that Christ came on earth to propel the human race towards the divine. Father Boulad expounded on this the theological language of "plenitude" and suggested the five reasons listed below which are based on Jesus' own words and he supported his statements with Biblical references.

1. **Jesus came so that we might have life in abundance.** Jesus said: *I came so that [you] might have life and have it more abundantly.* (Gospel of John 10: v.10). He came to give us the fullness of his humanity, his divine, eternal life- a life of the Spirit that never ends. Saving us from evil, sin and perdition is the mere result and consequence of such a state of plenitude

2. **Jesus came to testify to the truth.** Towards the end of his earthly life, when Jesus was questioned by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea who presided at Jesus' trial, Jesus said "…. *I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice* (John 18: v. 37) This statement of Jesus corresponds to what is written about John the Baptist and Jesus in Chapter 1 of John's Gospel. "*… What came to be* v.4 *through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;* […] John the Baptist came "*to testify to the light* v.8 *The true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world* v.9 […] *And we saw his glory as the of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.* v.14 Jesus, therefore came to enable us to make sense of our life.

This is particularly relevant today when truth is daily tested in the media, in the social, economic, political and other realms of our daily life. "*On se fait rouler dans la farine*"-They pull the wool over our eyes (idiomatic translation). We are being shortchanged and taken for a ride. We are being deceived by untruths. Yet, in spite of this, Jesus came to bring us truth and to shine a light on our path.

Clement of Alexandria, a 3rd century, Greek-Christian Early Father of the Church, who lived, in Alexandria, where Father Boulad resides, and who is known for reconciling Greek thinking with Christian thought, underlined that the search for truth by all people, and not only Christians is knowingly or unknowingly the search for Christ. Faith and reason are the two means by which people seek Christ. Whereas faith can divinely inspire a person to know in the depth of his/her heart that Jesus is the incarnate word of God, the *Logos* (Greek term for "word") can also be by discourse and reason. The magnificent prologue in the first chapter of John's Gospel states clearly that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God. In Christ, faith and reason are converged so that **all** who seek truth by reason can also reach Christ as *Logos.* Jesus saving us is a consequence of his coming, and not the reason for it.

3. **Jesus came to set the world on fire.** Jesus said: *I came to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!* (Luke 12:49) What is this fire of which Jesus speaks? The fire is God's divine love. "…*God is love* (Letter- 1John 4:8 and 15) *and who ever remains in love remains in God and God in him."* Jesus came to set the world on fire with the fire of His love, full of life and truth, ignited by the Spirit which prompts us to live the way of love. In anticipation of his death, at the Last Supper with his disciples, in the gospel of John chapters 14 to 18 Jesus expresses splendidly the Agape love of which he speaks: *Love one another, as I love you* (John 15:12,17).

Jesus came to gather all children of God into one body. This point is the culmination of reasons given in 1, 2 and 3. When Jesus was arrested, he was sent to Caiaphas, the high priest, the chief Jewish religious authority, who had a prophetic message when he said: *"[…] it is better for you* [the Jewish people] *that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish. He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one, [body] the dispersed children of God.* (John, chapter 11: 50-52)

Jesus came to gather all children of God not into a political state but into one mystical body: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who sent you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling!* (Luke 13:34).

Jesus came to unify all the children of God, Christian and people of all faiths, not as we see today by human means of communication such as by technology, telephone, internet or politically established states but rather, by communion.

Father Boulad reiterated that in his letters to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians St. Paul pleads for unity in Christ among the communities *"strive to preserve the unity of the spirit"* (Ephesians 4: 1-6, Philippians 2: 1-11) (Colossians 1 v.13 and all following verses- Chapters 2 and 3)

Father Boulad distinguished very clearly between an imposed globalism of totalitarian style which excludes differing points of views, and globalization which encourages exchanges and interdependence. He also said that Jesus' Kingdom may have elements of global reach and interdependence but His is on the level of communion, not of mere communication.

Finally, Jesus also came just to be with us. To illustrate God's deep desire to be present to humanity whether we are not aware of His presence or consider it as useless, Father Boulad cited an example from *The 25th Hour*, the famous novel of Virgil Gheorgiu. When Trajan's friend, Moritz lost his fiancée in a tragic accident, Trajan felt the deep need to share in his friend's sorrow, even if his presence was not of any perceived useful value. He stood in the sogging rain next to his friend, just to be present to Moritz.

Perhaps the most profound reason why Jesus came is to express to each of us, "I am always with you". "I am with you through all your trials and tribulations", "I hold your hand and suffer with you, even when you might feel that my presence might not change anything, even when you are not aware of it or feel it not useful." "I want to give you this free gift of my presence because I love you".

Unlike the practical world we face daily which proclaims "there is no free lunch" (idiom), for Jesus, the Incarnation is an absolute necessity of God's loving revelation. If you love you understand….

Jesus comes to us as a freely given gift, and chose to be called "Emmanuel" which means "god with us",

Beyond all the benefits that his birth brings for life, truth and light, his loving presence is essential. Emmanuel… We will name you Emmanuel… You are here little child in your crib. You are powerless, you do nothing, you say nothing, but you are here. This is Christmas.

Merry Christmas to All- *Joyeux Noël à tous*.

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Note from translator: This is neither a literal translation nor a word for word translation of the conference entitled "*Why did Jesus come*?", given in French by Father Henri Boulad, S.J. on December 4, 2021, via zoom live. This translation may not be reproduced or distributed without the permission of Father Henri Boulad S.J. / Abir Nabih

English translation-lmhb12/20/2021

IF CHRIST IS AN ILLUSION

If Christ is an illusion,
If Jesus Christ is a pipe-dream,
If Christianity is a mystification
If God did not visit us
If He did not come down from His heaven
If He had not taken this crazy, incredible,
Impossible, unbelievable step of the Incarnation
If he did not surmount the insurmountable chasm….
He would stop being credible
He would stop being Love
He would stop being God
Love signifies: Sharing
Em-pathy, sym-pathy
Com-passion, union, communion.
The greater the distance between He and us

The more he was compelled to overcome it.
Love compels
Infinite love compels infinitely
The most impossible action
becomes the most necessary
The epitome of the incredible
becomes the pinnacle of the credible
Faith consists in believing this,
Making it the ultimate conviction of one's life
If Christ did not exist,
We would have to invent Him

© Henri Boulad, S.J. Alexandria, March 5, 2001

***Addendum* :** Dans *La Quête du Sens*, Père Boulad écrit :

En adorant le Christ, je ne m'incline pas devant la puissance, mais devant l'amour. Cet amour fou manifesté dans l'Incarnation et la croix m'oblige à me prosterner devant lui, le front dans la poussière. (Page 43)

Biography

Educator, lecturer, professor of theology, Henri Boulad, S.J. was director of Caritas-Egypt and vice-president of Caritas-International for the Middle East. He was honored as an officer and commander of the French National Order of Merit. He is a prolific author and has published extensively in fifteen languages. His latest book, *La quête du sens,* published on August 28, 2021, the day of his 90th birthday, *is the quintessence of seventy years of life, reflection and experience.*

The first 20 pages of the book can be viewed at:

https://henribouladonline.wixsite.com/amis-du-pere-boulad/la-quete-du-sens