

FATHER AND SON PERFECTLY UNITED: The Nature of the Divinity of Jesus Christ

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“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28).

Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Yet according to His own testimony, often repeated, He and the Father were one. Through all the ages of Christianity, people have tried to understand how this could be. Except perhaps in mutual love and filial loyalty, no son begotten of a mortal man is one with his father. He is always a separate person, a distinct individual, and no one has been able to imagine how it could be otherwise with Jesus Christ. Even from a faithful reading of the Gospels one would gather no other idea, for Jesus Christ never directly claimed that He was God, but called Himself the Son of God. He prayed to the Father as if to another individual. He displayed characteristics quite incompatible with the idea of God. He was subject to all the weaknesses of mortal man. He hungered. He wept. He grew weary. And in the end He suffered the agony of death upon the cross. The whole fabric of Christian theology, dependent on the teaching of the Sacred Scripture, is based upon the idea that the Son of God is a separate person from the Father, and yet is one with Him in some mysterious way. Unable to penetrate the mystery, and knowing that there can be only one God, people have come to think of God as the Father, and of Jesus Christ as one who intercedes with the Father to forgive the sins of fallen humanity. This concept finds expression in the custom of addressing prayers to God the Father for the sake of His Son.

The reason the Gospels speak of Jesus Christ as if He were separate from the Father is because this was true, in a very special sense, as long as He lived on earth. The physical body, born of Mary, was not God, nor could it be, for it was finite and God is infinite. Jesus' conscious mind, as far as it was formed from sensations derived from natural objects and from knowledge received by instruction from others, was not God, for these things, too, are finite. They formed a veil of appearances through which the light of infinite love inflowing from His soul could penetrate only by degrees. This penetration was effected, we are told, by flashes of insight or successive revelations, and when these came the Lord spoke with surpassing wisdom and performed miracles of Divine power. But there were intervals during which the veil remained opaque. At these times it seemed, even to the Lord Himself, as if He were separate from the Father. In this state He endured temptations and prayed to the Father for help, even as all people pray. Throughout His life such states of humiliation recurred continually, and the sense of separation they induced was never more complete than when He cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Yet the soul that gave life to the Lord's body and formed His mind within it was the infinite love of God for the salvation of the human race. It was the same Divine love which from the beginning of time had stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him (see Zechariah 12:1). The light of this Divine love dispersed the cloud of external appearances progressively, until, when the Lord rose from the empty tomb on Easter morning, every semblance of separation was forever dissipated. Thenceforward the Son was fully united with the Father, and took to Himself all power, both in heaven and on

earth—all power to make God visible to angels and to people in a Divinely Human form. This is the inner truth revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem.

That there was a temporary and apparent separation from the Father, and an eventual union with Him, the Lord openly declared when He said to His disciples: “I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28). What is meant by “coming forth” from the Father is illustrated in the Heavenly Doctrine. Love “goes forth” when it formulates ideas in the mind that present the goal of its desire to view. It goes forth to others when these ideas are expressed in words that others understand. It goes forth in fact when it is expressed in deeds that produce in actuality the goal which before had only been envisioned in the mind. Yet in every case, it is the love that goes forth or proceeds. Ideas are merely “something added” by which the love becomes visible. Words are only “something added” as carriers to transmit a vision of the love to others. The actions of the body are only “something added” that enable the love to operate appropriately on the physical plane. And the finished product is only a substantial embodiment in which the love abides and finds its ultimate fulfillment (cf. *Conjugal Love* 87).

If any one wants to transmit to others some realization of a love he feels deeply within himself, he must do so in terms that are familiar to them. He must express his love in the form of ideas and words that fall within the range of the others’ experience. He must, as it were, put himself in their place, become sensitive to their thoughts and feelings, and thus be able to approach them with understanding and sympathy before he can cause his love to “go forth” to them. This is why we are told that God, in proceeding to take upon Himself an earthly human, passed through the heavens, and in doing so He clothed His infinite love with the Divine as it is received by the angels. This was necessary because the whole purpose of His coming into the world was so that He might teach people about Himself—teach them things about Him they had never known before, and things they could never know except from Him. But to do this He must approach them from those things that they already knew, things which they had learned from the Word as it had been given in former times.

What God took on, therefore, in passing through the heavens, was the Word as it is with the angels. The Word as acknowledged, loved and received by the angels is the Divine of the Lord that makes heaven. In this the Lord dwells with the angels. This, therefore. He could put on as an enveloping garment, as a protective covering in His descent. It is this to which the angel Gabriel referred when he said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). And this is what is meant when it is said in John that the Word, which “was in the beginning with God,” and which “was God” “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,2,14). In this way the infinite love of God “came forth” in bodily form as Jesus Christ. This is what the Lord meant when He said, “I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world.”

It was God Himself who came into the world. The human, put on by birth was only “something added” through which God might be present visibly and tangibly to people on earth. Through this material covering He could be seen only dimly. And, yet, the whole purpose of His coming was so that people might see Him clearly, as never before, and might learn to know Him more

and more truly, even to eternity. The human was taken on, not to hide His love, but to reveal it. To this end everything that was not God, everything that was finite, imperfect, incompatible with the Divine, had to be removed from the human. The human had to be purified, and at last glorified, that is, perfectly united with the Divine above the heavens. And so that this might come to pass, the Lord had to ascend, even as He had descended, through the heavens. This is why, after declaring that He had come forth from the Father, He continued by saying, "Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

The glorification of the Lord's human was a gradual process. It was the work with which He was occupied continually throughout the entire course of His life on earth. It was effected by continual combats and successive victories in temptation. God cannot be tempted, but the human He had put on could endure temptation when, in states of humiliation, it appeared to be separate from the Father. Into the Lord's mind there constantly poured false ideas and misinterpretations of the Word that had become the clothing for evil loves in the minds of people and spirits. These had arisen and been multiplied for centuries because people seized upon the literal statements of Scripture and distorted their meaning so as to excuse unworthy motives and conceal selfish ambitions under a semblance of pious devotion. Thus they had made the Word of God of no effect by their tradition (see Mark 7:13). By such perversions they deceived and misled the simple, who innocently accepted their teachings as the very truth of God. But when these false insinuations came to the Lord, He rejected them completely. He did so in states of humiliation, when He seemed to be alone, separate from the Divine. He did so by recalling the truth He had perceived in former states of glorification, or union with the Divine. The Lord's resistance to temptation was like that of every person who, from conscience, resists what he has been taught is false or evil. Therefore, we are told that the Lord glorified His human in a way that is wholly analogous to the way in which He regenerates a person. This would have been impossible unless at times it had appeared, even to the Lord Himself, as if He were separate from the Father.

By unmasking evil, refuting false interpretations, and proclaiming the true meaning of the Word, the Lord progressively conquered all the hells. He deprived them of their power over the good, and thereafter opened the way to freedom for all who were willing to receive the truth.

But it was not only the falsity of evil that had to be removed from the Lord's human. All appearances due to the finite limitations of the human mind also had to be removed. Only in this way could the human be fully united to the Divine. The wisdom of the angels immeasurably exceeds that which is possible to people on earth, but even the angels are finite beings. They cannot grasp the infinity of truth. Though it may continue to be perfected to eternity, their understanding of the Word is far from perfect in the sight of God. These imperfections also had to be removed by the Lord, and that is why He had to be tempted, even by the angels.

In His descent through the heavens the Lord had taken upon Himself the Word as it was received by the angels. But if the human thus put on was to be united to the Divine it had to be purified of all the inadequacies and imperfections of angelic understanding. Therefore, when the ideas of the angels came to Him, the Lord corrected them, showing where they were deficient and how they might be brought into greater accord with the infinite truth itself. From the relatively simple ideas of the natural angels, to the highly abstract and subtle concepts of the wisest and most celestial, the Lord ascended step by step, imparting to all the angels a new and wonderful

understanding of the Word, and thereby bringing all the heavens into a new order. Thus, through Jesus Christ, the angels received a vision of God so new and glorious that the sun of heaven shone for them with sevenfold splendor.

As the Lord so ascended through the heavens, He gradually put off what He had before temporarily put on in His descent. He expelled from His human every finite limitation. He made the Human the truth itself, the very form of God, the Word which was in the beginning with God, and which was God. Yet this truth, this Word, was now accommodated to human reception as never before. It remains forever a new way of approaching people, a new means of Divine instruction, a new revelation of God as infinitely Human, for the Lord rose from the tomb with His whole body. He ascended to the Father, together with, and in, His Human glorified.

In this Divinely Human form of truth the Lord comes again in the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church. This doctrine is the “Comforter,” the “Spirit of Truth” that leads into all truth (see John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). In it God becomes visible for evermore as the Lord God Jesus Christ, risen to full union with the Father, coming in glory to establish His eternal kingdom.

Amen.

Lessons: John 16:13-33; Matthew 28; *Arcana Coelestia* 3318, 5337