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THE DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS OF CHRIST

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In this, his first article for Faith & Reason, the internationally renowned French theologian Bertrand de Margerie, SJ examines what has become one of the hotly disputed questions in contemporary theological debate. With calm reasoning and discernment, Fr. de Margerie sets forth the Church's teaching concerning the divine and human consciousness of our Lord.



HIS TITLE AND TOPIC MAKES US ENTER INTO A MYSTERIOUS AND CONTROVERTED field of thought, about which so much has already been written! Who is Jesus of Nazareth in His own eyes? What did Jesus say about Himself? Was there an unconscious zone in His human psychology? After a preamble about the meaning of the vocabulary used, we shall consider, in the context of the faith of the Catholic Church, the following three aspects: 1) the divine consciousness of Jesus Christ, 2) His human consciousness as a divine Person, and 3) the effects of this human consciousness of being the Son of God on his mission as Revealer and Saviour.

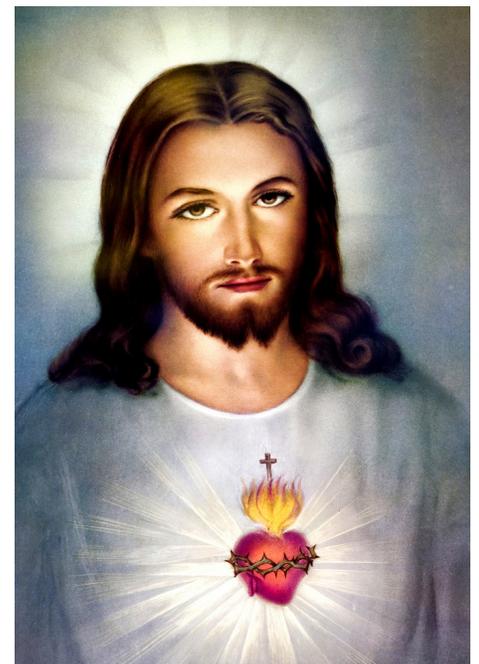
We shall conclude with a synthetical outlook at the Eucharistic consciousness of Christ. This whole study might be understood as an introduction to a fruitful reading of my booklet on “the Human Knowledge of Christ,” published by the Daughters of St. Paul. In this small book I was considering mainly the knowledge of Jesus in his human nature, and only in passing the mystery of His self-consciousness; here, I intend to do the reverse.

A word on methodology: much more than to try to demonstrate anything on the precious level of apologetics, from a rational reflection over historical data, I wish to expose what the Catholic theologian can say, inside faith in divine Revelation, about the mysterious consciousness of Jesus Christ.

PREAMBLE ON VOCABULARY

Let us briefly recall what is understood by these four words: consciousness, person, nature, subject.

The philosophical vocabulary of *consciousness* is far from being unanimously fixed. For some—and probably for most—consciousness means an *immediate experience of self*; for others, a more complex, if not confused, reality. Here I opt for the understanding of consciousness as immediate experience of self; or, at least, as intimate experience of self. In other terms, the whole theological



treatment of the topic would be different if I adopted a different philosophical understanding of consciousness.

Consciousness comes from the Latin *conscientia*, a contraction for *cum alio scientia*: a knowledge along with something else. In this line, consciousness means the reflective knowledge a knower has of himself and of his act in the process of knowing some thing other than himself. Consciousness is experience, intimate experience of self and of one's acts. In human beings, consciousness does not necessarily imply a knowledge of one's own nature or essence, but at least of one's existence. Consciousness is not always knowledge.

By way of consequence, consciousness is not only the awareness that the subject has of his being here and now, but also of his past states of thought and emotion, previously experienced and retained in the memory; consciousness also includes them when they are no more in the field of awareness.

The *Person* is a concrete individuality existing in itself, as a substance, not an accident of another, and in an intellectual nature, that is in a nature open to all being and referring itself to all Being through all its acts.

The *subject* is on the psychological level what the person is on the ontological one.

Nature is a principle of operation, for instance, of acts of consciousness.

All these concepts are here understood in the context of Bernard Lonergan's view of Thomism.¹

THE DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS-OF-CHRIST AS GOD AND SON OF GOD

1) If consciousness is a quality immanent to intellectual operations, it is clear that our analogical knowledge of God allows us and even obliges us to say that God is an Infinite Act of Being and Love, perfectly and infinitely conscious of Himself. God is infinite, eternal Consciousness. God knows Himself perfectly and infinitely. God is Light. There is no unconscious in God. His plenitude of Being is fullness of knowledge and of consciousness. Christ as God is infinite Self-Consciousness, infinite Light.

2) Christ is not only God. He is also God from

God, Light from Light, He is the only Son of God. He is eternally conscious of being generated by the Father, of receiving His divine nature and His very divine consciousness from the Father. He is eternally conscious of being loved by the Father and of reciprocally loving Him, in that way spirating and "breathing" their common Spirit.

3) However, the eternal Son of God is not only conscious of Himself, of His absolute Being. He is also conscious in Himself of unceasingly creating me, out of nothing.

In and with Himself, the Son of God knows all His ideas, particularly the Idea He eternally has of me—a loving and merciful Idea. It is as infinite Consciousness of Himself that the Son of God knows, loves and creates me.

I am eternally an aspect of the divine self-consciousness of the Word, Logos of the Father.

4) Deeper still, the Son of God is the eternal, uncreated expression of the knowledge that the Father has of himself and of all the creation, including of myself. In the mirror of the divine Essence, identical to Himself, God our Father sees all possible creatures. He sees me and expresses his knowledge of me in the eternal pronouncement of His only Word, His only Son. In a parallel way, as Father and Son love each other, loving their common amiability, they love all the possible reflections and images of this common amiability (amongst whom I am) and they produce, "breathe", their only and eternal Spirit-Link as an eternal overflow of their love for me (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.37.2.3).

5) In other terms, each one of us is, so I am, eternally present in the reciprocal consciousness of the Three divine I(s). Precisely, we reach here a last and important point of the divine consciousness of the Son of God: the divine science and the divine consciousness are on the side of the nature common to the Three. Just as in man consciousness qualifies human nature and not necessarily and immediately the human person, (who remains such even when he is unconscious, for instance during sleep), so, in an analogical way, there is a unique divine consciousness common to the Three divine Persons; these three divine Subjects are each conscious of self and of the other two through a unique consciousness. Their nature is unique, so is their consciousness.

They are for this reason three self-conscious subjects through an unique consciousness.

This point has been beautifully stressed by Langeran.³ This means that, though the Son of God is infinitely different from His Father, and from their Holy Spirit, His consciousness of me in Himself is the same as the consciousness that Father and Holy Spirit have of me.⁴ And the Son of God receives this divine consciousness from the Father, with His divine nature.

THE HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SON OF GOD MADE MAN

In Christ, as we know through Revelation and faith, there are two natures, one divine, the other human. That is, there are two principles of operation. Consequently, consciousness is immediately a quality of the nature, there are two consciousnesses in Christ: one divine, the other human.

However, all the actions of the human nature of Christ, all the actions posited by this human nature, are ultimately ascribed to the divine Person of the Logos acting through its human nature. (Let us not forget that the same Logos, Son of God, acts both as God, as possessing the divine nature, and as man, through his human nature.) So the acts of human consciousness of the Incarnate Son of God are always posited by his divine Person acting through his human nature. The divine Ego of the Son is always both the Subject and the ultimate object of these acts.

In other words, due to the unique Person of Christ which is divine, there is no human consciousness of Christ which would be the consciousness of a Person only human. When Jesus says I, his divine Person expresses in this human word and concept his human consciousness of a divine Self.

This means that the same and unique divine Ego knows himself divinely on one side, humanly on the other. It is not a human ego who would know itself humanly, as in our case. It is a divine Ego who knows Himself not only divinely, but also humanly.

How? On the ultimate basis of the New Testament, on the more proximate basis of traditional Catholic theology (recognizing since the thirteenth century, at least, the existence in Jesus, since his conception, of the

act of Beatific Vision as affecting his human intelligence), several modern Catholic theologians have concluded that there is a connection between this act and His human consciousness of his divine Self. Without the permanent elevation of the human mind of Jesus to the act of Beatific vision, that is to say, to the face to face vision of His Eternal Father and of His own eternal and divine Ego, there is no possible explanation of His permanent consciousness of His divine identity.

If consciousness is Intimate knowledge and experience of self, if the Subject in Christ is a divine Person, He can not humanly experience Himself in an immediate way without the act of Beatific Vision. Neither sense experience, nor reflection or reasoning on the basis of it could lead Jesus Christ-in his human mind-to an intuitive consciousness of His divine Person. Not even an infused conceptual knowledge of Prophetic type could achieve such a result.⁵

In other words, nothing short of a permanent act of Beatific Vision, given to Jesus ever since the first moment of the creation of His human, immaterial, immortal soul and of its assumption by the Logos, could give to this soul the immediate awareness of belonging to a divine Person.

That Jesus enjoyed the Beatific vision on earth, from the moment of his conception, has been the conclusion to which came all the schools of Catholic theology since at least the twelfth or thirteenth century.

Particularly, many Catholic theologians and exegetes have seen in the Gospel of John's repeated allusions to the vision of the Father by the earthly, pre-ascend Jesus of Nazareth a strong biblical basis for this affirmation (1,18; 5,19-20; 6,46; 8,38). These texts show that Jesus was the permanent human seer of the Father and of the Father's plan and action regarding the salvation of mankind. And how could Jesus see, in his human mind, the Father face to face without seeing Himself in His Father?⁶



For instance, let us quote here the famous English exegete, Dodd, commenting upon John 6:46, "The knowledge which Christ has of God has that quality of direct vision which Hellenistic mystics claimed-falsely in the Evangelist's view-and which for Jewish thinkers was reserved for the supernatural life of the Age to Come."⁷

More importantly, Christ's knowledge as seer of the Father is transconceptual, incommunicable as such.⁸ Whereas Christ's knowledge, as Prophet and Revealer, of the data he was to transmit to mankind in the name of the Father is indirect and mediated through concepts; such a knowledge does not explain his human and immediate knowledge and experience of His own divine identity and Ego, though it presupposes it.

So, even without the precise and particular Biblical foundations provided by the Gospel of John, the general Biblical witness to the divinity of Jesus would oblige us to postulate for Him, ever since the creation and immediate assumption of His soul by the Logos, this beatific vision, this beatifying and immediate experience of His divine Person by his human intelligence-in other words, His human consciousness of His divine Ego.

Whereas, we, ordinary human beings, can be admitted to the Beatific vision only after the creation of our souls, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only Man who is and always was God; so we can not admit the sudden irruption, in what would have been an ordinary human psychology or even in an extraordinary and prophetic one, of a consciousness of being God which would have replaced a purely human consciousness of being a man, unconscious of His divinity.

Nothing in the Gospel indicates in Jesus a becoming conscious of a previously unknown identity: neither the first human words recorded by Luke as pronounced by Jesus, in the Temple of Jerusalem, when He said to Mary: "I had to be in my Father's house (Lk 2:48-50, obviously meaning, not Joseph, but his Eternal Father⁹), nor the first declaration of the eternal Father witnessing to His beloved Son during His baptism by John, in the Jordan. Jesus did not learn Who He was: He always knew it; as the Belgian Bishops wrote in 1967, "no one had to tell him who He was.

The consciousness of Jesus is a filial consciousness,¹⁰ manifested especially by Him when He identified Himself with the divine I am: "before Abra-

ham became, I am (John 8:58).

The consciousness of Jesus is also manifested when He calls Himself-not less than 70 times-the Son of Man:

In calling Himself the Son of Man, Jesus expresses His whole mystery: His awareness of His preexistence, of His redemptive death and of His glory to come: all that is before time, all that He accomplished in time, all that awaits Him at the end of time ... Truly, this title expresses best His consciousness of Messiah and Son, for He stresses His possession at the same time of a true human origin and His heavenly origin; with this title, the Christology of the New Testament is at its maximum since the outset.¹¹

Through these two human concepts-I am, the Son of Man-Jesus was able to communicate in human language the supra-conceptual knowledge derived from his human consciousness of being the Son of God. It is true that Jesus could not communicate to us these truths in the manner according to which He was seeing them in the bosom of the Father, but His soul was seeing, in the very light of Beatific Vision, through which deficient human concepts and words the seen mysteries would be enunciated.¹²

THE EFFECTS OF THIS THEANDRIC SELF- CONSCIOUSNESS OF JESUS ON HIS MISSION AS REVEALER AND REDEEMER

"*I am*", "*the Son of Man*": these two human concepts, expressed in human language, remain such when used by the Son of God. This is obvious. Any human being can say, I am. We can also say, with Ezechiel, about any prophet that "he is a son of man." The extraordinary use and application that Jesus makes of these concepts does not change their intrinsic nature; but when Jesus uses them about His own Person and destiny, they become loaded with a transconceptual weight; as we listen to Him telling us: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, you shall know that I am" (John 8:28). We hear Someone telling us and making us understand that He transcends time and space. It is none the less through the use of these concepts linked with time and space that Jesus is teaching us His eternity and His infinity, as well as His desire to lead us to participate in His eternal and infinite happiness.

To understand better the revealing and salvific use made by Jesus of our human language, let us recall the very precise and precious declarations of an eminent Catholic theologian, Juan Alfaro:

Christ acquired by the normal way of human apprenticeship the conceptual representations and the very terms with which He translated His filial experience: it suffices to recall the primordial influence that certain images, formulas, Old Testament concepts (for instance the Servant of Yahweh, the Son of Man, etc.) have exerted on His message. But these same concepts received from the personal experience of Christ a new and transcendental dimension. Moreover this experience could contribute to the formation of concepts and of new terms. The invocation *abba* (Mk 14:36), for example, with which Christ expressed his intimate experience of divine filiation, was an original creation. More than the formation of new concepts, the personal experience of Christ contributed to the living of the events of His existence in the transcendental light of His filial relation with God and He understood in this same light the words of the Prophets as realized in His Person (Mk 1:11, 2:28, 8:31, 9:7, 14:62, Lk 4:18, etc.). The absolute certitude with which Christ utters his doctrine, affirms his divine filiation at the risk of His life and requires from men an unconditional adhesion to His Person, this is a reflection of that intimate, metaconceptual light in the field of His conceptual consciousness.¹⁵

Thanks to His permanent, unique act of beatific vision, Jesus, the Seer of the Father, conscious of being the Son, can use His knowledge of human language and concepts and of divine truths to accomplish His mission of Revealer.

If He were only the Seer of the Father without an accompanying knowledge in conceptual terms, Jesus could not communicate His message to men. He needs His human knowledge to do so.

If He were only the Seer of the Father, without an infused knowledge in conceptual terms, Jesus could not have merited for us our salvation ever since His entrance into this world: "This is what Christ said as coming into the world: I am coming to obey your will, here I am" (Hb 10:5-9). Many interpreters have seen in this inspired affirmation of Hebrews, in this initial and redeeming, sac-

rificial oblation, the presence of an infused knowledge in Jesus since the first moment of the Incarnation.

Indeed, the Act of Beatific Vision as such is not a principle of merit; it is only through acts posited in the connection of His prophetic or of His acquired, experiential knowledge that Jesus could merit the reward of our salvation.

Without an infused, conceptual and universal knowledge, Christ the Son of God, the conscious human Seer and Witness of His divine Super Ego, could not merit, as Redeemer, our eternal happiness nor know or expiate our sins as Redeemer, nor be our Judge, as Man. But all his knowledge as Redeemer was totally penetrated and transfigured by His self-consciousness of being the Incarnate Son, Seer of the Father and of us in the Father.

Let us recapitulate the reasons for which the human consciousness of Christ Jesus transcends in an incomparable way our self-consciousness:

a) We became self-conscious after having been unconscious of self. Our self-consciousness is mediated by the knowledge of the exterior world. It is not a permanent accident, as sleep manifests. We are only partially self-conscious because many of our past acts have become unconscious and we are totally unconscious of our future acts, so that the vast majority of our human actions escape our present consciousness; even in Mary, such was the case.

b) Whereas, in Jesus Christ, his human consciousness of self and of all his human actions is always actual and present; nothing in His past acts escapes His self-consciousness. Before Easter Jesus was always aware of all His future actions. His human consciousness was always direct and did not need any exterior mediation. In Jesus, the human self-consciousness of His divine identity was not a transitory but a permanent accident accompanying always the substance of His human nature.

c) There is a last transcendence of the human self-consciousness of Jesus as Son of God to which I would like to call your attention.

Jesus, in virtue of His beatific vision even before Easter, was the only Man able to see here below, unceasingly, His Father creating-out of nothing-His humanity,

His own human consciousness of being the Son of God. We do not see here below the creation of our own immortal souls, of our selfconsciousness as they are created by God from nothingness.

Precisely because Jesus was unceasingly seeing-as a Man-the position in being-out of nothingness-of His human soul and self-consciousness, it was mysteriously easier for Him, so conscious of His human contingency, to accept and embrace the will of the Eternal Father on the death of his mortal body for the eternal life of the world: "I know the Father and I lay down my life of my own free will ... This is the commandment I have been given by the Father" (John 10:15,18).¹⁴

THE EUCHARISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

We can now somehow understand the beautiful statement of Pope Pius XII in his doctrinal Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ:

The knowledge and love of our divine Redeemer, of which we were the objects from the first moment of His Incarnation, are more than any human intellect or heart can hope to grasp. In the womb of the Mother of God, he began to enjoy the Beatific vision and in that vision all the members of His mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him and He embraced them with His redeeming love. In the manger, on the Cross, Jesus knows and loves all the members of His Church better, much better than a mother knows and loves her own child and that anybody knows and loves himself.¹⁵

In other words, Jesus, humanly conscious of being the Son of God and of His salvific mission, is also inseparably-as Man, lovingly conscious of each one of us; each one of us can and should say with the Apostle Paul¹⁶: "The Son of God loved me and delivered Himself up for me (Ga 2:20). Otherwise, how would he have humanly expiated my sins? How would He have humanly redeemed humanity? His kenosis did not consist in the (impossible) suppression of His divine consciousness nor in the suspensions of His human knowledge, but in the painful assumption of the human knowledge of the sins and sorrows of men.

He loved me not only in His divine "form and condition," but also in His "human form," in His "form and condition of slave" (Ph 2:6-8). He loved me in spite of my sins, in order to save me from them and it is because He knew me-and knew them-in that human form that He offered Himself for me on the Cross and ever offers Himself for me on all the altars of the world.

The Church has never believed that the man Jesus knew me on the Cross only as God, loved me on the Cross only with a divine love. Never has she believed that the man Jesus as man did not know my sins and my person at the moment of dying for my salvation.¹⁷

As we receive the Eucharistic Christ¹⁸, we receive Him who, in the womb of His Mother, in the Crib, during His agony in the Garden, during the last Supper, on the Cross, has always known and loved us both as Son of God and as Man. Always lovingly and humanly conscious of being the Son of God, He wants to help us become more conscious of being, in faith, adopted sons of His heavenly Father, so as to lead us to the Beatific vision, eternally, of His own divine consciousness and of His own indefectible human consciousness of being our Redeemer and Saviour.

In this beatific vision, we shall understand better how Jesus, the Christ, both as God and as Man, has always been lovingly conscious of each one of us. That is, Jesus Christ never knew Himself as God and as Man without knowing us in Himself, He never loved Himself without loving us in and with Himself.

In other words, for Jesus Christ, "conscientia" is always "cum alio scientia". If, already, as certain psychologists and philosophers think, the human subject becomes conscious thanks to an exterior object but in the context of another human subject; if, consequently, on the ordinary human level, consciousness is intersubjective, and if we do not forget that man is the image of the Trinity, we understand better that, in Christ Jesus, consciousness implies science of God inside the science of man, science of man inside the science of God, science or knowledge of the Father inside the knowledge of the brother and conversely. In his human consciousness, Jesus knows and loves the Heart of His Father, His own Heart and all human hearts, including my own.

NOTES

1We have derived great profit from the study of N. Spaccapelo, S.J., “La coscienza di Cristo, *Science et Esprit*, 26 (1974) 5-37. This study takes its inspiration from B. Lonergan.

2B. de Margerie, S.J., *Les Perfections du Dieu de Jesus-Christ*, Paris, 1981, ch. VI, pp. 145-157.

3B. Lonergan, S.J., *De Deo trino*, Rome, 1964, vol. II, pp. 186-196; cf. B. de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, translated by E. J. Fortman, S.J., St. Bede’s Publications, Still River, MA, 1982, p. 267.

4Ibid.

5Except if it is linked with Beatific Vision: cf. P. Galtier, S.J., *De Incarnatione et Redemptione*, Paris, 1947, section 334, p. 263, commenting upon Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 111.11.1.

6see B. de Margerie, *The human knowledge of Christ*, Boston, 1980, section 16, pp. 22 ff: “If Christ is a prophet never in error, it is precisely because He enjoys as man the vision of His Father, a vision which is the supreme source of infallibility and immutability in the perception of truth by the human soul of the God-Man. Christ Himself tells us that His teaching is worthy of belief because He speaks of what He has seen (Jn 3:11, 3:31-32, 8:38). The Gospel of John specifically presents Christ as superior to Moses for that reason: Moses has not seen God (cf. Jn 1:18) while Jesus has seen and continually sees the Father, who, in this context, draws men to His Son as an infallible Master (Jn 6:45-46). It is precisely to guarantee the truth and credibility of His teaching and His Person that Jesus presents Himself as the Seer of the Father. In 6:46, John uses the verb to see in the Greek perfect tense (“*eoraka*”) emphasizing the lasting result of the action of seeing. Jesus is always the seer of the Father.” See also section 17.

7Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1968, p. 167.

8cf. B. de Margerie, *Human Knowledge of Christ* (quoted n. 6), section 26, n. 31: there are exposed some precious distinctions of Cardinal Billot (*De Verbo Incarnato*, Rome, 1912, p. 233 n. 2): Jesus did know, in his trans-conceptual vision, the concepts, the human concepts through which he wanted to communicate to mankind his salvific message; the mode of his knowledge, not the knowledge itself was incommunicable.

9see J. Galot, *Esprit et Vie*, 1982, p. 121.

10See J.T. O’Connor, *The Father’s Son*, Boston, 1984, p. 103: “The Son only knows Himself in knowing the Father... Jesus, in His human self-awareness knows Himself as from the Father, and of the Father, and for the Father.”

11Fr. Uricchio, OFM Conv., “Presenza della Chiesa primitiva nel Vangelo di S. Marco,” *Misc. Franc.* 66 (1966) pp. 42-47; quoted by B. de Margerie, *The Human Knowledge of Christ*, op. cit., section 42, 49.

12see n. 8.

13p. 13J. Alfaro, S.J., *Encarnacion y Revelacion*, Gregorianum 1968, pp. 455-456; quoted in *The Human Knowledge of Christ*, n. 53, pp. 70-71.

14See B. de Margerie, *Les sept yeux de l’Agneau*, *Divus Thomas* (Piacenza) 86 (1983) p. 10: this study continues the analysis of the Biblical, Patristic, Magisterial and theological “dossiers” presented in *The Human Knowledge of Christ*; for another presentation of the same topic, see William Most, *The Consciousness of Christ*, Christendom College Press, 1980.

15Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, AAS 35 (1943) 230 and 215.

16We can hold, in the context of Ph 2:5-11, that Paul is here speaking of the two loves of Christ for me: as God and as Man.

17*The Human Knowledge of Christ*, section 49, p. 54-55.

18J.M. McDermott, S.J., Luc XII, 8-9: Pierre angulaire, *Revue Biblique*, 1978, pp. 397-401: *une conscience sacramentelle*.

