

## OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF HIS DIVINITY

BY the modern non-catholic mind the problem of Our Lord Jesus Christ's knowledge of His Divinity is stated in terms of Consciousness. In other words, the mass of non-catholic writers on the nature and work of Jesus Christ ask, and in various ways answer, such a question as this: "Was Jesus Christ conscious of His Divinity?" For example, this statement of the great problem of the Jesus Christ of the Gospels was dominant in the recent conference of Modern Churchmen at Cambridge.

The Dean of Carlisle, whose historical scholarship is not necessarily akin to theology, said "that Jesus did not claim divinity for Himself. He may have called Himself, or more probably allowed Himself to be called, the Messiah or Son of God; but never in any critically, well-attested sayings was there anything suggesting that His *conscious* relation to God was other than that of a man towards God" (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 Aug.). Here the phrase "conscious relation to God" seems to mean that Jesus Christ did not know and did not believe Himself to be God. He knew and believed Himself to be merely a man. In Dean Rashdall's recent explanations he seems to assert that Jesus was God. We await his explanation of how Jesus could be God and not claim Divinity.

The Rev. H. D. A. Major, Principal of Ripon Hall, Oxford, said in effect ". . . as to whether Christ claimed to possess a pre-existent *conscience* and knowledge which the Fourth Gospel answered in the affirmative, the speaker thought that to-day they must be strong to declare that the *conscience* of Christ was a full human *consciousness*, leaving the question of a pre-existing conscience unsettled" (*ibid.*). Here we

## *Blackfriars*

have a perplexing confusion between the word conscience and consciousness. This is all the more perplexing because the English language in this matter has one of its rare victories over other languages—even over Peripatetic Greek and Scholastic Latin, the two most precise languages yet elaborated. In English we quite clearly distinguish between “Conscience—Consciousness—and Conscientiousness”; a feat not equalled in any other tongue. But it is quite clear that the Principal of Ripon Hall in using the word Conscience is speaking, not of the faculty of moral judgments, but of the faculty which knows human acts or activities. In other words, he wishes to agree with those who say that Jesus Christ did not know and did not believe that He was God.

Dr. Bethune Baker, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, did not clear the confusion by his words. “He did not think that the assumption in our ecclesiastical interpretation of the Gospels, *that Christ knew He was God* was either justified by the evidence or required by the logic of the doctrine. He did not for a moment suppose that He ever thought of Himself as God. The whole content of His consciousness was rightly styled unique; but it was human” (*Sunday Times*, 14 Aug.). Here, again, the problem of Jesus Christ’s knowledge of His Divinity is stated in terms of Consciousness, rather than of knowledge. Dr. Bethune Baker, however, is nearer the most valid formula of enquiry when, before plunging into the confusion caused by the word Consciousness he speaks of “the interpretation of the Gospels that Christ knew He was God.”

It need hardly be pointed out how much confusion arises from the use of the word “Consciousness.” Of more value will it be to point out that the confusion arises from the general and undivided use of the word. Philosophy uses the word Consciousness

## *Our Lord Jesus Christ's Knowledge of His Divinity*

generally and not particularly, as science uses the word animal. But whereas Science also gives us the words horse, cow, zebra, and thousands of other words for particular animals, Philosophy does not give us particular words for particular kinds of Consciousness. Indeed, so undeveloped is the terminology that in most languages but our own the same word has to express on the one hand the high faculty of moral judgments and categorical imperatives, and on the other hand, the homely faculty whereby we recognize that sugar is sweet and that stone is hard. It says much for the courage of some of our contemporaries that with this primitive terminology they undertake to be assertive about the intricate relationship between God and the "Mind of Christ." We have deep sympathy with their effort and even with their failure. We realize that they are suffering from their heredity, or at least from their ancestry; which if it is not responsible for their thought, is responsible for their thought's environment. But our sympathy with their honest doubts will oblige us to state the problem and its solution: the question and its answer not in terms of the confusing word Consciousness, but with St. Thomas Aquinas, in the less confusing and more accurate terms of Knowledge. For this reason we have entitled this study "Our Lord Jesus Christ's Knowledge of His Divinity."

The irreducible minimum for solving this question must be an elementary yet accurate acquaintance with Psychology. We are not of those whom Dr. Rashall rightly condemns of Apollonarianism. We do not deny that Jesus Christ had a human soul. We accept it as an article of Catholic faith defined by the Second Council of Constantinople. Moreover, in accepting it fully with all its implications we see in it the only principle for solving the problem of Jesus Christ's knowledge of His Divinity.

## *Blackfriars*

If we apply this principle that Jesus Christ had a human soul, we shall agree that Jesus Christ's human soul had two main kinds of knowledge : I. Sensitive Knowledge, and II. Intellectual Knowledge.

I. It is clear that Jesus Christ's human soul could not have Sensitive Knowledge, either external or internal, of His Divinity. The five external senses and the four internal senses are not competent to know the Godhead. Thus St. Thomas says : " It is impossible for God to be seen by the sense of sight or by any other sense or faculty of the sensitive power. . . . The essence of God is not seen in a vision of the imagination ; but the imagination receives some form representing God " (1 Pars., Qu. 12, Art. 3—Eng. transl.). We need not further labour this point. It is clear that if Jesus Christ was God, His Divinity could not be heard by His ear, seen by His eye, imagined by His imagination ; in a word, His Divinity could not be known by His external or internal senses. Jesus Christ could have no sensitive knowledge of His Divinity.

II. It is different with His intellectual knowledge. It is clear that if Jesus Christ was God, His human soul *could* have intellectual knowledge of His Divinity. Granted this possibility there remain two further questions :

1. Whether the human soul of Jesus Christ did actually have intellectual knowledge of His Divinity ?

2. Granted that Jesus Christ's human soul had intellectual knowledge of His Divinity, how did this take place ?

1. As regards the actual fact, we pass it over, for the moment, as a matter of Biblical exegesis, more suited to a Biblical expert than to a theologian. But in passing it over we do not mean to suggest that it is a matter of secondary importance or that it is a thesis with slender scriptural basis. We merely record the

### *Our Lord Jesus Christ's Knowledge of His Divinity*

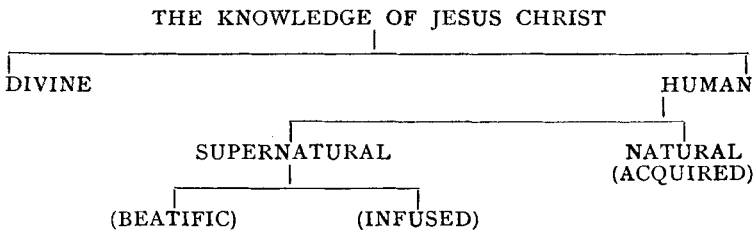
theological principle that even if the Gospels or the other books of the New Testament contained no words of our Blessed Lord clearly affirming His Divinity it would nowise disturb the basis of our faith, which is summed up in the formula, "Jesus Christ claimed to be God."

Here we may be allowed to comment on the ambiguous formula used by some of the speakers at the Cambridge meeting. They speak of the "human soul of Jesus Christ." With Dr. Rashdall they (rightly) deny that such a human soul had any existence previous to the Incarnation. They deny that this human soul of Jesus Christ had any knowledge that He was God. Now it may be granted as a mere possibility that the Son of God could have become incarnate in a human nature whose human soul was ignorant of the Divine union. But this leads us to formulate two distinct questions : If God the Son was incarnate in a human nature, could HE (the Divine Person) be ignorant of His Divinity ? and 2, Could IT (the human nature) be ignorant of His Divinity ? In answer to the second question we may provisionally agree that, as a mere psychological possibility, the Incarnation could have taken place in a human nature ignorant of the Divine Union.

In answer to the first question we must ask our readers to follow Thomas Aquinas in his subtle analysis of the Knowledge of Jesus Christ. With the Catholic Church St. Thomas believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, true God of true God. He, therefore, believes that Jesus Christ has all the attributes of God—infinity, omniscience and the rest. Jesus Christ as God has, therefore, that knowledge which we call Divine. This Divine knowledge of Jesus, being infinite extends to all things not only actual, but possible. It is, therefore, clear that Jesus Christ, as God, knew His own Divinity.

## *Blackfriars*

But Jesus Christ, as man, has none of the attributes of God as God. Neither His nature nor His knowledge is, or could be, infinite. His knowledge is essentially finite. If we are asked the question, "Did Jesus Christ as man—or did the human intelligence of Jesus Christ—have knowledge of His Divinity?" we cannot give one answer, since we are asked not one, but three questions. These three questions arise out of the three kinds of Knowledge which, according to St. Thomas, are to be found in the human intelligence of Jesus Christ. Let us represent this schematically.



The human beatific knowledge of Jesus Christ comes of His human intelligence being supernaturally united to the Divine Essence by the Beatific Vision. This knowledge is not infinite. By it Jesus Christ does not know all things, possible and actual. But, according to St. Thomas (confirmed by a recent decision of Rome,\*) by His Beatific Knowledge, Jesus Christ knows all actual things, i.e. all things that actually are, or were, or will be. It is again clear that by His human beatific knowledge Jesus Christ had certitude of His Divinity.

\* A Decree of the Holy Office, 5 June, 1918: "Utrum tuto doceri possunt sequentes propositiones:

I. "Non constat fuisse in anima Christi inter homines degentis scientiam quam habent beati seu comprehensores?"

II. "Nec certa dici potest sententia quæ statuit animam Christi nihil ignoravisse, sed ab initio cognovisse in Verbo omnia

## *Our Lord Jesus Christ's Knowledge of His Divinity*

The human infused knowledge of Jesus Christ comes of His human intelligence being united to the Divine Essence, not directly by the Beatific Vision, but indirectly by infused intellectual species, such as prophets and seers are vouchsafed in this world. This knowledge is not infinite. Nor is it as extensive as the human beatific knowledge. It extends neither to all things possible, nor to all things actual. Indeed, its extent may well be made the subject of theological investigation. But we are within the common teaching of the theologians in saying that by His human infused knowledge Jesus Christ was certain of His Divinity.

There now remains the natural and acquired knowledge of Jesus Christ. This acquired knowledge comes of His human intelligence working without supernatural light on objects presented with no supernatural guarantee. This natural and acquired knowledge is not infinite, does not extend to all things possible or actual, and is not co-extensive with His supernatural infused knowledge.

The extent to which it could reach may be gauged by its mode of action. It could act only on empiric facts. It could reach conclusions from these facts only by a process of ratiocination. For the moment we may refrain from judgment merely to ask the last momentous question: "Did or could the human soul of Jesus Christ know His Divinity by means of His natural, acquired knowledge?" It may well be

*præterita, præsentia et futura, seu omnia quæ Deus scit scientia visionis ?*

III. "Placitum quorundam recentiorum de scientia animæ Christi limitata, non est minus recipiendum in scholis catholicis quam veterum sententia de scientia universale?"

To these questions the Holy Office replied "Negative." This decision of the Holy Office confirmed the doctrine of St. Thomas in his *Summa*. By His beatific knowledge "the soul of Christ knows all things that God knows in Himself by the knowledge of vision; but not all things that God knows in Himself by knowledge of simple intelligence" (III<sup>a</sup>, Qu. 10, Art. 2, ad 3—Eng. transl.).

## *Blackfriars*

argued that in view of the divisions and distinctions already made the answer is already given. It would seem impossible that by His human natural acquired knowledge Jesus Christ could have any but a *conjectural knowledge* of His Divinity. The phrase *conjectural knowledge* is used by St. Thomas to signify any knowledge which does not amount to undeniable certitude. The human intelligence of Jesus could reason, as any human intelligence could reason, about the empiric facts of the Incarnation. But it could not arrive at certitude ; just as our human reason cannot arrive at certitude about the truths, such as the Incarnation, which are essentially matters of faith.

It is admitted that in such a view of faith there is much to baulk our imagination. Yet it is not to be expected that our imagination is adequate to the work of faith. Nevertheless, there are analogies which may satisfy at once our faith and our imagination. St. Thomas teaches that the human soul which is actually united to God by Divine grace has only a conjectural knowledge of its union. It is not certain of its state of grace. It can make inferences from the empiric facts and affections of its being. But none of these facts or affections as recorded empirically justify it in being certain that it is united to God by grace. In an analogous way the human natural reason of Jesus could make inferences from the observed facts and affections of His being. But unless we are to make it possible for reason to prove with certainty the things of faith, we must admit that these inferences would lead not to certitude, but to what St. Thomas calls conjectural knowledge. We may then ask : " Was it possible that by His human acquired knowledge Jesus Christ was not certain of His Divinity ? " \*

\* The problem of Christ's acquired knowledge led St. Thomas to a change of opinion which he has humbly acknowledged in his *Summa* : " Therefore if in the soul of Christ there was no habit



## *Our Lord Jesus Christ's Knowledge of His Divinity*

If for the purposes of discussion we maintain that by His (1) Divine, (2) Beatific, (3) Infused knowledge Jesus was certain of His Divinity; and that only by His (4) Acquired knowledge was He uncertain of it, we go on to ask if these doctrinal principles have any influence over our statements.

We are at once confronted by the marvellous doctrine of the Θεοτόκος. The Council of Ephesus condemned the doctrine that Mary was Χριστοτόκος, Mother of Christ, and proclaimed that she was Θεοτόκος, Mother of God. By this daring and almost paradoxical formula the Catholic Church proclaimed not so much the dignity of the Mother as the Divinity of the Son. At once a series of astounding propositions became possible. Mary was the Mother of God, because Mother of Jesus. In other words, if God had a mother, because Jesus had a mother, then God was born, suffered, died, because Jesus was born, suffered, died. That these statements were the verbal opposites of other statements seemed not to disturb the Christian mind. God was impassible; yet God suffered. God was everywhere; yet God was born, not everywhere, but in Bethlehem. God was immortal; yet God died. God had no beginning; yet God had a mother.

These verbal (not real) contradictories were not tempered by any verbal (but only by mental) re- of acquired knowledge beyond the habit of infused knowledge, as appears to some and *sometime appeared to me* (III Sent. Dist 14), no knowledge of Christ increased in essence but only by experience. . . . But because it seems unfitting that any natural intelligible action should be wanting to Christ . . . it follows . . . that in the soul of Christ there was a habit of knowledge which could increase.

(Ad 1<sup>m</sup>) . . . The acquired knowledge of Christ is caused by the active intellect which does not produce the whole at once but successively; and hence by this knowledge Christ did not know everything from the beginning but step by step, and after a time, i.e. in His perfect age;—and this is plain from what the Evangelist says, viz. that He increased in *knowledge and age together* " (III<sup>a</sup>. Qu. 12, Art. 2).

## *Blackfriars*

strictions. Even when the Church meant that Mary was the Mother of Jesus only in His human nature, she said merely, "Mary is the Mother of God"; and did not add, even though she meant, "in His human nature." She took the same great way of verbal contradiction in all the other statements about the Incarnation, and with His birth, suffering, death and resurrection.

We are then faced with the further question: Granted that by His acquired natural knowledge alone Jesus was not certain of His Divinity, could we use the simple phrase, "Jesus Christ was not certain of His Divinity?" Would such an expression be less sufferable than the phrases not, only "Jesus died. Jesus had a human mother," but "God died. God had a human mother," although we must also say "God cannot die. God cannot be born of human parenthood."

The question becomes all the more complicated because by the common teaching of theologians the Incarnation meant a certain limitation of the normal effects of the Hypostatic Union. Thus because of the Beatific State to which the manhood of Jesus Christ was raised, the human body and soul of Jesus should have been impassible. But by a distinct and miraculous interference of God this effect of the Beatific State was impeded, for the purpose of Redemption. If this doctrine of theologians is correct, then it is seen that for the purposes of the vicarious suffering of Redemption certain effects of the Hypostatic Union were suspended. The conscious Beatific knowledge of the Godhead was miraculously confined to some plane of the humanity where it was compatible with bodily and mental suffering. This would lead us to ask whether, unless the suffering of Redemption were mainly in the body, it was not largely in the human intelligence, and especially in the

## *Our Lord Jesus Christ's Knowledge of His Divinity*

natural workings of the human intelligence of Jesus that this redemptive suffering was wrought.

We are further led to wonder at the Church's action in deciding against the Monothelites, whose reverence for the Divinity of Jesus made them deny that in Him there was more than one will. By deciding that Jesus had really two wills, and that in its natural instinctive workings His human will might not coincide with the Divine will, the Church was really deciding that the (*αγωνία*) Agony in the Garden was not an unreal but a real struggle, made possible by a miraculous suspension of the effects of the Hypostatic and Beatific Union. It would seem only a continuance of this principle of the Church to interpret the cry of Calvary, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me" (Matt. xxvii. 46), as some echo in the intellectual plane of the agonizing cry of His will, "My Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39). Such a principle would take nothing away from the dignity and Divinity of the Redeemer; but to some devout followers of the Crucified it would seem to add incalculably to the agony of the Redemption.

To sum up :

By His Divine knowledge Jesus was certain that He was God.

By His Beatific human knowledge Jesus was certain that He was God.

By His Infused human knowledge Jesus was certain that He was God.

By His Acquired human knowledge Jesus may not have been certain that He was God. By a special miraculous interposition this ignorance might have been allowed to cause some of His pain and to occasion some of His words.

If by His acquired human knowledge Jesus was not certain that He was God it might be lawful for us to

## *Blackfriars*

say, "Jesus was not certain of His Divinity," provided that we understood (though we did not express) the conditions ; even as it is lawful for us to say the greater things, "God had a mother. God died," although we do not express but merely understand the conditions.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.



## *THE WEB*

I WONDER, dearest, what you do,  
The while I sit and weave for you  
A silver-shining web of prayer,  
To hold you in its silken lair.  
By night and day I weave it round,  
Till you are fettered fast, and bound.  
Your body sweet I snare from harm,  
In the close magic of its charm.  
Your golden head I wind about,  
To keep all thoughts of sadness out.  
Your darling hands, your darling feet,  
Are safe within its meshes sweet.  
For Heaven is ev'ry angel's home,  
So lest some fellow-sprite say, "Come,"  
And you should strive to spread your wings,  
For the glad sound of what he sings,  
So fast my web shall wrap you round,  
You shall not have this earthly ground.  
For I have wrought it strong and well,  
And only GOD can break the spell ;  
Yea, round His Hands I weave my net  
That so He may not break it yet.

SISTER MARY BENVENUTA, O.P.