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# CHRIST TRUE GOD

By  
MARTIN J. SCOTT, S.J.

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# Christ True God

MARTIN J. SCOTT, S.J.

THE most momentous question for mankind is: Who and what is Christ? On the answer to this question depend our dealings with our fellowman, our outlook on life, our attitude towards affliction, and our beliefs concerning the grave. If we believe that Christ is God, we shall regard His precepts and teaching as the very ordinances of God, and in living by them, have the assurance that we shall eventually share His everlasting blessedness. If, on the other hand, we do not believe that Christ is God, we must reject Christianity as a fable and believe that Christ was an impostor and blasphemer, or, at least, a victim of hallucination.

It was a common-sense philosopher who declared that Christ was either Divine or demented. Consider for a moment what Christ affirmed Himself to be, and judge if any sane person who was not an impostor could make such claims.

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John viii, 12). Who but an insane man could affirm that of himself, unless he was truly Divine? Again, He set Himself up as a model for all mankind: "Learn of me, that I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. xi, 29). No mere man would presume to proclaim himself the exemplar of mankind. To speak thus, if Christ were man only, would be insane arrogance.

What man would dare proclaim as Christ did: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live" (John xi, 25)? None but the Creator may assure life after death. Unless Christ was what He claimed to be, how could He presume to say: "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore, teach ye all nations, . . . and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. xxviii, 18-20)?

These and similar declarations of Christ must be the ravings of a maniac unless He was truly God. Not even an impostor would make such claims, for they would be so preposterous as to engender ridicule rather than credence. Even an impostor must have a sense of proportion.

It is clear, therefore, that unless we regard Christ as mentally unsound, we must accept His claims. But the most hostile critics of Christ do not for a moment consider that He was insane. The verdict of the learned world is that Christ was the most perfect being, mentally and morally, that this world has known. He who is the most perfect being is neither fool nor fraud. We must therefore accept Christ, since His testimony cannot be discredited.

As all Christians know, the *Incarnation* means that God became man. This does not mean that God was turned into man, nor that God ceased to be God and began to be man; but that, remaining God, He assumed or took a new nature, namely, human, uniting this to the Divine nature in the one being or person—Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

At the marriage feast at Cana, the water became wine at the will of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Creation (John ii, 1-11). Not so did God become man, for at Cana the water ceased to be water when it became wine.

An example which may help us to understand in what sense God became man, but yet one that does not perfectly illustrate the matter, is that of a king who should of his own will become a beggar. If a mighty king should leave his throne and the luxury of the court, and assume the rags of a beggar, live with beggars, share their hardship, etc., in order to improve their condition, we should say that the king became a beggar, yet was still truly a king. It would be correct to say that what the beggar suffered was the suffering of a king; that when the beggar atoned for something, it was the king that atoned, etc.

Since Jesus Christ is God and man, it is evident that God, in some way, is man also. Now in what way is God man? It is clear He was not always man, since man is not eternal and God is. At a certain definite time, therefore, God became man by assuming human nature. What do we mean by *assuming human nature*? We mean that the Son

of God, remaining God, took another nature, namely, that of man, and so united it with His own that it constituted the one Person, Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation, therefore, means that the Son of God, true God from all eternity, in the course of time became true man also, in the one Person, Jesus Christ, consisting of the two natures, the human and the Divine. This, of course, is a mystery. We cannot understand it any more than we can understand the Trinity.

There are mysteries all about us. We do not understand how the grass and water which cattle live on are converted into their flesh and blood. A chemical analysis of milk shows no ingredient of blood in it, yet the milk which a babe receives from its mother's breast is changed into the flesh and blood of the child. The mother herself does not know how the milk is produced in her which she gives to the child she suckles.

All the wise men in the world cannot explain the connection between thought and speech. We should not be surprised, therefore, if we cannot understand the Incarnation. We believe it because He who has revealed it is God Himself, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

It may be objected that this is to prove the Incarnation by the Incarnation. Let us consider this point. Christ asserted that He was the eternal Son of God. But anyone may make an assertion. When Christ, who certainly was a man, claimed that He was also God, was His claim substantiated? Did He give evidence that in making this stupendous claim He was stating the truth? This is the crux of the whole matter.

#### THE EVIDENCE IN THE CASE

Christians affirm that Christ did give evidence to corroborate His assertion. No one is a Christian who denies or doubts that Jesus Christ is true God and true man. In order, however, to fortify Christians against the assaults of Rationalists and others such, and in order also to afford non-believers reasons for faith in Christ as God, we shall review briefly the evidence for our faith in Christ as the Son

of God. We shall go about this matter in the same way that a court of law proceeds when a case is before it for adjudication.

If a man makes a statement before a tribunal and it is disputed, he must corroborate it in a way that will convince reasonable minds. If the man's intelligence be sound, and his character above reproach, and if besides he bring respectable witnesses to confirm his statement, and if in addition he adduce other evidence of a corroborative nature, all of which substantiates his assertion, his testimony will stand. If, moreover, his testimony does not benefit himself, but on the contrary causes him very serious loss and suffering, it is evident that any jury which is open to conviction would accept his testimony.

The intelligence of Christ is acknowledged by the learned world to be the soundest known to mankind. The character of Christ stands out as the most upright in the annals of history. The corroborative evidence furnished by Christ is the most convincing ever presented for any claim. In Christ, therefore, we have a witness who is intellectually sound, morally upright, and in addition supported by confirmatory evidence of the most convincing character. In brief, Christ stands out as the highest type of person that ever witnessed to a fact, and in addition, presents incontrovertible evidence to substantiate His testimony.

Are we to believe Him, or to brand Him as a shameful impostor? He is, on His own testimony, either God or a fraud. The most perfect being that was ever in this world was not a fraud. Even those who are unwilling to admit that Christ is Divine assert that intellectually and morally He towers above the rest of mankind. In point of fact, Rationalists have glorified the character and intellect of Christ as highly as His most ardent followers. They grant Him everything but Divinity.

#### TESTIMONY OF RATIONALISTS

Harnack, prince of Rationalists, has this to say of the character of Christ: "The sublimity which emanated from the person of Christ is as Divine as any appearance on earth

of the Divine has ever been" ("Gesprache mit Eckermann," viii, 148). Here Harnack concedes that Christ's character was as near to Divine as this world has known.

Rousseau makes a similar admission: "Can the Person, whose history is recorded in the Gospel, Himself be a mere man? What gentleness, what purity in His morals, what a touching charm in His teachings, what sublimity in His principles, what profound wisdom in His discourses, what presence of mind, and what apt frankness in His replies, what control over the passions!" ("Oeuvres," ii, 280). This can be said of no other human being.

Pfeiderer, another Rationalist, says that Jesus is "a heroic personality which in triumphant majesty passed over the earth, and is still today the redeeming and formative power which lends to human life both in its details and essential character a merit and value that outlast the temporal" ("Entstehung des Christentums," ii, 11, 108).

It would be difficult for the most devoted adherents of Jesus to give Him higher human praise than these Rationalists have bestowed on Him. From the very camp of those outside the Faith, therefore, we have the highest testimony to the moral character of Christ. Let us see what men of this same type say of Christ's intelligence.

Julius Kögel thus refers to Christ's mentality: "A universal and illuminating frankness permeates His discourses and gives, particularly to His metaphors and parables, a unique and wondrous charm, impregnating them with a glow of the clearest and most splendid colors. In them there is revealed an insight into the things of this world, the significance of which Jesus has absorbed with His sharp and penetrating glance, and whose value, even if naturally only a relative one, He frankly acknowledges, since He makes use of them for the elucidation of His thoughts" ("Probleme des Jesu," p. 35). Nothing shows keen mentality so much as the power of discernment and comparison. Kögel, in that passage, attributes this power in supreme degree to Jesus.

Let us hear Harnack on this same point: "Jesus never spoke like an *exalté* or fanatic, who sees only one burning point, and for whom on that account, all the rest of the

world and all that is in it vanishes. He delivered His sermons and looked out into the world with a clear, fresh perception of the great and the small in the life which surrounded Him. He proclaimed the fact that the gaining of the whole world is of no importance if the soul be lost; and yet He remained sympathetic for and interested in every living thing" ("Wesen des Christentums," p. 22).

We could go on piling up testimony from outside sources to the moral and mental sublimity of Christ, but what we have adduced is sufficient to show that no human being is entitled to credence if it be not Jesus Christ. We content ourselves with giving as character-witnesses to Christ those who are not of His faith, because if even those outside so highly commend Him, it is proof positive that His mentality and veracity are above questioning. If a man of Christ's character were today put on the witness stand, would it be possible to doubt the truth of His testimony?

#### OTHER CREDENTIALS

But beside His character, Christ presents other credentials for His Divine claims. Knowing that He made the most stupendous claims ever heard among mankind, He realized the need of substantiating them. He made supernatural claims. Supernatural claims demanded supernatural confirmation. This, Jesus supplied. When He perceived that in spite of His ascendancy over the people His claims staggered them, He said: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though you will not believe me, believe the works . . . they give testimony of me" (John x, 25-38).

Christ claimed to be God Almighty, the Creator of the world. Yet in appearance He was as the rest of men. The Jews had an inexpressible reverence for God. So far did this reverence go, that they did not pronounce His name, but used a symbol instead. *Jehovah* was the Maker of heaven and earth, the Ruler of the universe, the Lord of life and death. Is it any wonder that the Jews were not only amazed, but stunned, when Jesus affirmed that He was the eternal and infinite Lord of time and eternity? How could



the Creator be a creature; the Infinite, finite; the Eternal, temporal? Jesus perfectly understood their mental attitude, and for this reason condescended to confirm His claims by deeds which were directly possible to almighty God alone.

Miracles are the sign-language of God. They are the Divine seal put upon a man and a mission, stamping them as true. When a monarch puts his seal on a document, it signifies royal approval of its contents. When a government sends an ambassador to a foreign court, it puts its seal on his credentials, to signify that his mission has government confirmation. So when God puts His seal on a man or a mission, it is God's confirmation on that person or mission. God cannot approve of error. Hence a miracle is Divine confirmation of what it is associated with, because a miracle is directly or indirectly the work of God, and hence God's approval of what it confirms.

The prophets of the Old Testament and the saints of the New performed miracles, but always as the agents of the Almighty. They called on God to manifest His power in order to confirm the truth of their cause. But not so did Christ perform miracles. His miraculous deeds were done in His own name, directly.

To the corpse that was the son of the widow of Naim, which was being carried out to burial, Jesus said: "Young man, I say to thee, arise" (Luke vii, 14), and in response to the Creator's direct command, the corpse became a living being. To the leper, Jesus said: "Be thou made clean" (Matt. viii, 3), and straightway the leprosy left its victim. To the cripple, lying helpless on a cot, He said: "Arise, take up thy bed and walk" (John v, 8), and the paralyzed man leapt to his feet perfectly sound and whole. To the sinner, Jesus said: "Thy sins are forgiven thee" (Matt. ix, 2), and in confirmation that his sins were truly forgiven, Jesus restored the cripple to soundness of limb, showing that the words which gave his body health also healed his soul (Matt. ix, 6-7).

None but God can directly forgive sin. The Jews knew this, and when Jesus pronounced forgiveness on the sinners, they thought in their hearts that He was guilty of blasphemy, because none but God can forgive sin (Mark ii,

6-7). Jesus, who read their hearts as we read a book, told them their thoughts, saying: "Why do you say in your heart that I am a blasphemer because I forgive sins? It is true that none but God can forgive sin, and to show you that I am God, I will now do what is possible to God alone. In my own name I will say to this paralytic: 'Arise!' that you may know that my words have the efficacy of God." Then, turning to the paralytic, He spoke the word, and the man who was carried to the feet of Jesus on a bed, took up his bed rejoicing, and returned home sound of soul and body (Mark ii, 11-12).

### THE FINAL MIRACLE

Again at the grave of Lazarus, Jesus demonstrated most unmistakably that He was what He claimed to be. Before performing this, His greatest miracle, He made it a test of the truth of His Divine claims. There were assembled at the tomb of Lazarus the most distinguished men of Jerusalem, members of the Council and of the Sanhedrim. Before this critical gathering, Jesus gave the greatest possible proof of His Divine claims. He, as it were, challenged doubters. He proclaimed to the bystanders that what He was about to do was in order to call His heavenly Father to witness the truth of His claims and mission. Raising His eyes to Heaven to His eternal Father, He stated His reason for the impending miracle,—“that they may know that Thou hast sent me” (John xi, 42). Then as the expectant multitude looked on, He cried out to the corpse which had already begun to corrupt: “Lazarus, come forth” (John xi, 43). The clay obeyed the voice of the Creator, and became instantly a man, perfect in health and faculties.

It was after this stupendous display of Divine power that the Jews poured out from Jerusalem and met Jesus on the way. Cutting down branches from the trees, they waved them triumphantly before Him, crying out: “Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord” (John xii, 13). The Jewish leaders then hastily called a council, saying: “What do we, for this man doth many miracles? . . . Do you see that we prevail noth-

ing? Behold, the whole world is gone after him" (John xi, 47; xii, 19). It is this Jesus who testifies to the truth of the Incarnation.

It is on the word of Jesus Christ that we believe that God became man. Are we to believe Him? If not, no man in the history of mankind can be believed. No person that ever lived is so worthy of credence as Jesus Christ. His moral character is the highest conceivable. He alone of all men could say: "Which of you shall convince me of sin?" (John viii, 46). He alone could point to Himself as a model: "Learn of me, that I am meek, and humble of heart" (Matt. xi, 29). His morality and mentality have never been approached on this earth.

This Jesus is our authority for the truth of the Incarnation. Besides His sublime integrity and keen mentality, His deeds speak for Him. Never in the history of the world was there such a witness to a fact as Jesus Christ is to the Incarnation. It is on His word that we base our belief in the Incarnation. Faith that rests on such a foundation is eminently reasonable, even though it be concerned with what is above reason to comprehend.

### HUMANITY AND DIVINITY

It may not be generally known, but it is a fact, that the Catholic Church has had to defend the fact of the humanity of Christ in past ages as it now feels obliged to uphold His Divinity. In former ages, the person of Jesus was so wonderful in the eyes of Christians that some maintained that He was not really man, but such in appearance only. Against these persons, the Church proclaimed that Jesus Christ was true man, like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. Christians in that era had no doubts concerning the Divinity of Christ. In their estimation He was so Divine that some could not reconcile human nature with His perfection.

This perfect human being, the one man in the history of mankind who could point to Himself as a model for humanity, the one man of all men who could openly challenge the world to accuse Him of sin, the one man who performed

deeds never before done since the foundation of the world, this man solemnly proclaimed that He was the eternal Son of the eternal Father, that in all things He was equal to the Father.

Christ affirmed that He was God, although He knew that His affirmation would cause Him to be sentenced to a death of pain and shame. Before the tribunal of the High Priest, the highest sacred tribunal of the nation, He solemnly swore that He was the true Son of God. The High Priest put Him on His oath: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that thou tell us if thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. xxvi, 63). Jesus answered: "I am" (Mark xiv, 62).

It is clear that the High Priest, in using the term *Son of God*, meant it in its real sense; otherwise, he would not have pronounced the answer of Jesus blasphemy. If Jesus did not mean to affirm that He was God in the sense that He was Jehovah, there could be no grounds for the accusation of blasphemy. As it was, He was declared guilty of death because, as the Jews stated to Pilate, being man, He made Himself to be God (John xix, 7).

That Christ meant to affirm that He was God is evident from what He had previously said: "I and the Father are one" (John x, 30). Before that, He had proclaimed that there was one God only (John xvii, 3). When therefore He stated that He and the Father were one, He made Himself God as the Father was God. At the baptism of Jesus, the Father bore testimony that Jesus was the Divine Son of God, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii, 17).

Unless, therefore, the Incarnation is a fact, the bottom drops out of Christianity. Unless Jesus Christ is God, He is the most criminal impostor this world has known, for believing on His word, millions of the best men and women of the human race have gone to death to uphold their faith in His Divinity. Jesus Christ is guilty of more bloodshed than all the tyrants of history if He is not God as He solemnly declared.

## WHY IS HE DOUBTED?

It may be asked, why is it that in view of Christ's perfect moral and mental character there are those who refuse to accept His claims to Divinity? Perhaps the chief reason is that, if they believe that Christ is God, they must live by His precepts. They are willing to admit that He is everything but God. They are even willing to admit that He is Divine in a certain sense, that is, that He above all other men was most highly favored by Almighty God, and in consequence most nearly approached the Divine ideal.

But all this is mere evasion and self-deception. For if Christ is the highest expression of the Divine in man, He surely was neither deranged nor a deceiver. And if He was neither deranged nor a deceiver, He was what He claimed to be, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Alexander, Cæsar, Aristotle, Plato and other persons of antiquity are accepted by mankind as credible historical personages. Christ is more of a historical personage than any of these, but is not credited by worldly people. They can believe in Aristotle without having to regulate their life by his teaching. That is the difference, and that explains in great measure the attitude of those worldly people who deny that Christ is God.

Christ has done His part to save us. It rests with ourselves to do our part. He was crucified because He maintained He was God. He was worse than a fool or impostor to die willingly for a false claim. He sacrificed His life that we might have eternal life. He died that we might live forever. It makes all the difference in the world to mankind whether Christ was God, or a deranged impostor.

Truly the most momentous question in the world is: *Who and what is Christ?* The Catholic Church answers that Jesus is the true Son of God, equal to the eternal Father in all things; that He established a Church which was to last forever and teach unerringly His doctrine; that this Church is consequently in the world now, teaching with His certainty and authority; that Catholicism is as true as God.

## WHAT DOES CHRIST MEAN TO ME?

What does Christ mean to me personally? No matter what He may be, and no matter what He may be to the world at large, unless He be to me, personally, the Ruler of Heaven and earth, the Lord of time and eternity, the Legislator whose will is the law of my life, unless Christ be all this to me, the Incarnation is lost on me. It is worse than lost, for Christ the Saviour will be for me Christ the Judge.

Selfishness and passion may blind me to the claims of Christ now, but when I stand in His presence before the eternal tribunal, selfishness and passion will be no defense for my rejection of Him or my indifference to Him.

The Son of God became man in order that man might become a partaker of the Divine Nature.

The Incarnation gives a new meaning to life and a new dignity to man. Life, no matter how burdensome, is worth while if it lead us to membership in the Divine family. The realization of who and what Christ is, gives to His faithful followers that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away, that peace which comes from knowing that we are friends of God, and that we are on our way to that blessed home which He has prepared for those who serve and love Him.

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