

INTRODUCTION¹

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”
(1 John v. 5).

Scepticism regarding Our Lord’s Divinity

As many who profess to be Christians go so far as to call in question not merely the supreme dignity of our Lord's Humanity, but even doubt His Divinity, it has been thought well to preface this work with an introductory chapter setting forth a few of the Scriptural proofs for that fundamental and central truth of our holy Religion, the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

Some of these so-called Christians are willing to grant that Christ was the most perfect of all *creatures*, but they maintain that He was no more than a creature, that there was a time when He was not, that He was not *properly* God, i.e., that He was not the same God, and had not the same substance and nature as the eternal Father and Creator of all things. They regard Him as a great teacher, it is true, and as one setting us the noblest example of virtue, but they fail to realise in any true sense that He is God, equal to the Father and to the Holy Ghost, and claiming the same Divine honour and worship.

The Blessed Trinity

In subsequent chapters we shall see that Faith teaches us that there are three Persons in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that the Father is God, that the Son is God, that the Holy Ghost is God; that these three Persons are really distinct from another, but equal in all things, having all one and the same nature and substance, common to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. But here we shall confine ourselves to treating only of the Divinity of God the Son.

Reason for St John’s Gospel

St. John, we are told, wrote his Gospel for the express purpose of demonstrating the Divinity of Jesus Christ against those heretics of his day who pretended that

¹ [This has been taken from pages xi to xxi of the *Student’s Catholic Doctrine* by The Rev. Charles Hart BA, published by Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, London in 1927. That book was used as a textbook for religious education in Catholic Secondary Schools up to and during the Second Vatican Council when, like most decent catechetical works, it disappeared from the catechetical scene. It was known affectionately as “Hart’s Christian Doctrine”. We reproduce it as a service to teenage and adult catechesis. A S Fraser, Editor, *Apropos.*]

Jesus was a mere man who had no being or existence before He was born—as they asserted—of Joseph and Mary.

Opening, then, this Gospel, we read in the very first chapter:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was made nothing that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John i. 1-14).

According to the Gospel, therefore, the Word was at the beginning of things, that is, He existed before anything was created; He is not then a creature. All things were made by the Word; the Word then was not made—He is therefore eternal. The Word was united with God, and formed only one nature with God; He was therefore God Himself, *et Deus erat Verbum*.

Our Lord is adored as God

Many writers, to prove the Divinity of Jesus Christ, have appealed to prophecy and miracles, yet He Himself refers to these mainly in proof of His Divine *mission* and *work*, and points out to the Jews that He fulfils in His Person and in His work all that has been foretold of the Messiah; but this is altogether different from the question of the Divinity of His Person. "Moses," says Father Devivier,

*"**was the messenger of God**; he also was entrusted with the mission of establishing a more perfect religion than that which preceded it, and yet the Jewish people never thought of considering him as God. Jesus Christ, on the contrary **is adored as God** by all who for nineteen centuries have been proud to bear his name and to follow His doctrine. This fact is undoubted but does Jesus deserve this adoration—**is He truly God?** . . ."*

*We believe in the Divinity of the **mission** of Jesus because He expressly declared that He was sent by God, and that He confirmed this mission by the most stable proofs. We must believe in the Divinity of **His Person, if He has positively given Himself out as God.***

Our Lord affirms His Divinity

*"Now, it is a fact absolutely certain, attested by a great number of perfectly clear texts, that Jesus **affirmed Himself to be God**. Without the least ambiguity, and in a multitude of circumstances, He declared that He was God, the Son of God, equal in everything to the Father who had sent Him."²*

² Devivier, *Christian Apologetics*, Vol. 1, p.344.

Son of God

That our Lord constantly applied to Himself this supreme title, "Son of God," was indeed a surprising revelation of His true nature. It was a title, too, constantly given to Him by His disciples; and yet in this Soul, so meek, so humble, it called forth not the slightest astonishment or opposition.

Peter's confession

To those who were constantly with Him, who had seen the miracles which He wrought, and who themselves had worked miracles in His name, He on one occasion put the question, "*Whom do **you** say that I am?*" Simon Peter answering for all, said: "*Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt. xvi. 15, 16). And again when speaking for the twelve: "*We have believed and have known that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God*" (John vi. 70).

That of Martha

Note, too, the expression of Martha's faith just before the raising to life of her brother Lazarus: "*Lord, I have believed that Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, who art come into this world*" (John xi. 27).

That of St Thomas

St. Thomas, also, after affirming that he would not believe that Christ was risen from the dead unless he received the most convincing proofs, is brought to the humble confession, "*My Lord and my God*" (John xx. 28). He saw the humanity, remarks St. Augustine, and confessed the Divinity.

That of many disciples

Yet again: after Christ had stilled the tempest, they that were with Him in the ship fell down at His feet and worshipped Him, saying: "*Thou art truly the Son of God*" (Matt. xiv. 33).

Now what was our Saviour's attitude to all this? Was He fired with indignation, as naturally He would have been, had He been an ordinary man, on hearing applied to Himself the sacred name of God? See how Paul and Barnabas behaved when the enraptured people wished to pay them Divine homage. They indignantly rejected the proffered honours. Rending their garments, they ran among the people exclaiming: "*O men, why do you these things? We are mortals, men like unto you*" (Acts xiv. 13, 14). And when the disciples of John the Baptist thought that perhaps he was the Messiah, John never ceased to disabuse their minds; but pointing to our Lord, he exclaimed: "*Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world. . . . And I give testimony that this is the Son of God*" (John i. 29, 34).

Our Lord allows the title "Son of God"

Yet, though our Saviour constantly hears Himself addressed as the Son of God, the true Son of God, He not only permits such epithets to be applied to Him unchecked, and allows Himself to be adored as God, but He praises Peter for

applying them to Him, and, as the reward of his clear and open profession of faith, declares to him the dignity to which he is to be raised: "*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona : because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven, And I say to thee : That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matt. xvi. 17, 18) . He also rewarded Martha's confession of His Divinity by raising to life her brother Lazarus who had been dead four days.

He even seeks it

Nay, more: besides accepting the title and declaring blessed those who gave it to Him, He even seeks an acknowledgment of it in such as come to Him for spiritual or temporal favours. To the man born blind, to whom He had just given sight, He said: "*Dost thou believe in the Son of God?*" The man asked: "*Who is He, Lord, that I may believe?*" Jesus said to him: "*Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He who talketh with thee.*" He answered and said: "*I believe, Lord. And falling down he adored Him*" (John ix. 35-38).

He affirms His Divine Sonship

Jesus Christ Himself, too, directly affirmed His own Divinity. Speaking to Nicodemus He said: "*God so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting*" (John iii. 16). And what He said to Nicodemus in the secrecy of an intimate discourse, He made the common subject of His preaching in Jerusalem.³ Here He affirmed His Divine Sonship, absolute and eternal, His essential unity with the Father, in such terms that the Jews murmured, were indignant, stopped their ears, and even took up stones to cast at Him. And when He said to them: "*Many good works I have shown you from My Father, for which of these works do you stone Me?*" they answered: "*For a good work we stone Thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God*" (John x. 24-33).

Neither threats nor entreaties, nor the prospect of a cruel death, could make Him retract His affirmation of His Divinity for a single instant: "*If Thou be the Christ, tell us.*" Jesus answered: "*If I shall tell you, you will not believe Me.*" The priests replied: "*Art Thou then the Son of God?*" And He said: "*You say that I am*". (Luke xxii. 66-70). The High-priest was not content with this reply. Wishing to have some strong accusation against Him, he put the question distinctly and with the utmost religious solemnity. "*I adjure Thee,*" he exclaimed, "*by the living God, that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*" Jesus said to him: "*Thou hast said it*" (Matt. xxvi. 63, 64).

His claim understood by the Jewish leaders

The leaders of the Jews certainly never mistook His assertions, but accused Him of having blasphemed by saying that God was His Father, and by making Himself equal to God (John v. 18). They therefore sought to kill Him; and when they brought Him

³ See Bougaud, "Le Christianisme," vol. ii., p. 622.

before Pilate, what was their accusation against Him? *"We have a law; and according to the law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God"* (John xix. 7).

And people alike

And the people, too, well knew the reason for His condemnation; for as He hung upon the Cross *"they blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying: Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God. . . . If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said: I am the Son of God"* (Matt. xxvii. 39-43).

Even the centurion who had to see to the carrying out of the death sentence, and those that were with him watching Jesus, *"having seen the earthquake, and the things that were done, were sore afraid, saying: Indeed this was the Son of God"* (Matt. xxvii. 54).

Our Saviour, then, not only accepted the title, Son of God, true Son of God, and congratulated and rewarded those who gave it to Him, but took it to Himself in private, in public, in the streets of Jerusalem, before the rulers of the people and before the tribunals. **He died for having taken it, and raised Himself from the dead to prove it.**

Jesus claims Divine prerogatives

Moreover, whatever are the titles that are given to God, Jesus appropriates them; whatever is the homage that is due to God, Jesus claims it; whatever the powers that belong to God, Jesus exercises them. Not only did He take the name of God, of Son of God, but He assumed to Himself the functions, the acts, and the necessary and supreme attributes of God: *"All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine"* (John xvi. 15).

He distinguishes Himself from the Father

Yet in calling Himself God, Jesus Christ clearly distinguishes Himself from the Person of the Father who has sent Him, and whose work He has come to do: *"What things soever the Father doth, these the Son also doth in like manner"* (John v. 19). *"The Father loveth the Son; and He hath given all things into His hand"* (John iii. 35). *"Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee"* (John xvii. 1). *"If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him"* (John xiv. 23).

And from the Holy Ghost

He distinguishes Himself just as clearly from the Person of the Holy Spirit. *"I will ask the Father and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever"* (John xiv. 16). *"But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you"* (John xiv. 26).

But never from the Son

Thus Jesus pointedly distinguishes Himself from God the Father and God the Holy Ghost, but never from God the Son. He never speaks of the Son as of one other than Himself. It is He Himself who is the Son. Moreover, in taking the name of the Son, He takes it in a sense which implies nothing less than absolute equality in power and substance with the Father and the Holy Ghost. *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me. If you had known Me, you would without doubt have known My Father also; and from henceforth you shall know Him, and you have seen Him."* Philip said to Him: *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."* Jesus answered him: *"Have I been so long a time with you; and you have not known Me? Philip, He that seeth Me seeth the Father also. . . . Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? Otherwise believe for the very works' sake. Amen, amen I say to you, he that believeth in Me, the works that I do, he also shall do; and greater than these shall he do; because I go to the Father: and whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. . . . If you love Me, keep My commandments; and I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him. . . . If any man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him"* (John xiv).

He is the Son of God

In the above we have clearly indicated to us the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, as also Their union and Their distinction. And among these Three Persons, Jesus is the Son.

Claiming then to be the Son of God, this meek, humble, holy, gentle being never hesitates, in His discourses, to take the rank which becomes a Man-God, to place Himself above all creatures whether in heaven or on earth; above patriarchs and prophets; above Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon; above John the Baptist the greatest of the children of men; even above the angels: *"Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matt. xxvi. 53). He affirms His existence to be before the creation, from all eternity: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am"* (John viii. 58).

Acts and speaks with Divine authority

He even acts and speaks as God. He commands, He judges, He absolves, He decides and disposes all things with an absolute authority. To Peter He gives the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; to him and to the other apostles He grants the power of working miracles and of remitting sins. While others work miracles in the name of God, and by virtue of delegated powers, it is as Sovereign Master that Jesus gives His commands to nature, to men, to angels, to demons. To the daughter of Jairus who had just died, He said: *"Damsel, I say to thee, arise"* (Mark v. 41). To the widow's son who was being carried out for burial, He said: *"Young man, I say to thee, arise"*

(Luke vii. 14). To Lazarus, who had been four days in the tomb: "*Lazarus, come forth*" (John xi. 43). And in each case the dead rose up in obedience to His call.

Jesus, then, was not content with merely *declaring* His Divinity. In support of His claim He invoked the test of His works, and it was by miracles that He obtained belief in His words; for a miracle worked in favour of a doctrine is a Divine seal impressed upon that doctrine.

Jesus forgives sin

As God, He forgives sins. When, on a certain occasion, Jesus forgives the Scribes and Pharisees were scandalised at His remitting sins, and charged Him with blasphemy, saying in their hearts : Who can forgive sins but God? Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "*Why do you think evil in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins: Arise, He said* (turning to the man sick of the palsy), *take up thy bed, and go into thy house.*" Immediately the man rose up, and went away in the sight of all (Matt. ix. 2-7). And in the case of Magdalene, He forgives her all the sins she has committed against God, as a debt contracted towards Himself, and on account of her great love for Him: "*Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much*" (Luke vii. 47).

He is omnipotent

He declared that He would come to life again by His own power. "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. . . . But He spoke of the temple of His body*" (John ii. 19, 21). "*No man taketh my life away from Me ; but I lay it down of Myself; and I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again*" (John x. 18). What He declared He would do, that He did when He raised Himself to life again on Easter Sunday.

He requires the homage due to God alone

Beside taking the titles which belong to God, and attributing to Himself Divine power, He demands the homage which is due to God alone. He will be the object of faith: "*Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me*" (John xiv. 1). "*If I do the works of My Father, though you will not believe Me, believe the works; that you may know that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father*" (John x. 38). Of love: "*If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him*" (John xiv. 23). Of prayer: "*Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do. . . . If you shall ask Me anything in My name, that will I do*" (John xiv. 13, 14). Of adoration: "*And behold Jesus met them . . . but they came up and took hold of His feet, and adored Him*" (Matt. xxviii. 9). And the man who had been born blind said: "*I believe, Lord. And falling down, he adored Him*" (John ix. 38).

Jesus as God and Man

It may be objected, it is true, that certain passages of Scripture seem to represent the Son of God as inferior to the Father; such, for instance, as speak of submission

to the Father and doing His Father's will. It should be noted, however, that in these passages it is not a question of the Word considered simply as the Word, that is, of the Son of God considered as God; but of the Word made flesh, of the Son of God made man, of Jesus Christ who has two natures, the Divine nature which He has in common with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and the human nature which He has in common with us. Now, although Jesus Christ—God the Son made man—is inferior to the Father according to His humanity, He is equal to Him according to His Divinity. As Son of God, He is one and the same God with the Father: "*I and the Father are One*" (John x, 30); that is, one in Divine nature, but not in personality.

Conclusion

Christ, then, clearly claimed to have the nature and prerogatives of God—in fact, was crucified because of His claim. Had this claim been false or illusory, it is impossible for God to have supported His mission and teaching by the sanction of miraculous power. But He did so support it. Therefore the claim to it is true and Divinely sanctioned.