

The Person of our Lord.

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IV.

EVERY student of New Testament theology is familiar with two distinct lines of approaching the Person of our Lord in the New Testament writers. The Christology of S. Peter, or of S. Paul's missionary sermons and earlier letters, answered to our modern method, for it set out from the historical facts of Jesus' earthly career. The later and more reflective Christology of the Philippian and Ephesian Epistles, of Hebrews, and, above all, of the Fourth Gospel, was that from which the Church of the second century took its cue, and which down till the year 1700 or thereabouts dominated Catholic and Protestant alike. Thus the change of attitude which took place, as the Canon shows, within the lifetime of the apostles, has been paralleled by a similar change, though in reverse order, in the Church's mode of approaching the Person of her Lord.

Every student is familiar with this change. It has had profound consequences for our modern Christology. This was inevitable; for it must make a prodigious difference with what mental preoccupation or in what theological interest you study the Gospels. So long as Christendom continued to read these records primarily as Gospels of God-with-us, records of a wholly supernatural Visitor from the celestial world, in the light, say, of the Logos theology of the second or third centuries, or of the Nicene Creed in the fourth, why, it reckoned on finding at every step indications of His Divine as much as of His human origin—or more so. Whatever could be deemed suprahuman, and there is plenty of it, was traced to our Lord's Divinity and set down as a proof of it. Jesus' words or actions, instead of a coherent or consistent whole, springing out of the depths of one Personal life, became an amalgam: wherein this part was due to the operation of His Deity, that to the limitations of His manhood. Miracles attested His omnipotence as God: insight into men's hearts His omniscience. On the other hand, whatever betrayed creaturely limitation, as of knowledge, for example, had to be explained by the purpose of His mission. It was next to im-

possible under this reading of the Gospels to escape docetism. Clement of Alexandria could not get above the Gnostic notion that the ἀπαθεία which ought to characterize a wise man, must have rendered Jesus inaccessible, in spite of appearances, either to pleasure or to pain. And later it became the fashion to explain passages which indicate a limitation of our Lord's knowledge to an 'economic' or prudential affectation of ignorance. The Christ-life so read was not merely dual, in the sense that while tied on earth to time and space, His Godhood was everywhere at work ruling the universe. But the same duality invaded the earthly life itself. Here also He was really living as God within the mere veil of a seeming manhood.

There is no need to say at any length how radically men's thoughts about all this have been changed. Under the very minute historical investigation to which the Gospels have been subjected, a quite different impression has resulted—the impression of a genuine manhood growing up and doing its work, if not within normal human limits, at least normally and humanly under unique and strange conditions. The subtle tendency to a docetic interpretation of Jesus which had beset theology ever since the Church formulated the doctrine of her Lord's divinity has been overcome. There is abundance of supernatural material in the four Gospels, no doubt. But with the exception of His healing miracles, it is seen to cluster round His entrance upon earthly life and His leaving it, His coming and His going, forming as it were a framework or setting to the Life. While the striking thing is that the closer we get to the inner side of Jesus, the real Person who moves and teaches within this wondrous framework of the supernatural, the more intensely human, realistic, and like ourselves does the Figure become. Voices from the sky attest His superhuman origin; angels wait on Him and demons recognize Him; death in His case yields back its prey, and He disappears at last into the sky; yet at the heart of it all, when you can lay your human intellect and heart and

spirit alongside Jesus of Nazareth, you are startled, yet consoled, to feel that intellect, heart, spirit answer in Him to your own, and you can understand Him and keep company with Him as the humanest Brother Man you have ever met.¹

This modern rediscovery of the historical Jesus, if I may so describe it, has had the effect of making the old problem of His Person stand out with a quite fresh sharpness of outline. At least it has done so for all of us who cannot accept any of the numerous rationalistic and naturalistic explanations of Jesus which within the last two centuries have had their day and been discredited. That these efforts to reduce Jesus to a mere ordinary manhood should have been persistently made cannot surprise any one who attends to the change of christological method which I have described. But Christian faith will none of them. It stands to-day just where it has always stood. It adores Christ as God, as the Early Church adored Him. It confesses Him to be God as the ancient creeds confessed Him. And the old difficulty rears its head only in acuter form: How is it possible that the very same Person whom we have learned now to know so well as our fellow-man, living here on earth as we live, could be all the while, consciously be it, or unconsciously, living also the life of Deity?

While all this is true, the differences which must exist between the modes of the Divine and of the Human life in respect of all the activities of a spiritual being are too great for us to combine them in a single mental state. By the Monothelite controversy in the seventh century the Ancient Church was compelled to face this question in so far as it bore on the faculty of the will. Led mainly by Western divines it adopted the dogma of a double will. It could not do otherwise. God we conceive of as a Spirit that for ever and unchangeably wills all things out of time relations in the effective form of an all-embracing purpose. Nothing could be more unlike the fluctuating desires and volitions of a man, influenced by motives, exposed to the temptation to choose otherwise, and deciding only on a balance of conflicting considerations. Yet the difficulty of

¹ This is far from being the whole truth, I know. There is about that mysterious Figure also an aloofness due to His possession of traits that are inimitable and beyond our sympathy, because they transcend humanity. Notwithstanding, what I have said is true.

harmonizing this dualism is by no means at its worst in the sphere of the will.

The problem becomes more acute when we turn to the intellectual or noetic side of a spirit's activity. Here it is a question of the presence or absence of knowledge, that is, of the contents of thought, in a given state of consciousness. It is not simply the question: Could Jesus at one and the same time know a thing after one manner as God and after another manner as man? But could He at the same time both know a thing and not know it? It is a question which theology has only begun to face in seriousness. In what a hesitating and inconsistent fashion the ancient fathers handled it can be seen from the citations collected by Bishop Gore in his second Dissertation. Of late it has been discussed by quite a number of English writers as the crucial point in the christological problem; by Mr. Swayne, Canon Mason, Dr. Moorhouse, Mr. Powell, and others. That our Lord's knowledge advanced from infantile ignorance, and advanced as that of other men does by the ordinary methods by which men gain information; that what He thus came to know could not be at all times equally present to His mind and was wholly absent from His mind in the unconscious intervals of slumber;—this simply follows from His possession of a human mind at all. It is human to know in part, to retain much in memory which is not present to thought, and at each moment of consciousness to attend only to a very limited sum of impressions and ideas. All this is quite independent of nice questions about how far He shared the ignorance of His contemporaries on scientific facts or on historical events, or how He could be ignorant of the day of judgment.

It seems to me of little use to debate over such details, if we recognize that He shared with us the intellectually limited life of acquired knowledge and of varying states of consciousness which make up our mental experience. For then the supreme difficulty is to see how at the same time He could share the unlimited and unchanging consciousness of the Divine Mind. It is not simply that God knows more than a man can know, swallowing up our extremely partial knowledge in His omniscience. But He knows in a quite different way. Not by mental processes of observation, comparison, or inference, but by one changelless and timeless act of intuition, we suppose the Divine Intelligence to embrace all that is knowable, without loss or incre-

ment, without uncertainty or error, neither learning nor forgetting. And the central difficulty lies in conceiving the coexistence in the same conscious Subject of two consciousnesses, so utterly unlike each other, so wholly exclusive of one another, as God's and man's.

I am not sure there is not yet another department of our Saviour's inner life—the innermost of all and the most sacred—which has contributed to intensify the difficulty for us moderns of combining in thought His Divinity with His manhood. I have said that the closer we come to Jesus the more we realize our own oneness with Him. Now we come most close to Him in His moral and religious experience. I am reluctant to touch on this topic with no time to do it any justice. But every one now recognizes how intensely human the Captain of our salvation was in His temptations, as the writer to the Hebrews long ago discerned; and the temptability of a Divine Person must raise very difficult problems; for 'God cannot be tempted of evil.' Most striking of all, Jesus led a life of religious experience. Comparatively recent is the attention divines have bestowed on this fascinating aspect of the great Life; but it has grown enormously in importance since it came to be perceived that His absolutely unexampled and trustworthy acquaintance with religious truth—which has made Him the world's supreme authority on God and the way to God—stood connected with His own religious experience as a Man. Be the limitations of His knowledge on other subjects, due to the conditions of His age, what they may, here at least is neither ignorance nor error. Of God the Father and of the world unseen, of the heart of man and our future destiny, of eternal truth and duty and of their values, He speaks with the confidence and with the authority of One who alone knoweth the Father and who, when He tells us of heavenly things, bears witness to what He has seen. Yet this unexampled insight in the sphere of religious truth He cannot have had always. It must have grown with the growth of His own religious life; and that religious life bears the creaturely notes of dependence upon God and subjection to Him. Indications are plentiful, no doubt, that the intimacy which Jesus maintained with the unseen world and with the Father reached the utmost possible degree of closeness, of affectionateness, of unbrokenness. We may, if we will, describe it as a prolongation under human con-

ditions of the very fellowship He had from eternity as the Eternal Son in the Father's bosom. Still, it was intercourse now under human conditions. He lived by faith, as all religious creatures must. He fed His soul on Holy Writ. He strengthened Himself, as we have to do, by prayer. He did nothing of Himself. Not only His personal piety, but also His official or Messianic activity, was inspired, informed, guided, sustained, from step to step by the Holy Spirit whom at baptism He had received from the Father. The Father's guidance He seeks and follows; speaks the words and does every hour the works which by the Spirit's impulse the Father gives Him to do or to say. His very miracles are done, as one infers with probability, by the power of the Spirit resident in Him, as by 'the finger of God' and on each occasion in fulfilment of the Father's will. In short, we behold in our Lord at every point the lowly devout obedient Son glorifying the Father in Heaven, as He calls upon His disciples to do. Needless to say that this religious attitude is in its form peculiar to creaturehood, although its spirit be that of Divine Sonship: for it is the very soul of all creaturely piety and the spring of every creaturely virtue. It marks the earthly life of Jesus therefore as at its centre the life of a perfect man and perfect saint.

All these features in the Divine Man, brought home to us moderns by recent study of the Gospels, serve to define the old problem left at Chalcedon—the problem of a single life uniting the divinity to a perfect manhood, with a sharpness of contour not discerned in any earlier age of Christendom. Can one and the same Person be at one and at the same time the Subject of two coexistent states of consciousness that are mutually exclusive, like the conscious life of Deity and the conscious life of Man?

As I understand the Kenotic Theory, it dares for the first time to answer boldly, 'No; He cannot.' And bold as the answer is, I am not surprised that many divines, some with decision and some with hesitation, have been found to favour it. For if two parallel and coexistent states of conscious life, such as the Divine and the Human, are unthinkable in the same Person, there seems, may one argue, to be nothing for it but to postulate on the part of the Divine Son who became Man a temporary extinction or suspension of His Divine consciousness. Biblically of course the daring conjecture has to base itself on its inter-

pretation of the Philippian passage; theologically it justifies itself by saying: Such a stupendous self-sacrifice on the part of the Second Person in the Godhead means a sacrifice of other less vital attributes and activities of the Divine Being to the one supreme end of holy love; it is the triumph of the moral in God over the physical.

What judgment are we to form of this latest attempt to reach the unity of theanthropic life?

The various forms under which the theory has been put forward were sorted by the late Dr. Bruce into four groups. For our present purpose two will suffice. Either Kenotists suppose a suspension by the loving will of the Son of His divine activities (*all* His activities, save the will so to suspend them) which may be described as *total*, because it extends even to His universal activity as Lord of all worlds. Or they limit this surrender of His Divine activity to the sphere of His incarnate life as a Man upon earth—leaving His cosmical and universal action as God otherwise unaffected.

1. The former and more thoroughgoing type we might call for distinction the Lutheran one, since it conserves a fundamental principle of old Lutheran Christology (that there is no activity of the Incarnate Son outside of His human nature); but this does not mean that only Lutherans support it; Ebrard and Godet are conspicuous exceptions. It suggests that the Eternal Son—not the Deity as such, which were unthinkable, but the Second Person only in the adorable Godhead—did, by a free and continuous act of His divine will-power, lay aside during His life on earth that mode of conscious existence, thought, and world-ruling activity which till then He had always possessed in common with the Father and the Son. At the cost of a depotentiation so complete as this, we do reach a *single* conscious life in Jesus, a *truly* human life, though unfortunately, as it seems, a *merely* human life. But such a suggestion in all its forms conflicts violently with the traditional doctrine '*de Deo*'; as respects both (1) the Being and Attributes of Godhead, and (2) the internal relations and unity of the Blessed Three in the Most Holy Trinity. It demands a serious change, if not a reconstruction, of dogma on both.

As to the former, the theory would require us to abandon the philosophical substructure of our doctrine of God. For, according to it, the Being of God is no longer conceived as absolute, in the sense that it is in every respect necessary and in-

susceptible to alteration. Nor is it any longer so *simplex* that to be and to act are inseparable. Noetic and volitional activities, instead of being essential to the life of Deity, are reduced to accidents of it, which can be laid aside at will. 'Infinite,' 'unchangeable,' are words which must disappear from our definition of God or receive a new sense. They will no longer apply to the Attributes as well as to the Being of the Most High—to His all-presence, for instance, or His all-knowledge, or His all-working. In short, you must conclude that God can exist, if He choose, under the limits of time and space, as creatures do.

I am not forgetting what can be said on the other side. This falling back on the idea of God as Personal Will, in revolt from old philosophical speculations on the Divine Being or Nature, is much in the line of recent divinity, and has an attraction just now for many minds, grown suspicious of metaphysics in the theological domain. Moreover, it falls in with the modern desire to ethicise our theology, when we are told that the sole essential feature in Godhood, for the sake of which physical attributes can be subordinated, is moral love, including a capacity for self-sacrifice for His creature's good. It may be that the movements of thought ahead of us will run in some such direction. So far, however, the new theology has not had time to mature on fresh lines its own doctrine of God, and it will have a hard task in hand to come to terms with the old dogma of 'a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His Being,' and no less in all His attributes. I would not go so far as to brand the Kenotic school (as some Ritschlians have done) with the scornful epithet 'mythological'; meaning, I suppose, that it reduces the Christian God to a pagan level of manifoldness and casual variability. Yet, in this country at least, sober divines seem to shrink from a form of Kenosis which opens before the thinker such untried and perilous paths.

Nor is the bearing of it on our doctrine of the Holy Trinity much less serious. For it seems to follow from it that One of the Sacred Three may surrender for a time His share in the eternal life of the Other Two—the Son ceasing to receive from the Father, as His eternal generation requires, the continual fulness of the Divine Life; whereby there would be introduced into the conscious existence of Deity what I must term an impossible, an unendurable, cleft or severance. One of the

Sacred Three no longer partaking, while the Other Two continue to partake, in the sum of the Divine Thought or in the effective Willing of the Divine Plan. Rather than seek such a solution of the problem most theologians would probably prefer to leave it on one side as insoluble.

2. Deterred by such difficulties, most English divines who have been attracted by the Kenotic theory at all, take refuge in a less severe form of it.

Here the cosmical life and activity of the Second Person are supposed to proceed as before incarnation. He lives as God in all the universe, save within the conscious experience of His manhood. Ensphered as it were within the all-embracing ocean of His changeless divine consciousness of all things, lies a tiny islet of limited and growing human experience, beginning in infantile ignorance and abiding to the last within earthly limitations. In this enclosed domain of the flesh, He elects in His love to lead a life consistently human as we know it to have been, acquiring and retaining knowledge of earthly things through observation, memory, reflexion; and winning the power to love and serve and humbly obey as we all have to do, by prayer, self-discipline, and overcome temptations.

This does not hinder the humanity of our Lord from receiving in varying degrees through the mediation of the anointing Spirit, the best and highest and divinest gifts which under earthly conditions human nature is fit to receive: charismata of wisdom, holiness, power, and grace, including certainly the ability to rain forth even physical healing and soundness, but, above all, an unerring insight into all that religious truth which for the purpose of His mission the Christ behoved to know. Nor does it, I suppose, exclude, what there is abundant evidence of in our sources, notably in the Fourth Gospel, a consciousness breaking through out of the hidden background of His divinity, of His own celestial origin, eternal glory with the Father, mission from the unseen, unique and solitary Sonship, and the like; glimpses all, or reminiscences, of another life than this poor obscured and narrow earthly one, which startle us as we read the lowly record. But even this unexampled consciousness of pre-existence and more than human dignity, probably entered by human means (that is, by means of religious faith and experience) into His more normal consciousness

as a Man and became a part of it. While for the rest, and chiefly through the earlier and unofficial years of His life, the earthly consciousness is supposed to be simply that of a stainless and perfect manhood.

Essentially this scheme is that of Reformed Christology. I confess, indeed, that the older reformed divines failed to work out their premises so clearly as this on the point of Jesus' consciousness. But the commentary upon them, or the inferences from them, worked out by Schweitzer and Schneckenburger (with whom Bruce concurs) make it pretty clear that we have here a legitimate enough development of the Calvinistic Christology.

What it is able to give us is a human consciousness which fairly well answers to the requirements of the evangelical narrative. What it does not give us, frankly confesses itself unable to give, is unity of consciousness in one Person. Our problem, therefore, is not solved by it. The incarnate life is left dual still. The same Ego is assumed to have been on earth the subject of two simultaneous consciousnesses which were as far as possible from having the same extent or even the same content; of which one at all events did not enter or very seldom entered into the other, divine into human; while yet the other, the human, must always have been swallowed up and engulfed in the boundless consciousness of God.

It seems to me we have reached here the latest shape the ancient problem has for the present assumed: in which it fronts and challenges the thinking of the Church. The difficulty, tracked to its source, turns out, I think, to be a psychological one, the answer to which lies hid somewhere in the mysterious subject of personality. When we come to know what is possible to a spiritual person, whether or not the personal life can be lived from more than a single centre, whether consciousness must be single, and how far two disparate states of mental activity can coexist: then we may perhaps find ourselves a step nearer the solution.

No doubt there are not a few in our generation who will prefer the Ritschlian method of declining the difficulty of a dogmatic solution by reposing in a practical religious certainty. They will be satisfied with saying that the Christian's faith is sure of the value-judgment that Jesus is to us God in the sense that in Him God meets us in the only way in which He and we can meet. If on these lines the metaphysical Deity of our blessed Lord cannot

be affirmed, as little can it be denied, as is done (surely inconsistently) by Schultz, for instance. In this half-way house I grudge no man his right to take shelter, if he can go no farther, as many in these days of difficult faith are fain to do. I would not seek to dislodge him from a useful haven when the winds are high. All the same, I do not expect these conditions to be other than temporary. Theology will not always be content to evade inquiry into the reasonableness of its faith, under a self-denying ordinance. And when the times are again propitious for a fresh venture in this agelong quest into the central mystery of Christianity, I venture to suggest it will be along the line of psychological investigation it will have to be made.

Our best hope of understanding the dual life of our Lord may lie in the humble study of our own personal life. There are whole regions of psychical phenomena, little attended to till of late, which betray the existence in the soul of subconscious states and processes of psychic life. The mind holds a great deal more than comes to the surface in clear and waking consciousness: mental possessions in all of us, and mental movements going on, of which we are either not at all, or not frequently, or not fully, aware. Processes of thought discover themselves by their results, of which while they were in progress the subject of them was unconscious; as in cases where exceptional powers of very rapid calculation exist, or where interrupted trains of reasoning are carried out in sleep, or where the long silent combinations of genius suddenly issue in a constructive flash which looks like inspiration. We have to take account, too, of subtle alterations of moral attitude or disposition, brought about slowly in that abysmal region of our nature where it is possible for unseen forces, good or evil, to operate on men without their knowing it. These are all normal and commonplace examples; without borrowing any

dubious light from the little understood phenomena of morbid conditions or of psychic influence, such as Mr. Myers collected in his posthumous volumes. I am far from implying that the analogy between the phenomena of the subliminal life, and the co-existence in our Lord of divine and human consciousness is either close or satisfying. The case of incarnate Deity is and must be unique and incomparable. What they do suggest is that within the mysterious depths of a single personality there may coexist parallel states of spirit life, one only of which emerges in ordinary human consciousness. They may serve to repel the superficial objection that such a dualism is impossible. Within Christ's complex and wonderful constitution, room might be found for a life-activity verily His own, yet of which He had on earth no human consciousness, or at most, it may be, an intermittent and imperfect knowledge; and, if it were so, the psychology of the human personality has nothing to say against it.

It is not an explanation. Far less is it a proof. But it is no new thing to use the submerged world of our own mental life, of which little or nothing ever comes to the light in the form of conscious knowledge, to rebut objections against the Church's faith in a dual life of the Incarnate. For to this use such phenomena were put many years ago by the late Cardinal Newman, in words with the citation of which I shall close:—

'This being so,' he wrote of similar phenomena, 'how can we pronounce it to be any contradiction, that, while the Word of God was upon earth, compassed within and without with human virtues and feelings, with faith and patience, fear and joy, doubts, misgivings, infirmities, temptations—still He was, according to His divine nature, as from the first, passing in thought from one end of heaven even to the other, reading all hearts, foreseeing all events, and receiving all worship, as in the bosom of the Father?' (*Paroch. Ser.* iii. 185).