

XI

THE REDEEMER

GOD BECAME MAN

THE supreme truth about the Saviour, for which the chosen people were wholly unprepared, was that He was God. To effect the redemption of the world, God became man. The inner meaning of God's plan, what made it redemptive, we shall not discuss yet. When we have seen what He did, we shall be in a position to grasp how it met the situation created by Adam's first sin, and worsened by all the sins with which men hastened to follow Adam's. We must concentrate our attention upon what actually happened.

God became Man. Not the Trinity, but the second Person of the Trinity, the Son, the Word, became man. Reread the opening verses of St. John's Gospel. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Here we find the fact—that it was the second Person who became Man. And we find the reason—"all things were made by Him".

Glance back at page 43, where appropriation is discussed. Creation as a work of omnipotence, bringing something into existence of nothing, is appropriated to God the Father. But the order of the universe, as a work of wisdom, is appropriated to the Son. The order had been wrecked, and a new order must be made; it was the Son who made it.

To make it, He became Man. Read the first chapter of St.

Matthew and the first two of St. Luke. A virgin, Mary, conceived a son; at the time she was betrothed, and soon after was married, to Joseph, a carpenter. The child thus conceived was God the Son. The second Person of the Trinity, already and externally existent in His own divine nature, now took human nature in Mary's womb.

His conception was virginal; He had a human mother but no human father; that which in ordinary conception is produced by the action of the father was in this instance produced by a miracle of the power of God. He grew in the womb like any other child, and in due course was born into our world in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem. He was named Jesus, and came to be called the Christ, which means the Anointed.

Of the next thirty years of His life we know little. He was a carpenter, in Nazareth, further north in Galilee. Then came the three years of His public life. He travelled over Palestine with the twelve followers He had chosen, the Apostles. He preached of God and man, of the Kingdom, and of Himself as its Founder; by every kind of miracle, of healing especially, He showed that God was guaranteeing the truth of His utterance. He was without mercy for the sinfulness of the religious leaders of the Jewish people. They could only want His death, and He gave them the pretext on which, in the name of true religion, they might kill Him. For He claimed to be, not Messiah only, but God.

Upon a charge of blasphemy, they persuaded the Roman governor of Judaea to crucify Him.

He was nailed to a cross on a hill called Calvary for three hours until He died. He was buried, and on the third day He rose again. For forty days more He appeared among His Apostles, then ascended into the sky until a cloud hid Him from the gaze. In His death, resurrection and ascension mankind is redeemed.

That is the story of our redemption in its barest outline. We must try to see its meaning, or as much of its meaning as is graspable this side of death.

The first step is to pierce as deep as we may into the being of Christ Our Lord. And for this we must read the Gospels. The newcomer to theology, even if he is not a newcomer to Gospel reading, should at this point in his study do what G. K. Chesterton advised—he should embark upon a reading of the Gospels *as though he had never read them before*, almost indeed as though he had never heard the story before. He must make the considerable effort to read what is there.

Two things especially make it difficult for us to read what is there.

The first is the extreme brevity of the four accounts. They are intensely concentrated, packed with meaning. We must learn to read them slowly, comparing one part with another, trying to *see* what they narrate or describe, living them as we read them.

The second is that we think we know it already. This can be a real obstacle to our hearing what the Gospels are actually saying. We flip through the first and second chapter of St. Luke with a vague memory of Christmas cribs, Christmas carols, and Christmas cards. We move as inattentively through the four accounts of the passion and death of Our Lord with the feeling that we have been through it all a thousand times in the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary.

Above all we bring to the reading the popular picture of Our Lord as a nice kind man, easily pushed around, always turning the other cheek, happiest when patting small children's heads. So strong a grip has this imaginary portrait that it can prevent us meeting the strong and complex Christ who is actually there.

OUR LORD AS WE MEET HIM

We must read, then, with the determination to meet Our Lord for ourselves, as He is. A reader coming wholly new to the story, not even thinking he had heard it before, would certainly become aware, after a while, of what I may call a *double stream* both of word and action. At times Our Lord is speaking and acting simply as man—a great man, an extraordinary man, but not more than a man. But at other times He says things and does things that go beyond the human: what He says and does is either a claim to be superhuman, or is utterly meaningless. Nor will the word “superhuman” long suffice. He says things that only God could say, does things that only God could do.

I shall not attempt to illustrate this double stream in detail. To get real value from the experience, each one should live through it for himself in the Gospels. In a way he will be living through the anguished questioning of the Apostles in the three years they were with Him. At one moment they felt He must be more than man; then the feeling would fade only to return stronger, and perhaps fade again, but always revive.

Our Lord does not tell them at the beginning. The truth that the carpenter with whom they now lived so familiarly, whom they saw hungry and thirsty and weary, was the God by whom all things were made, was not one to be tossed casually to them or hurled violently at them. These men truly believed in God, had God's infinite majesty as the very background of all their lives. They must be made ready to receive the truth which, presented too suddenly, would have shattered them.

So Our Lord does not tell them at once. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that He brings them to the point where

they tell Him—to Peter's "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. xvi. 16), to Thomas's "My Lord and my God" (John xx. 28). Yet, from time to time, He did make statements which could only be a claim to be God.

Quite early came "No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son" (Matt. xi. 27; Luke x. 22). This is a statement of equality (and if you glance back at the section on the Blessed Trinity, you will see that it is precisely the Father's *knowledge* which generates the Son). Here and there as the story proceeds come other statements—note especially, "Before Abraham was made, I am" (John viii. 58), and "The Father and I are one" (John x. 30).

The Apostles heard these things: heard Him forgiving sins and supplementing the law God had given to Moses, always as one having in Himself total authority: saw the miracles which were the divine guarantee of His message. Yet they hesitated.

Knowing the answer we may tend to marvel at their slowness. But, as so often happens, what kept them from the answer was that they phrased the question wrongly. They came to ask "Was He man or was He God?" So much evidence for each possibility, and how were they to know that He was both? Who would have known *that* as a possibility, if it had not happened? What indeed does it *mean*, that one person should be man and God? The theology of the Incarnation must be our next consideration, what it means that the Word became flesh. Never think of this as *mere* theology, a proper occupation for learned men, but too remote for us. Until we have entered deeply into it, we shall not understand anything Our Lord said or did, we shall not have the beginning of understanding of our own redemption.

CHRIST: GOD AND MAN

Understanding what Christ *is*—in so far as a beginning of understanding may be made here below—is essential to understanding what He *does*. We can, of course, decide not to bother with understanding, to build our whole spiritual life upon love and obedience. This attitude may be at best profound intellectual humility, at worst total intellectual unconcern. Either way it is impoverishment, a refusal of nourishment which the soul should have. To be willing to die for the truth that Christ is God is a glorious thing, but there is no glory in holding the phrase simply as a phrase, the riches in it never made our own.

Christ was a carpenter, the sort of man whom any of the neighbours could have called upon to make a plough or a door frame. There was one such in every village of Palestine. What was special about this one is that at the same time He was infinite God, who had made all things of nothing (including the customer whose order He was executing, including indeed His own body and soul), who enlightened every man that came into this world. To say as much as this is to speak a mystery. We must begin to know what we are saying.

The key to our making the reality our own lies in the distinction between person and nature. At this point it would be a good idea to reread pages 32-5, where these terms are examined for the light they shed upon the doctrine of the Trinity. We may repeat some points of the distinction here. The nature anything has decides what it is—to take the example closest to us, we who possess a human nature, a union of spiritual soul and matter, are men. But nature, though it answers the question *what*, does not answer the question *who*. In every rational nature there is a mysterious something which says "I"—*that* is the person (and this is

true not only for man, but for every angel, and as we have seen, for God Himself). That which says "I" is the person, is the answer to the question *who* any rational being is.

There is a further distinction. Nature decides what a being can do; but the person does it. My soul and body make all sorts of actions possible to me, but I do them. Whatever is done, suffered, experienced in a rational nature is done, suffered, experienced by the person whose nature it is.

Left to ourselves, we might simply assume that each person has one nature, each nature (if it happens to be rational) has one person. We have already seen how wrong we should be if we made that assumption; it is simply one more way of treating man as the measure of all. In God there is one nature, totally possessed by three distinct Persons. This plurality of Persons over nature is reversed in Christ Our Lord, for in Him the Person is one, the natures are two.

That one Person who in Christ said "I" is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son, God the Word. Christ is not the first Person or the Third or all Three (in their profound way theologians have discussed all these as theoretical possibilities for an Incarnation different from Christ's). We have already seen why, when the first order of creation was wrecked, it fell to God the Son to make the new order. To make it, He became man: He who from eternity possessed the divine nature did, at a point of time, take to Himself and make His own a human nature, a body conceived of a woman, a soul specially created by God as our souls were.

Because Christ Our Lord, uniquely, had two natures, He could give two answers to the question "What are You?"—for nature decides what a person is. And He had two distinct principles, sources we may say, of action. By the one nature He could do all that goes with being God—He could read the heart of man for instance, He could raise Lazarus

to life; by the other He could do all that goes with being man—He could be born of a mother, could hunger and thirst, could suffer, could die.

But whether He was doing the things of God or the things of man, it was always the Person who did them. Actions are always done by the person, and in Him there was but one Person. Everything He did—down to the smallest, in itself most commonplace, human act—was done by God.

Every single action of Christ was the action of the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and this includes every action done by Him in His human nature. For natures are sources of action, but not doers. It is always the person who does them, and in His human nature there was but one single Person, and that Person God. There was no human person, for that would have made Him two people, each with his own distinct nature. His human nature was complete. But it was united to a divine Person, not a human person. He who said "I" in it was God, not man.

We may make this clearer by glancing at two great Christian truths—Mary was the mother of God, God died upon the cross.

I remember the first time a street-corner heckler said to me: "If Mary was the mother of God, she must have existed *before* God." I was a newcomer to the outdoor work of the Catholic Evidence Guild, and I simply gaped at him. In a superior voice he went on: "You realize, of course, or don't you, that mothers come before sons?" The immediate answer, though I did not handle the question very brilliantly at the time, is that mothers must exist before their sons are *born*; and Our Blessed Lady did exist before the second Person of the Trinity was born into human nature; that this one Son already existed in His divine nature does not alter the truth that it was in her womb that He was conceived as

man, from her womb born into our world. His eternal existence as Son of His heavenly Father does not by one jot diminish what she gave Him. There is nothing received by any human being from his mother which He did not receive from her.

There are spiritual souls outside the Church which find it unbearable that a woman should be mother of God: for many such the way of escape is to speak of her as mother of the human nature of Christ. But natures do not have mothers. He who was born of her as man was God the Son. She was as totally His mother as yours is yours or mine mine.

The other truth we shall consider in this connection is that God died upon the cross. Here again I am reminded of another street-corner question of about the same vintage: "You say that God died upon the cross; what happened to the universe while God was dead?" The suggestion is made that it was not God who died on Calvary, but the humanity of Christ. But in death, it is always someone who dies, a person; and upon Calvary's cross, only one Person hung. God the Son in the manhood that was His.

Thus it was God the Son who died—not, of course, in His divine nature, which cannot know death and which holds the universe in existence, but in the human nature which was so utterly His. Death, remember, does not for any one of us mean annihilation. It means the separation of soul and body, a separation which at the Last Judgement will be ended. Upon Calvary, the body that was God the Son's was separated from the soul that was likewise His. And on the third day thereafter they were united again. In His human nature God the Son rose from the death which in His human nature had been His.

In our reading of the Gospels, it is vital that we should never forget that every word uttered and action performed by Christ is uttered and performed by God the Son. With the

words, perhaps even more than with the actions, we shall find sayings we are often tempted to call hard. The one Person said "I", in the divine Nature and in the human nature, in an infinite Nature and a finite nature. He could say: "I and the Father are one"; He could say: "The Father is greater than I"—it is the same Person, uttering the truth of distinct natures, but asserting each nature as truly His own.

We shall look further into this. Meanwhile note that one value of reading the Gospels as I have urged is the new light the reading will cast for us upon God Himself. We tend to think of the truth "Christ is God" as a piece of information about Christ, and so it is. But we shall suffer loss if we fail to see it also as information about God. Apart from it, we should know God so far as our minds are capable of seizing Him, in His own divine nature. We should know Him, for instance, as Creator of all things from nothing. Although this is true, it is just a little remote, since we have no experience of creating anything from nothing. But reading the Gospels we see God in our nature, coping with our world, meeting situations known to us. Outside Christianity there is nothing to compare with the intimacy of this knowledge. It is ours for the having. It is a wonderful thing to see God being God, so to speak; but there is a special excitement in seeing God being man.

THE MANHOOD

The second Person of the Trinity became man. Grasp the precision of this. He did not take human nature as a mask which, when the play was over, He would triumphantly strip off. He is man in heaven and everlastingly. Nor did He simply take the appearance of a man, like the angel who guided Tobias. He did not take humanity like a garment that He could wear or an instrument that He could use. It was not simply that there were certain things He had to do

which required that He must have a human body and a human soul at His disposal, and that once these things were done the whole point of having them would cease.

He became man. He is as entitled to the name as we are. As we read the Gospels, there is one single element which might make us wonder if He were wholly man—He does not sin. He Himself challenges: "Who shall convict me of sin?"; and the Epistle to the Hebrews can say (iv. 15) He was "tempted in all things like as we are, without sin," or, in Monsignor Knox's translation: "He had been through every trial, fashioned as we are, only sinless." But sin is not a way of being man; it is a way of misusing manhood. We misuse ours often enough, He never misused His. He was more completely man than we.

This completeness has been a profound trouble to great numbers of Christians. To them it was a beginning of trouble that God should have become man at all, but somehow they accepted it—always with the feeling that He did not really do it in its totality. Somehow they felt that the dignity of God would be safeguarded by some want of completeness in the humanity He assumed. Thus very early the Docetists taught that His body was only an appearance, whereas St. Peter had said (1 Peter ii. 24), "Who His own self bore our sins in His body upon the Tree." But the Docetists were only a kind of crude beginning. What really started heresy after heresy was the desire to escape, not from Our Lord's body, but from His soul.

There were those who said that He had no human soul, His divinity performing the functions of a soul in the body wherein He redeemed us. The Church remembered the terrible phrase He uttered in the Garden of Gethsemane: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." Many more people, admitting the soul, denied it intellect or will. Both these faculties are worth a closer look, if we are to grasp at once

the completeness and the mysteriousness of Our Lord's humanity.

As God, Christ Our Lord was omniscient, He knew all things, His knowledge was infinite. What *could* such a person do with a finite intellect, which could only learn some tiny fraction of the things He already knew? In fact He did, and did with joy, all that could be done with it, for He was truly man. His body was real, and His senses were real; through them the external world made its way to His brain very much as it does to ours; and His human intellect proceeded to work upon their evidence as human intellects are meant to. The Person who in one nature knew all things did, as St. Luke tells us, in the other nature grow in wisdom. (Technically this is called experimental knowledge; in addition, the Church tells us, He had by God's gift two other ways of knowing: infused knowledge and the Beatific Vision. We have no space here to discuss these in detail; but observe that both are kinds of knowledge that the human soul can receive.)

Towards the end of the fifth century the Monothelites began to teach that while Our Lord had a human soul and a human intellect, He had no human will. (This was the heresy which caused a Council of the Church to condemn Pope Honorius—after his death—for not condemning it with due vigour.) In a sense it is simply another form of the objection against Our Lord's finite intellect. He Himself answered it in Gethsemane when He prayed to His Father, "Not my will but thine be done." There was never the faintest disharmony between the finite will and the infinite, but one was not the other.

The real horror of this heresy, little as its adherents saw it, is that it would mean that the human heart of Christ lacked the power to love. For love is the act of the will; and whatever mystery there may be in imagining a person with

an infinite intellect and a finite, an infinite will and a finite, it is simply mystery: it does not horrify us like the bleakness of a human soul that could not love.

We have begun to think of the love of Our Lord's human soul. It was, as human love must be to be wholly itself, love of God and love of man. The Gospels are filled with both.

What needs to be said about His love of man can be said quickly—it is the one thing that every Christian knows about Him, in fact that everyone knows about Him. But we have seen earlier a common misunderstanding. He is *not* a merely amiable person who goes round telling people He loves them. In fact He hardly ever tells anyone that. There is not a trace of sentimentality in Him, no sugar at all. His speech is abrupt, realistic, not often melting. It was not from His speech that men learned His love for them: it was above all from His actions. But learn it they did; and it was one of His disciples who uttered what is perhaps the most wonderful phrase of all religion, "God is love." St. John was combining the two truths he had come to know, that Christ is God and Christ is love.

What will startle the reader coming new to the Gospels is the intensity of Our Lord's devotion to His Father in heaven. The first words recorded of Him are, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"; His last words on the Cross were: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." In between, His love for the Father is continually finding expression. Time and again we are told that He went apart from the Apostles to pray to His heavenly Father.

Here we come to the third form of a difficulty which we have already considered twice. How can a person pray, when He is Himself God? Every act of Our Lord, whether in the divine nature or the human, was the act of the Person that He was. When Christ prayed, it was the second Person of

the Trinity who prayed. And prayer is, of its very essence, the utterance of the finite creature to the infinite God. Once again we face mystery, yet some small gleam of light we can get. It is the function, the duty, of a person to utter his nature; having taken and made His own a human nature, God the Son must utter it, and this includes uttering its adoration and thanksgiving and petition. But realize that though it was truly human prayer, it could not be simply as the prayer of men who are no more than men. Our Lord could teach His Apostles to pray; but He never prayed with them.

Because He had a real soul and a real body, Our Lord had real emotions too. Love, for instance, can be perfectly real simply as the total turning of the will to the good of others, without having any emotional accompaniment. Angels, we are told, love like that. But it is an odd man who has never known the emotion of love, a man, in that at least, not like Our Lord. He loved, and must have shown His love for, one of His disciples—St. John is especially “the disciple whom Jesus loved”; and one gets an overwhelming sense of His love for the family at Bethany, Lazarus and Martha and Mary.

He wept, too; not only over Lazarus of Bethany but over Jerusalem. And He could storm in anger. The long attack quoted by St. Matthew upon the Pharisees is the very high point of invective, justified invective, stimulating perhaps to us who are not Pharisees, but terrifying to every man who has ever examined his own conscience.

The temptation is to continue with the Man we meet in the Gospels. Let us consider one final question which in a way is a summarization of what we have been discussing. What does a Person who is God *do* with a human soul?

Clearly He does with it all that can be done with it, using every power it has to the uttermost of its possibility. And that is something that no merely human person has ever done.

Most of us use our minds when we have to, under compulsion so to speak, and not very brilliantly. The geniuses of our race are a constant reminder of our own mediocrity. But not the greatest genius does all with his soul that can, by the uttermost use of its own possibilities, be done. In fact, men do show a certain development in their realization of the human soul's possibilities; there have been very considerable advances in the last hundred years in the understanding of the mind's powers. Men have glimpsed the possibility of a profounder control, for instance, of soul over body. Our Lord had to wait for none of this. For He had made that soul of His, and it had no hidden surprises for Him. He knew what it could do.

He could do all that could be done with His human soul—but not more. We have seen that man's destiny is to do something which by nature he cannot do—see the face of God. He cannot do it, not because his own use of his nature is defective, but because unaided human nature cannot do it. That superb, that incomparable soul of Christ was given sanctifying grace. It was, as every spiritual soul should be, indwelt by the Holy Ghost.