

A Primer on the Deity of Christ

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This primer is in the form of a dialogue. The dialogue is between “Inquirer,” who is an educated, thoughtful person becoming convinced of the truths of the Christian religion (though not yet converted to them), and “Christian,” an experienced evangelical minister.

I: Among the many Christian doctrines we have discussed so far, we haven't yet taken up the doctrine of Christ Himself, have we?

C: No, not directly, although we did ground our doctrine of Holy Scripture on the teaching of Christ.

I: Yes, I recall. That was after we had demonstrated that Christ was a messenger sent from God. And that, in turn, was proved by the miracles He performed.

C: Exactly. From His “credit as a proposer” of doctrine, we noticed that we had to believe every doctrine He taught. Our primary concern there was with His view of Scripture. We agreed that as an authenticated divine messenger, He was to be believed in what He said about the Bible, specifically that Scripture, Old and New Testaments, was inspired of God.

I: Yes. And on that basis, I agreed that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. From that point on, we've grounded all the doctrines we've discussed on what the Bible says. But we haven't yet focused on what the Bible teaches about Christ Himself, have we?

C: No, not yet, even though that is the central verity of the Christian religion.

I: What do you mean?

C: Well, it is not only an important doctrine of Christianity. but the most important doctrine. Furthermore, it is indispensable to Christianity.

I: You mean that if a person doesn't have a sound doctrine about Christ, he is not a Christian at all?

C: Exactly. You see, many who call themselves Christians should not; their very idea of Christ is unsound.

I: But what if they still regard Him as very important and central in their lives?

C: They still would be at odds with the truth. If Jesus is none other than God incarnate, then to think He is merely a man would be a fatal mistake, would it not?

I: A very serious mistake, I grant you. But can you say that they don't believe in Him or follow Him when they do listen to His teachings and try to do what He teaches?

C: That's precisely the point. If He teaches that He Himself is God, and they follow Him as merely a man, can they meaningfully be said to follow His teaching?

I: I see your point. And yet, could they not follow some of His teachings, or even all of them, without realizing who He is as their Teacher?

C: That seems reasonable. But let's take a specific example of His teaching. As you know, He taught the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would that they do to you."

I: That's what I have in mind. I know people who follow the Golden Rule and agree with Christ's teaching about it, and yet they don't think He is God. As a matter of fact, they would be appalled by the idea that Christ is divine. They regard Him as a very godly person who taught very sound maxims, including the Golden Rule. If these people take the Golden Rule seriously and practice it rather admirably, how can you deny that they follow Christ's moral instruction, even if they don't share the church's theological estimate of Him?

C: I would grant that they could understand the Golden Rule and live according to it at least superficially.

I: The people I'm thinking of, however, are anything but superficial. They're very serious people, and they do take the rule very seriously. I can't quite see how, though they don't believe in the divinity of Christ, they are superficial in their observance of His moral commandment.

C: I understand your perplexity. As far as our discussion has gone, you would seem to be reasonableness itself, and I would seem to be way off reality. But let me make an observation we have not yet considered.

I: Please do.

C: Well, as you probably know, Christ taught also that He is the vine, and His disciples are His branches. Are you acquainted with that teaching found in the fifteenth chapter of John?

I: Yes, vaguely. He did say something about His being the vine in which they are the branches, and they bear fruit through Him. I'm beginning to see what you're hinting at. But, spell it out, please.

C: Well, as you sense, He teaches there that He is the source of their life and their fruit-bearing, that is, their morality. In another place He says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may behold your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." Here in John 15 He explains where their good works actually come from, does He not?

I: Yes, I suppose that is the point of the analogy He makes, He, as the vine, is the source of life, which somehow fills His followers, producing in them a moral life. As I ponder this, I see how profound the idea is. Are you saying that Christ not only teaches a morality but also claims that He Himself fulfills that morality in His followers?

C: Yes, that's right. I don't mean to deny that time and again He just issues commandments, as it were. He often sets forth teachings, describes maxims. But occasionally He also talks about the source of power for fulfilling the moral law, as in the vine and branches. In other words, the morality He commands is fulfilled in those who don't simply hear what He says and obey it, but actually look to Him for the necessary strength to fulfill it.

I: I guess my friends who try to follow Christ's morality without acknowledging that He is divine overlook this aspect of Christ's teaching. I can't help wondering if they've ever thought of Jesus' representing Himself as the source for fulfilling His own commandments. I'm not sure they would follow His teaching on that point. I suspect they would not. These people are real moralists. They try to be humble, but they really are proud of their character. They feel it's their character, and they don't need outside help to obey these commandments. If you told them that they could not carry out what Jesus taught without His power, they would not buy that. They would, in fact—well, I don't know quite what to say here.

C: What you're thinking, but are hesitant to say, is this, is it not? If they understood Christ to say His moral commandments could not be kept except by His own power, they would simply reject Him. Isn't that really what this whole thing amounts to?

I: I think you're right. It's hard to say, because I doubt they ever think in these categories. But when you put two and two together your answer seems inevitable. They think Christ is admirable as a moral teacher addressing Himself to moral persons such as themselves. They agree with His ideas. They join with Him in following them. But depend upon Him for the power to do good—you're right, they would not accept that. I have to conclude that they would want nothing more to do with Him. They would reject Him. He would be insulting them.

C: Well, it looks as if we've gotten the answer to our question, doesn't it?

I: It surely does. I'm surprised I didn't even suspect that a few minutes ago. And yet it's obvious, now that I think about it. I'm learning about myself, as well as about my friends. Up until this moment, I myself supposed that even though Christ was a messenger sent from God, whose every teaching I must accept, it was I who accepted them, I who would perform them (if I am forgiven for the sins I've already made).

C: Don't be too hard on yourself. Most people think that way at first. It's only when they realize how deep their depravity is and how little inclined they are to general morality that they begin to look around for help. Once they do realize they are sinners, as your friends apparently do not, then they know that they need forgiveness and power as well.

I: I can see that now.

C: Most people don't think in terms of the parable of the vine and the branches. If, as sinners, they sense that they cannot become new people unless they have a new principle of life within them, they may not realize at first that it's nothing less than Jesus Christ Himself dwelling in them and moving them to morality. But they learn quickly enough once He teaches them that.

I: I, for one, am catching on fast. I wonder why I took so long? Now that I do see it, it's very plain. I get your point that there is no following the moral teachings of Jesus Christ without recognizing who He is. It's really strange to me that just a few minutes ago it would have seemed self-evident that a person could follow the commandments of Christ, regardless of what he thought about Christ. I guess that's because I thought it similar to following Socrates or the Buddha or any other teacher without believing anything particular about the man himself. But a moment's reflection shows me that Jesus Christ is different from these other teachers.

C: Indeed He is. The others can understand certain moral principles and articulate them excellently and strive to fulfill their own moral ideals. You can join with them in recognizing the ideals and trying to fulfill them also. But once you realize that you're a sinner, you know that you do not have the internal power to make your ethics rise up and walk. That's because you've become acquainted with your own heart and with the Christian doctrine. These other teachers have not and, therefore, remain superficial in both their understanding of commandments and their understanding of their own ability to perform them.

I: That's precisely the case. And it was the case with me, also. Now that I am awakened to this truth, I realize that Christ, even in His moral teaching, implies His very— should I say, deity? That's certainly what you're driving at. But how does that follow? Granted that He presents Himself as the power by which His own morals are realized; how does that prove that He must be divine?

C: I don't suppose it does.

I: You don't? Well, if not, what's all this about? Aren't we talking about the person of Christ as supernatural?

C: We are.

I: I don't get it. That's what I thought this was proving, that He is divine because He dwells in us to make His morals come alive through us. Yet you say it does not prove that He is divine. I'm confused.

C: It would prove, as you have observed, that He Himself must empower us to fulfill His own laws by somehow indwelling us as the vine indwells and energizes the branch to bear fruit. But could you imagine Christ's being used by God in that role?

I: You mean as a spirit of some sort, while God would ultimately be the actual source of our morality? I guess that would be a theoretical possibility. Of course, Christ would have to be superhuman. He couldn't dwell in disciples as one person of a finite character.

C: Indeed no. (Remember, we're just trying this idea for size.) If that wouldn't be possible, then He'd have to be a spirit, would He not?

I: Yes. And moreover, He would have to be more than finite, would He not?

C: I would certainly think so.

I: So aren't we back where we started? That is, for Christ to indwell every Christian who bears moral fruit, He would have to be spiritual and not material, and He would have to be infinite. What else would that be except deity itself?

C: I couldn't agree with you more.

I: Well, I thought you said it did not prove that He was deity.

C: I meant that it did not at first glance prove it. Theoretically God could have used some agent. But as we have probed that concept, we have realized that the agent Himself would have to be divine. So, at a closer look, it does indeed require what you say, and does vindicate your original supposition.

I: In other words, I'm correct after all?

C: I think so; but, I think you do have to prove it, in the way you have just done.

I: In other words, we must conclude from the teaching of Jesus Christ about morals that He Himself is the fulfiller of them, and that, therefore, He Himself must be the infinite divine spirit.

We have our first proof, then, that Jesus Christ is God. Although it's an indirect one, it's a very impressive one for me. Let me see if I have this right. He teaches the way of morality and furthermore teaches that He is the way. Even if He said nothing more, that much would imply that to fulfill His own role He would have to be God.

C: I think that's exactly the case. Obviously He may say much more than that. But, as you put it very well, if Christ said nothing other than that, we would have to conclude that this was a veiled allusion to His deity.

I: I find that most interesting, because I'm still thinking of my friends who consider themselves Christians precisely because they follow the morality of Christ. The next time I talk with them, I'm going to start the conversation right along that line and see if I can't get them to see that the very moralism they regard as Christian would lead them inevitably to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is God, contrary to what they now think.

C: I wish you well. That is a fine approach to mere moralists who think they can be Christian without believing that Christ is God.

I: You did say that there were other, more direct indications of the deity of Christ?

C: Yes, many others. Christ says directly that He is God.

I: Directly? I don't know the New Testament as well as you do. But I can't remember ever hearing Christ say, "I am God." And that's the sort of thing I don't forget. Where does He say that?

C: Nowhere to my knowledge does He say in so many words, "I am God." But He says the obvious equivalent of it. For example, He says to His apostles, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." There's no question in anybody's mind that the word "Father" there refers to the Deity. So when He says those words to Philip, His obvious meaning is, "He who has seen Me has seen God." That's the same thing, is it not, as saying, "I am God"?

I: Yes. It could hardly be plainer. I don't know why I didn't notice that before. Strange, isn't it, how we can read the New Testament and not notice things. We can look at certain words and not see them. I must at some time or other, though I don't remember when, have read, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Yet it never struck me as "He who has seen Me has seen God." If Jesus had put it that way, I think it would have shocked me the first time I read it, and I'd never have forgotten it. Yet, until this moment, I didn't realize what He actually said.

Now that I've gotten over that shock, there's something else that puzzles me.

C: I have an idea what that is, but tell me anyway.

I: It's just that Jesus of Nazareth was the one speaking those words, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." The first thing one would think is that God is a man. After all, there talking to Philip was this man, maybe six feet tall, 165 pounds perhaps, and thirty years of age. I guess that's why I didn't see it the first time I read it. It sounds so absurd to say a six-foot-tall, 165-pound, thirty-year-old man is God. Yet, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." What are we to make of this? The more I reflect on my past, the more I suppose that I simply must have shaken my head when I read that. I must have thought, "I don't know what He means, but He can't mean what He seems to mean"—and let it go at that. Now that you make me stop and look more carefully at it, I have to admit that Jesus is seriously and unmistakably saying that to see Him is to see God. But what does that mean, if it can't possibly mean that God is six feet tall, 30 years old, weighing 165 pounds?

C: You're quite right that Jesus didn't identify deity with His human nature or any other human being.

I: I'm relieved at that, but I still don't know what He does mean.

C: Well, what else can He mean except that, in uttering those words, He is in union with God? In other words, we have here Christ's own reference to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.

I: Incarnation, meaning "in the flesh." God in the flesh, Immanuel. I remember that is one of His names, and the Bible itself interprets that as "God with us." What we have is "God in Jesus," I take it you are saying.

C: That would certainly seem to be His meaning, would it not? If so, that would be coherent.

I: I see what you are saying. That man who says, "He who has seen me has seen God," is in union with God. Seeing that man is seeing God, though not with literal eyes, but with the eyes of the mind. Am I right?

C: I think so.

I: Isn't there a sense, though, in which everybody has God dwelling in him. Could I not say in that sense, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father"? I tremble even at the utterance of those words because frankly they sound blasphemous. But if Jesus alludes only to being in union with God, would there be anything but a difference of degree between Jesus and His followers in whom He dwells?

C: As you say, you would feel blasphemous in saying, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." I too would feel blasphemous. Why is that?

I: Well, in my case, and I suppose yours also, it's because I know I am not God. Even if I were sure, which I am not, that God dwells in me, I am absolutely certain that I am not

God. So whatever Jesus Christ means by that statement, I know I couldn't say it with anything other than a feeling of abhorrence. You'll have to speak for yourself.

C: I couldn't say those words any more than you could, and for the same reason. I know I am not God. It would be a blasphemous falsehood. So we are really answering our question, are we not?

I: Yes, we are. You and I and others like us simply could not say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," because we know we are not God. Which drives us to the conclusion that when Jesus calmly makes such an utterance, He really is God. The only way to make sense of that claim coming from the lips of a visible human being is that He, Jesus of Nazareth, is actually in a unique unity with God. It is so different from the way any other human being is related to God that He alone can say that to see Him is to see the Father. Yes, I think you've proved your point. That statement is, on reflection, a clear claim of deity and simultaneously of incarnation.

C: On another occasion, Jesus said something similar and yet significantly different.

I: What was that?

C: He said, "I and the Father are one." Surely that sounds like, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." But there is this difference: In the statement we've been discussing, Jesus claims a one-to-one identification between Himself and the Father. But in saying, "I and the Father are one," He indicates not a one-to-one identity, but a two-in-one identity, if I may use that expression. He has in mind two persons when He says, "I and the Father are one." Referring obviously to Himself in distinction from the Father, He emphasizes at the same time that He is one with the Father: "I and the Father are one."

I: I think I see the subtle, wonderful difference here. The statement, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," stresses His identity with God. But, "I and the Father are one" speaks of both identity and diversity.

C: So we have here a reference to two persons in one Godhead, do we not?

I: Two persons in one Godhead? I hadn't thought of it that way, but I guess that's true. The two persons, "I" and the "Father," are "one," that is, one Godhead. I see what you're saying. But what does that mean?

C: Does that not indicate the doctrine of the Trinity in principle? In other words we have here a reassertion of the oneness of God or "monotheism," the unity of the divine essence or being. At the same time, we see that Christ is distinct from the Father. So we have, in the phraseology of the traditional Trinitarian doctrine, a reference to two of the three persons in the Godhead. The Son and the Father are one in the same divine essence.

Though our discussion does not focus on the Trinity, but on the deity of Christ, His being a member of the Trinity clearly underlines the full deity of Jesus Christ.

I: That is certainly true.

C: Before we leave the Gospel of John, let's take one other assertion that occurs there. In the eighth chapter, Jesus carries on a dialogue with certain "Jews who believed on Him." That phrase occurs in verse 31, but before the chapter is over, those Jews who believed in Him were seen not to believe in Him.

I: How is that?

C: When Christ claimed to be deity, these professed believers realized they did not in fact believe in Him. They believed in the person they thought Jesus was. When they learned who Jesus claimed to be, they were outraged at Him.

It was in the course of the dialogue with these "believing" Jews that Jesus indicated that He came from the Father and indeed was one with the Father. These "disciples" were getting the message and not liking it.

I: What happened then?

C: Well, as the chapter unfolds, the more these "believers" learn about Jesus and His claims to deity, the more they become hostile and outraged. Finally, they recognize that Christ unmistakably claims to be God. In their book, that is blasphemy, because Jesus was a human being, and it is blasphemy for a human being to claim to be God. When they put two and two together and came to the inevitable conclusion they picked up stones to kill Him because, as they said, "You being a man make yourself to be God."

You see, that other statement, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," was made to His believing disciples. They accepted it. But this statement about Christ's deity was made to professed believers who really did not believe. So here we have the testimony of unbelievers to Christ's own self-opinion as we have in the other chapter the testimony of believers to His belief about Himself. Both groups are confronted with the same Christ. One group accepts Him as divine and worships. The other group rejects Him as a blasphemer and endeavors to execute Him.

I: Different reactions to the same proposition of Jesus that He was indeed God incarnate.

C: Correct. John's Gospel concentrates on this theme, but we could also find evidence for Christ's deity elsewhere. Before we go to a direct statement of Christ's that clearly indicates His deity, let's notice a feature of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and Luke that, while not mentioning deity directly, unmistakably implies it.

I: You're referring to the famous sermon-lecture of Jesus on morals, where we have the Lord's Prayer and the Golden Rule and so on?

C: Yes.

I: Are you saying that the Sermon on the Mount teaches the divinity of Jesus?

C: Indirectly, yes.

I: That's the first time I have ever heard that. In fact, it is to the Sermon on the Mount that my friends, who do not believe in the deity of Christ, appeal.

C: I hope so. It may make believers out of them.

I: Show me.

C: The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is found in chapters 5 through 7. Here Christ says the type of thing that leaves no doubt He assumes His own deity. For example, consider the Beatitudes in general. We're all familiar with these. Many of us have memorized them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." And so on. I'll not cite them all, but just note that Jesus utters them with absolute finality and on His own authority alone. You know how the prophets would constantly say, "Thus saith the Lord." They would always ground the authority of their message not on themselves but on its source in God, who had revealed His message to them. They make it very clear that they are the servants and He is the Lord.

I: Doesn't Jesus call Himself the servant of the Lord?

C: True, He does say, "I came to do the Father's will." He was a man and He was subordinate to the divine will. He says so on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, on other occasions He appeals to nothing and relies on nothing. The authority of His message does not depend upon a source outside Himself.

I: How so?

C: In the Beatitudes, for example, on His own authority, He tells us who will inherit the kingdom of God, who will be the children of God, who will inherit the earth, and so on. No mere human being can say that on His own authority. He can give educated guesses. Or, if he is commissioned by God, he can say it in God's name, but not of himself. Yet this man Jesus spoke these things very calmly with a supreme and serene authority appropriate only to deity itself. Is that not so?

I: I suppose you're right. I had never thought of it that way before. As you say, I've known those Beatitudes for a long, long time. I've even memorized a good many of them. But since Jesus doesn't say so in so many words that He's God, I guess I never

noticed that He was really doing something even more impressive than that—just tacitly assuming it. That's what it amounts to. He talks as if He is God, even when He doesn't say so directly. A person might not notice that fact.

C: Maybe that's a tribute to Jesus: that these things sound so natural coming from His lips that we don't notice extraordinary implications.

I: It is as if we have a tacit, unconscious realization of His deity. It doesn't seem strange to hear Jesus speak that way. It certainly wouldn't be appropriate for anyone to speak that way unless He were divine.

C: I had never thought of it that way myself. You have a very fine point there. I thank you for it. I myself never realized that the reason people reading the Beatitudes miss their implicit argument for Jesus' deity is that it seems so natural coming from His lips. They almost instinctively realized that this was no mere preacher, that this was a divine preacher. Thank you, my friend, for that observation.

I: I'm glad to return a favor for all you have done me. What other things in the Sermon on the Mount imply the deity of that preacher?

C: Notice the last beatitude especially. Christ says there. as you know, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you."

I: Wait a minute. Don't tell me. I see for myself what you are about to say. Jesus is saying that the prophets suffered for Him. And the prophets lived hundreds of years before Jesus, did they not?

C: Indeed. Some lived thousands of years before Him. The prophets proper, those whom He may well have meant, were as early as a thousand years before Him. The latest before John the Baptist would have been several hundred years before Him.

I: In other words, people who lived a thousand years before Him suffered for His sake. That implies that He was preexistent, a supernatural being. If He lived hundreds of years before that sermon, and people suffered for Him a millennium before He was born, then He existed in another form before taking upon Himself a human form. Is that it?

C: It would seem an inescapable conclusion that He was preexistent, but not necessarily that He was eternal.

I: Is there not an implication of eternality here?

C: How so?

I: Well, if a person suffered for His sake, that would suggest deity because people don't suffer humiliation and slander and so on for anything other than what they regard as their God, or at least His representative.

C: That seems reasonable. They're willing to suffer for this preexistent person, and such a willingness is almost always reserved for God, or as you say, one who represents God. So, I guess you're right. There is an implication of more than the preexistence. The preacher's words suggest eternal preexistence.

I: It's strange how you can read a statement and not notice its significance the first time around. I've read that more than once and been impressed with what Jesus says about people rejoicing in suffering for Him. Yet I never thought that in mentioning the prophets' suffering for Him, He must be far more than a mere man preaching on the mount. How blind I was.

C: The point is even more plain if you imagine an ordinary person making the kind of statement He does. Suppose, for example, I stood behind a pulpit and said, "Blessed are John Calvin and Martin Luther and John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards because they suffered for my sake." It would not only be false, because, of course, they never knew me, or suffered for me, or would even think of suffering for me had they known me; it would also be absolutely absurd. I would have to be out of my mind to say a thing like that. But Christ says it as a simple matter of fact. In perfect calmness and secure rationality He casually remarks that men hundreds and thousands of years before suffered for His sake.

I: When you think of it, you realize what an overwhelming assertion of His deity that is. The fact that it comes in this veiled form (once the veil is penetrated) makes it all the more impressive.

C: The same thing is noticeable when Christ comments directly on the Bible. He says, "It is said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but I say unto you..." or "It is said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' but I say unto you..." Do you realize the significance of that?

I: You mean that He's putting Himself on a level with Old Testament Scripture?

C: Yes. For Him and His audience the Old Testament was the Word of God. Granted that some of His comments were not directly aimed at the Old Testament, but at contemporary misinterpretations of the Old Testament; nevertheless, in the same breath that He cites what His audience regarded as the inspired Word of God, He calmly says, "But I say to you."

I: In other words, by putting His word on a level with what was revered as the Word of God, Christ puts Himself on a divine level.

C: It certainly seems so. Again, I think we can get the impact of this all the better by comparing it with our saying such a thing. Suppose I, from the pulpit, said to a worshipping congregation, "Now, the Word of God says so and so. But I say unto you." You know what that congregation would say to me. "Who do you think you are?" How dare I put my word on a level with what I and my listeners consider to be the Word of God. Only one person may properly do such a thing: God Himself. The only one equal to God is God. And Jesus Christ certainly sounds as if He is making God His equal. If He were not God, then, of course, He would be just as impertinent and blasphemous as I to say such a thing. His being a perfect man doesn't change the fact that He'd be infinitely beneath the infinite God. Moreover, a perfect man would never utter such blasphemy.

I: Therefore, Jesus Christ is claiming to be God. I hear the argument.

C: There is more in the Sermon on the Mount, but let's move to its conclusion to see what intimations of deity we have there. Notice, that is where Jesus tells the well-known parable of the two men who built their houses on differing foundations. One man built on a rock; the other on sand. One of the houses, you remember, collapsed during a storm; the other stood. Do you recall what Christ was driving at in that story?

I: I do remember that story. It's even sung by kids in a simple chorus. The point of it is that the man who built his house on a rock really was building on Christ, is it not? And the man who built on sand did not build on Christ or His teaching. Am I right?

C: Yes, and you can see the implication.

I: I can indeed. Jesus is saying that if an individual believes in Him and His teaching and obeys Him, he will be able to go through the storms of life, and no doubt the storms of final judgment. If a person does not believe, he will be ruined in this world and the world to come. Knowing Jesus, that's the sort of point He's always making, is it not?

C: Yes. The people, no doubt, got that insinuation. This speaker was divine because no one other than God can assure that a person who does not follow Him will be ruined, and that a person who does will be saved. For anyone else to say that would be consummate arrogance and, again, blasphemy. And yet, what is more natural than for a divine person to say such a thing. If Christ is divine, you could never understand His not saying it; and if He were not divine, you could never understand His saying it. It's that simple.

Probably the most definitive utterance of all in this sermon is at its very end.

I: What is that?

C: Christ ends the Sermon on the Mount by describing the final judgment: "In that day, men shall come before Me and say, `Lord, Lord. Have we not prophesied in Thy name? Have we not cast out devils in Thy name? Have we not done mighty works in Thy

name?' And I shall say unto them, `Depart from Me ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you."

I: In other words, Jesus is saying He's going to be the judge of the last day. He is going to reject some people at His judgment seat. I get the point. The inference is clear. How can anybody miss it? The judge of the last day, who will determine the destinies of men, must be God. Is that what you deduce from this teaching?

C: I can't deduce anything else. There's only one judge of the last day: God Himself. Christ says He's the judge of the last day. Therefore, He is saying unmistakably that He is God.

I: I certainly see that. But something in what He says at the last judgment puzzles me.

C: I think I know what it is. It's that He denies at the day of judgment people who say they were His servants in this world. He even calls them evil-workers, doesn't He?

I: But why?

C: I could give you a flip answer here and say He calls them that because that's what they are. You yourself know that whatever He calls them, that's what they are. But what you're really asking is how could they be what they are. Is that not the question?

I: Yes

C: Well, let's see if we can get to His point. These people before the judgment seat of Christ are saying that they prophesied in His name and did many great things. Can we be sure they're telling the truth? They wouldn't try to deceive that Judge. So, let's assume they really were prophets of Christ or preachers of the Word of God. They were even successful at casting out devils. We are assuming they did many mighty works, because they wouldn't dare lie about a matter like that before the judgment seat. They may have been liars in this world, but not before the all-wise God in the next world.

I: You're fixing the noose ever tighter by making my question all the more difficult to answer, aren't you?

C: It would seem so, wouldn't it? By my saying that they must have spoken the truth about having done mighty works in the name of Jesus Christ, the question is indeed sharpened. Why would Christ reject such persons? But, don't you see, that's the very point. They did these things in the name of Christ, no doubt. But they didn't, apparently, do them in the Spirit of Christ. They could be preachers of the Word as, for example, I am one. They could declare the gospel, the true gospel, as I believe I do. They could even thereby deliver people out of darkness and into light, doing many other mighty works. Is that not so?

I: I guess it is. But, wouldn't the Spirit of Christ be what motivates them when they do preach the gospel and are blessed by conversions?

C: Not necessarily. And according to Christ, apparently not.

I: You're saying that people can preach Christ without loving Christ?

C: That seems to be the case, does it not? These people are witnesses of Christ and are even successful. Yet He disowns them. He never “knew” them. Now what can that mean except that they didn't have communion with Him. They didn't love Him and He was not in love with them. For some reason or other, they went about His business, maybe for gain or fame or a half-dozen other reasons.

I: But how could they be successful when they didn't love what they were doing?

C: Well, you see, it's the Word of God that the Spirit uses as His sword—not necessarily the one who voices the Word of God. Christ says His Word will not return to Him void. So when the Word goes out, even from an insincere heart and from lying lips, it's nonetheless the Word. God may see fit to honor His Word regardless of the source through which it comes.

I: I see. And that must be what happened. It's a very sobering thought, of course, even frightening. A person's success would be no proof that God is pleased with him.

C: Yes. It means we must very carefully search our motives. If we do what's right for the wrong reason, we're up against what we call “bad good works.” The works are good, and God honors those works by benefiting others. The worker, however, is bad. And God gives him the punishment *he* deserves.

I: I see what I was missing before. And I thank you, though I must admit that I'm still reeling a bit from that observation.

C: Imagine the effect the Sermon on the Mount had on the hearers.

I: If they were anything like me, they must have been overwhelmed.

C: They were. Their response was most significant. The text says that the people marveled because He spoke “as one having authority and not as the scribes.” Considering the themes on which He was speaking and the manner in which He spoke about them, they realized that His was an inherent authority. In other words, Christ was God. The very comparison they made between Christ's teaching and that of the scribes and Pharisees confirms this.

I: How so?

C: The Jews of that day had a very great veneration for their scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees were the main teachers and champions of the law. The Jewish people venerated the law of God as the divine thing it actually is. They didn't always understand it, and they seldom

obeyed it, but they always recognized it for what it is. They were like a good many Christian people who keep the Holy Bible in their houses and revere it as inspired, only to dust it off occasionally for lack of use. That is how the Jews revered their Scriptures and those who were the official interpreters of them.

I: I see. And they recognized that Jesus spoke with an authority that was different from the scribes' authority. The scribes had authority as the expounders of the authoritative Word. Jesus had authority in and of Himself. The people knew that a scribe's authority was outside himself. But Christ's authority resided in Himself. He did not need to appeal to another authority.

C: Well said. And so we have seen that in a sermon on morals, Jesus has a great deal to say about His own person, even when He is not talking directly about that subject. He assumes His deity here, as in other places He asserts it. Having noticed this tacit assumption of deity in the sermon, let us turn to a direct assertion of it in Matthew 11.

I: Granted I'm no expert on Matthew, but I don't remember Jesus' saying anything like "I and the Father" in that Gospel. As I recall, Matthew is more preoccupied with Christ as the Messiah and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and so on. Is it not?

C: You're quite right. That makes any direct statement by Christ about His deity in that Gospel all the more outstanding. In chapter 11, He makes a very significant declaration:

"No one knows the Father save the Son, and He to whomsoever He reveals Him. No one knows the Son except the Father, and He to whom He reveals Him." Do you get the point?

I: I get two points, as a matter of fact. The first one is that Christ claims a unique knowledge of God. That is striking, because, really, all men know there is a God. So it's puzzling that Jesus says no one knows the Father except the Son.

C: Yes. His statement implies that He has a *unique* knowledge of God.

I: The implication of that is unmistakable. Jesus Christ is saying that He is God, once again. This time it is obliquely stated. There is no unique way of knowing God except as *God* knows God. But is it possible that Christ would be an incarnate angel and have a knowledge of God different from what human beings have?

C: That's theoretically possible. On the other hand, He refers to Himself in the singular. No one knows the Father save the Son. That would not be true if He was referring to an angel because there are many other angels. On the supposition, they would all know God. So that uniqueness of His knowledge seems to preclude the possibility of its being some angelic knowledge of God. Though such angelic knowledge would be different from men's knowledge, it would not be unique: it would belong to another order of beings.

I: Furthermore, there is the additional statement that no one knows the Son save the Father. Here angels are clearly ruled out. If He were referring to Himself as an angel, He could never say that

only God knew Him, because certainly the other angels would know Him, as would human beings who came in contact with Him. Though angels are superior, they are not entirely different from men. After all, men and angels alike are creatures. Presumably they could know fellow rational creatures, however different they may be in some respects.

C: So, any way you look at it, this unique knowledge, which the Son has of the Father and the Father has of the Son, spells the deity of the Son.

I: Yes. I'm especially impressed by the latter statement, "No one knows the Son save the Father." As you have said, creatures can know other creatures, especially of their own kind. Presumably other creatures, because they are finite, have limited knowledge. So when this creature, the man Jesus of Nazareth, says no one knows the Son save the Father. He must be referring not to human nature, but to divine nature. Only divine nature is known exclusively by God. It takes a God to know God (uniquely).

C: This is a relatively clear and direct assertion of Christ's deity and His oneness with the Father. They are joined in this case by unique knowledge of each other. Therefore they must each be persons in the Godhead. Again, we have an allusion to at least two persons in the Holy Trinity.

Let us take one other reference in the Gospel according to Matthew that clearly indicates the deity of Jesus Christ. That is the Great Commission, which occurs at the very end of Matthew. Here we have the ascended Lord Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, saying to His apostles, "Go into all the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and teaching people to observe whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo am with you to the end of the age."

I: This is a supernatural context to begin with, is it not? Christ has risen from the dead, has ascended into heaven, and is claiming that all authority in heaven and earth is given to Him. All these supernatural things certainly indicate Jesus to be a supernatural being. At the same time, they of themselves would not prove Him to be a divine being.

C: True He could still be another exalted creature who has been given all authority in heaven and earth. He, in turn, gives His apostles a commission to go into the world and make disciples for Him. But there is more here than that, which makes the exalted-creature interpretation an impossibility.

I: What is that?

C: The Trinitarian formula. You'll notice that Christ commands His apostles to baptize disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They would have known from Jesus' teaching that He was the Son of God, as we have seen. They would know that the baptismal formula referred to not only God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, but also the Son of God standing before them in His resurrected and ascended human form.

I: So Jesus is bracketing Himself with the divine Father and with the divine Holy Spirit.

C: Yes. Here you have the doctrine of the Trinity. It is inconceivable that Christ as a mere creature would be mentioned in the same breath with two divine beings and associated with them as if they were one. We know indeed they are one according to the overall teaching of the Bible. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is *one* God." So this formula would indicate that Jesus Christ is on a level with these other persons and constitutes with them one God. He must, therefore, be a person in the Godhead, judging from the baptismal formula. That is another proof of the deity of Jesus Christ; indirect but unmistakable. Christ does not say, "I am God"; He just brackets Himself with divine beings. That amounts to saying, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," or God.

I: I can't help but note in passing that the deity of Christ would be implied in other aspects of the Great Commission as well.

C: What are they?

I: For one thing, He commands the apostles to teach people to observe whatever He has commanded them. Certainly, it's that same "arrogance" we noticed elsewhere if He were merely a creature, however exalted. Only God really has the right to demand that people follow His teaching. A mere servant such as you can only claim that his teaching should be followed insofar as it expresses the divine teaching. I think you will admit as a minister of Christ that you cannot properly say to me, "You must follow my teaching."

C: You are right. Was there something else as well?

I: Yes. It's the way the commission ends: "Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age."

C: You seem to be going ahead of me at this point. Wouldn't it be possible for Christ just to be a divine *agent* who is with the church until the end of the age?

I: I guess, theoretically. But in His saying on His own authority that He will be with them to the end of the age, that would imply His omnipresence. To be with the whole church, or even those eleven apostles only, would require more than being a creature. Otherwise He couldn't be with all of them all the time. We assume, as the church always has, that Christ's promise applies to the whole church, which seeks to carry out His mission to this day. If Christ was to be with the apostles through all their days, and with the entire church until the end of the age, He'd have to be divine, eternal, and infinite.

C: You've shown me something, which in turn has brought to mind another argument for Christ's deity I had not noticed before. Don't ask me why I didn't. It's plain enough when you point it out to me.

I: In other words, you're admitting that a non-Christian may understand some points of Christianity better than a Christian?

C: I readily admit that. I know non-Christians who know aspects of Christian truth better than I do. I suspect you know many more things than the few we've so far discovered better than I do, while you have not yet professed the Christian faith. Your point is gladly, though humbly, granted.

I: Thank you.

C: Now let me turn to what is the thinnest of the Gospels, Christologically speaking. I refer to Mark, which most people think has very little developed theology, especially Christology, or theology about Christ.

I: You mean that there is less reference to the deity of Christ in Mark than in the other Gospels, just as there is much more in John than in any of the other Gospels?

C: Yes. That's the general view. As you may know, there was a time when many scholars thought that the deity of Christ was lacking in all the Synoptics and developed only by John.

I: Yes. When I was in school, they felt that John was much later than the others. Did they not?

C: They did indeed. In fact, many of them thought the apostle John was not the author. It was once thought to be a late second-century writing, so exalted was its Christology.

I: But as we have seen, John is clearly in the generation of Jesus. Didn't you mention that some scholars today think it's the earliest of the four Gospels and certainly before the fall of Jerusalem?

C: Yes. What an amazing shift in critical opinion that's occurred in this century! Getting back to Mark, it's interesting to note that at the turn of the century, some radical critics recognized that Mark taught the deity of Christ as truly as John did.

I: How was that?

C: Well, one of the early form critics, a man named Wrede, made the remark that "Mark is as bad as John."

I: Whatever did that mean?

C: It meant that Mark was as good as John. Mark taught the deity of Christ as truly as John did.

I: So some unbelieving critics were reversing themselves? They were, at least this man Wrede, saying that the earliest Gospel and the earliest records represented Christ as God.

Is that the point?

C: Correct. You can see it in the very opening verse of Mark's Gospel. There we read: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the *Son of God* . . ."

I: That was the statement of Mark and not of Jesus, was it not?

C: Yes. Consequently, we cannot say that it was a self-disclosure of Jesus Himself. Nevertheless, the very fact that Mark, a follower of Jesus, attributed deity to Him must, we suppose, have come from Christ Himself. You remember that the reason the statements in John affirming His deity were supposed to be later was the supposed late date of John. The notion was that there were no claims for deity early in His career and in the following years; only after a century and a half did the church attribute to Jesus a deity He never claimed for Himself. But here in what the critics consider the earliest Gospel, and at the very first verse, we have a statement by Mark that Jesus is the Son of God. It's hard to believe he could have gotten such a notion from anyone but Jesus. There certainly was no time for an elaborate evolutionary development of this doctrine from something not found in the sources at all.

I: I see your point. You say this man, Wrede, was a critic. Does that mean that the critics had changed their minds by the beginning of this century and recognized that Jesus was thought to be and taught to be divine at the very beginning of His ministry?

C: Not all of them. But at least some critics believed it; form criticism and Wrede and Schweitzer definitely acknowledged that it was in the record and not a later importation.

I: Then, there was a sudden influx of higher critics into the church at the turn of the century?

C: No. Sorry to say, there was not.

I: I don't understand. You said they did recognize that Jesus was indeed divine, did you not?

C: They recognized that some of the sources said Christ was divine. Some of them even recognized that Christ Himself said He was divine. But most critics themselves did not believe He was divine. You see, some of the more liberal scholars, who did not believe Jesus was divine, claimed that *He* didn't either. Yet radical scholars were beginning to acknowledge the clear evidence that both Jesus and the early church believed Him to be God. Those who denied that had to admit that they were no longer loyal to Christ and the early church, though they once claimed to be.

I: This interests me very much, as you can well suppose. These critics were like me, were they not?

C: You mean that they knew that Christ is God, but had not yet been converted?

I: Yes. Are they not in exactly the same situation?

C: No. Not quite as hopeful a situation as yours. You see, they simply acknowledged that Christ and the early church believed He was divine. They didn't believe it themselves. You do believe it. You are persuaded not only that Christ taught His deity and the early church believed it, but that it is true. Unlike these critics, you think that He is God, though you are not certain you have

a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Recognizing the same facts as you, they made no pretense of personal belief in them. You do, though you have not come to trust in Christ as your Savior.

I: Yes. That's my situation. I am persuaded He is divine and that if I believe in Him, He would be my Savior. Yet, I'm not convinced that I have that kind of saving belief. I see the difference. Why don't these critics believe what Christ Himself claimed? The early church, which comprised witnesses of Him, believed it. I think I know the answer to my own question.

C: I think you do too.

I: Was it the old naturalistic bias?

C: I think so. Why would people note that Christ said He was God, and that the people closest to Him believed it, and that there was evidence of miraculous power, which showed He was sent from God, and not believe it themselves? Why would they disbelieve unless they simply rejected sound theistic thinking and evidence of a revelation from God? That wasn't always clear in their writings. Though they didn't always say why, I suspect that common to their unbelief was their naturalistic bias against the supernatural.

I: Maybe you and I should talk with people like that today.

C: Indeed we must. Let us now turn to the Gospel of Luke for a verse or two there on the deity of Christ. It might be well to start with a statement of Jesus that suggests to many people a denial of His deity.

I: A denial?

C: Yes. That is what the famous British scholar H. G. Wells thought it to be. He wrote an article years ago entitled "Man among Men," intending to show that Christ was merely a human being. Others too have claimed that when Jesus says to the rich young ruler, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is good," He denies that He is God.

I: That does seem to be what He's saying.

C: The question is whether that is what He is intending by those words.

I: What's this distinction between what He's saying and what He's intending?

C: Well, we earlier mentioned that He said He was the vine and we are the branches. When He said that literally, His *intention* was that He is the life-principle of Christians, who bear fruit by His indwelling presence. The form of words may convey a deeper meaning than the words themselves. In the present instance, there is no parable or figure of speech. Christ is using plain speech. But is it not possible that He means something other than those words normally convey?

I: I would have to admit that it's possible. Just as I suppose you will admit the burden of proof is on the person who seeks some meaning other than the obvious one H. G. Wells took from it.

C: Yes, I must shoulder this burden because I am arguing for an interpretation other than the obvious one. Are we agreed it is not out of the question that Christ may mean

something other than what the words normally mean?

I: Agreed.

C: The first thing that alerts us is that this remark is a question rather than a statement. Christ does not say that He is not God. He simply asks the young man why he calls Him good inasmuch as only God is good. That is certainly not the same thing as denying that He is God.

I: Still, He does go on to assert that only God is good, does He not?

C: Yes, He does say, "Why do you call Me good? None is good save God." The way we usually read that, and even enunciate it, is that Christ is denying that He is God because He's denying that He is properly called good. Nevertheless, strictly speaking, that is not what it says. Christ is simply addressed as good master, and He quizzes the addresser on why *he* calls Him good. By pointing out that only God is good, He could be saying that the reason He is good is that He is God. Could that not be the meaning of the words?

I: Yes. I guess that is a possible construction. Nevertheless, you yourself admit that's not the first thing that comes to mind.

C: Granted, but we have also seen, time and again, that the first thing that comes into one's mind is not always the last thing to stay there.

I: Yes, I know, and I admit that could be the case here. At first glance, Christ is denying His deity. At subsequent glances, He may not be doing that. In fact, one has to grant that Christ is *not* denying His deity. He may actually be asserting it in the form of a question. He may be saying to the rich young ruler, "Since you call me good, do you realize I am God, inasmuch as only God is good?" That interpretation is possible. It remains to you to show its feasibility and probability.

C: Of course we already have clear evidence from other places that Jesus is God. He knows that He's God, and He tells people that He is God: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." When we remember that this is the same person who says, "Why do you call Me good? None is good save God," that does put a different light on that question, does it not?

I: Yes, it does. Admitting that Jesus Christ is God, we would have to say that this question actually probes the ruler's mind to see if he recognizes that fact, rather than implying a denial of it. That is a cogent argument, given the other data we have about Jesus Christ. The more I reflect on it, the more I like that interpretation. I realize now that it can be the only legitimate one, given the identity of the questioner.

C: On the other hand, if we didn't know that Jesus Christ is God, we would not think He was intending a subtle assertion of His deity by that question. It would be more naturally taken as an

implicit denial. Knowing that Jesus elsewhere plainly says He is God, we realize His question must be a subtle way of bringing the rich young ruler to a recognition of implied deity.

I: At least it would be a gentle rebuke advising the young man not to be careless in his use of language. That is, the only proper use of the word “good” belongs to God. Did you say there's something else in the passage that seems to suggest the deity of Christ?

C: Yes, in the very conversation Christ had with this rich young ruler.

I: Reading it again. I see no other indication that Christ says He is God incarnate.

C: Christ tells the young ruler that if he wants to be perfect (reach his goal of eternal life), he must sell everything, give to the poor, and follow Him.

I: That shows that Christ is the determiner of eternal life.

C: And only God is the determiner of eternal life.

I: But can't you, as a minister, tell me or anyone what is necessary for eternal life without being divine? Can you not advise us what God requires without being God?

C: Yes.

I: Are you claiming deity for yourself?

C: No.

I: What am I missing here?

C: As a minister, I can tell the *general*, not *individual*, terms of eternal life.

I: Please explain.

C: I can tell you, or anyone, that it is difficult to be rich and a Christian. I can advise you that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through a needle's eye. What I cannot do is tell you that *you* are worshipping mammon, and you must give up all of it if *you* would be saved. Only God can do that.

I: In other words, only God can see into the hidden heart of men?

C: That is the difference between Christ and the servants of Christ.

I: I am convinced about the deity of Christ. I know there is much more in the Bible that you could cite in proof, but you have given me enough. Except—

C: Except?

I: I can't help wondering whether other religious leaders don't claim deity, too.

C: Claiming and proving are two different things. But they don't even claim it. Occasionally some of their followers have attributed deity to them. But, you name a great religious leader, and you will find that he did not present himself as divine.

I: You mean that only Jesus of Nazareth ever said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," or anything like it?

C: Compare Confucius, who, as you know, was really a skeptic. He took one world at a time. He was very sagacious about laws of conduct for this world, but dubious about the future world. He was satisfied to be a moral legislator for this sphere in which we live.

I: What about the "Enlightened One," Buddha?

C: Gautama, the Buddha, was an atheist.

I: Yes, I suspected that.

C: It is easy to demonstrate that Buddha was further from theism than was Confucius. While Confucius was insecure about the future, Buddha didn't even entertain a belief in a personal deity. He was a pantheist in the pure sense of the word. He certainly was not laying claim to being God when he didn't believe there is one. The same is true of other Eastern religious leaders such as Mahavira, Zoroaster, and so on. None of them ever laid claim to being deity.

I: The greatest religious influence in the world today, next to Christ, is Mohammed. His followers seem utterly devoted to him

C: He categorically repudiated deity. As you know, the great creed of Islam is there is *one* God, Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet. The Muslims are rigid monotheists. While Mohammed is, for them, the greatest prophet, he is *merely* a prophet and in no way deity.

I: As a matter of fact, I understand that the Muslims have a high view of Jesus. They believe He was virgin born, was sinless, did miracles, and is coming again. But they certainly do not believe that Christ is God. Nor do they believe Mohammed is God.

C: In fact, they consider belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, whom they admire as a prophet, to be the greatest blasphemy of the Christian church. I'm even told that, because Christians worship Christ, Muslims do not like to be called Mohammedans for fear people will think they worship Mohammed. They admit that Christians worship Christ, which they consider our worst sin. They do not want people to suppose they worship Mohammed. Neither Mohammed nor his followers have claimed deity for him.

I: Likewise the Jews don't think that their Moses was God, or that Moses Maimonides of the Middle Ages, their second great Moses, was God either. They, too, would regard the Christian notion that Jesus Christ is God as a form of blasphemy.

C: Yes. In John's Gospel they accused Jesus of blasphemy because, being a man, He made Himself to be God.

I: I get the point. And I'm going to be ready the next time I hear students confidently remark that all religious leaders lay claim to being deity. To be told that Jesus made a unique claim should have quite an impact on them. I can only hope it makes them think more seriously about Christ.

C: It's real irony, isn't it, that this unique event, the incarnation of God in human flesh, should be made out to be a commonplace, as if all religious leaders taught such doctrine.

I: What do you do when sophisticated people such as George Bernard Shaw, for example, say things like, "Yes, Jesus did think of Himself as God. We have to admit that He suffered from megalomania." In some ways, that's the most devastating criticism of Christ one can hear. It patronizingly grants that Christ made this claim. Then on the basis of that assertion, Shaw, Bunby, and others go on to question Christ's sanity. I hope you'll forgive me, my good Christian friend, for raising a question like this. I know how much it must hurt you to hear anybody questioning the sanity of the Lord and Savior of mankind. You must consider that blasphemy and suffer from merely hearing such speech. At the same time, as you know, probably better than I, that sort of thing is said and comes from some very influential sources. What do you say to such a thing?

C: Don't apologize for mentioning it to me. You're perfectly right. It's hard speech, and I detest it. I do consider it blasphemy. At the same time, it comes from responsible sources and must be faced responsibly. From where George Bernard Shaw stood, it was an almost inevitable rational conclusion. And I often cite Shaw precisely because he admits Christ's claim to deity. There are plenty of people who try to ignore that or turn it aside or denature it. Shaw is to be commended, as others, for "telling it like it is." I'm sure Shaw himself would have been much more comfortable with a Christ who didn't make such claims. He must have been tempted, as were other liberals, like H. G. Wells, to say that Christ was merely a man among men, never entertaining any grandiose illusions about Himself. Shaw knew better than that. Don't ever apologize for raising any kind of blasphemy that takes the form of an argument against the Christian religion. Such things cannot be turned off. Though horrible, they have to be dealt with squarely, in honor and integrity.

I: Thank you. How do you do that?

C: Well, what I say is simple enough. I agree with the Shaws of the world. If this man Jesus were merely a man, and laid claim to deity, He would be sick, and probably worse than sick. He would not be worthy of a following. He would be out of his mind. I suppose I would ridicule Him more than Shaw does if I were standing where Shaw stood. But Shaw's mistake is that he just gratuitously assumes that Jesus Christ is not God.

I: That's true. He takes it for granted that Christ is merely a man, just as most people take it for granted that any man is just a man. Hardly anybody can imagine God's actually becoming man. The almost inevitable assumption is that any man claiming to be God has to be out of his mind. What other conclusion could you draw? I think you're on target with respect to Shaw's mentality.

It is virtually the mentality of the human race. I plead guilty to it myself. Until I started to talk seriously about these matters, I would have assumed as self-evident that Jesus Christ was merely a man. If you had proved to me then that He *claimed* to be God, I would have turned Him over to a psychiatrist.

C: I agree. We, on the other hand, know that of course there isn't any rational objection to the proposition that God could take upon Himself a human nature. Where we agree with Shaw is that we will assume a man is merely a man until there is evidence to the contrary. Short of that evidence, we will agree with Shaw that any person claiming to be deity is a "liar or a lunatic." Shaw will have to listen to us at this point, will he not? He will have to give some proof that it's impossible for God to take upon Himself human nature and remain God. Yet Shaw doesn't do that, He doesn't even attempt to. And I'm confident he never could if he did try.

I: But he must try. You're perfectly right. He has no right simply to say something that is not demonstrative. It is *not* self-evident that God cannot take human nature upon Himself. It is self-evident that a man is merely a man *unless* there's conclusive evidence to the contrary.

C: Until a person examines the evidence of Christ's claim and shows that evidence to be false, he has no right to say that Jesus is not actually God.

I: We have found the very opposite. The evidence is in and it shows that, first, Jesus Christ *claimed* to be God, and, second, Jesus Christ proved Himself to be God. But yet—

C: What's that?

I: I hate to bring this up at this late date.

C: If it is relevant, it's never too late.

I: That's the problem—I don't know whether it's relevant.

C: Maybe we had better hear what is on your mind and judge together whether it's relevant.

I: Well, just the other day a Jehovah's Witness came to my door . . .

C: And argued against the deity of Christ?

I: Yes Most of what he said was characteristically puerile. But one thing disturbed me.

C: What was that?

I: He reminded me that Christ is called "Son" in the Bible and even in Christian churches.

C: I can guess what else he said that disturbed you.

I: Go ahead.

C: My guess is that this Witness went on to say that Christ's being called "Son" means He was born and therefore could not be eternal, and therefore could not be divine.

I: Exactly. I didn't—and frankly, don't—know how to answer that.

C: That is not surprising. At first glance, it is very puzzling. As we use the word *son* it always means someone born in time and not eternal.

I: You say, "As we use the word *son*." Is there some special meaning when the word is used of Christ?

C: Right on the surface, there is. For example, when Jesus (or John referring to Jesus) says: "*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son . . .*" (3:16), this is not a typical reference to a human son, but to the Son of God.

I: Granted, but still He is a *Son*.

C: Yes, but a *Son of God*.

I: I don't get what you are driving at. Son of God or son of man, does the word *son* not mean "born" and therefore temporal?

C: It means "born," but does it need to mean "temporal"?

I: I'm beginning to see the light. If Christ or the Word is the *Son of God*, He is born of God (Son), but eternally born (of God)?

C: If that were not so, the Word would not be His *only* (unique) Son. God is the Creator of all men, who in that sense are "sons" born in time.

I: But "His only Son" must be as eternal as He is?

C: That is the reason the church all throughout her history has adoringly referred to the Word as "the eternally begotten Son of God."

I: The Witnesses will never believe that.

C: They should—

I: Why?

C: Because, first they agree that Christ is called the *Son* of the Father. Second, they agree that the *Father* refers to the *eternal* God. Third, they agree that the word *Father* has no *meaning* without an offspring (Son). For example, I, like some Witnesses, existed forty years before my

first child was born. Only then did I *become a father*. There cannot be a father, or a Father, without offspring. Therefore—

I: Let me interrupt and see if I cannot state the inevitable conclusion (just as a Jehovah's Witness should). Therefore, since the Father is admittedly eternal, *His Son must also be eternal* because the very term *Father* is meaningless or false apart from *Son*.

C: Amen.

I: How could I have failed to see that? How could that Witness fail to see that?

C: The question is, How does anyone ever fail to “see” the deity of Christ?

I: Yes, how?

C: It is not because the deity of Christ is not plain enough.

I: How is it, then?

C: Suppose we let Christ tell us how one *does come* to see the obvious deity of Christ.

I: Does He?

C: He does precisely in the dialogue with Peter (Matthew 16: 13ff).

I: What does He say there?

C: First, He asks the apostles, “Who do you say that the *son of man* is?”

I: I do remember And Peter answers, “Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

C: Correct, and it is Christ's comment on that confession that gives us our answer to how one comes to “see” the deity of Christ.

I: Which is . . . ?

C: “Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

I: In other words, it is the Father who reveals the Son.

C: Just as we had noticed earlier when Christ said that no one knows Him “save the Father and he to whom He reveals Him.”

I: Where does that leave me? Or you? Are you telling me that we have spent an hour talking about the deity of Christ and I will never understand what you are saying unless God “reveals” it to me?

C: Exactly.

I: Then what is the point of our talking?

C: If God ever does reveal it to you, it will come out of dialogue such as this, just as it was revealed to Peter only after Jesus had explained it to him. You see, the true witness paints the picture. God gives the eyes to perceive it. God does not paint the picture, and we painters cannot provide eyes to see.

I: What am I to do?

C: Ask God to give you the eyes to see and the heart to confess: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

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