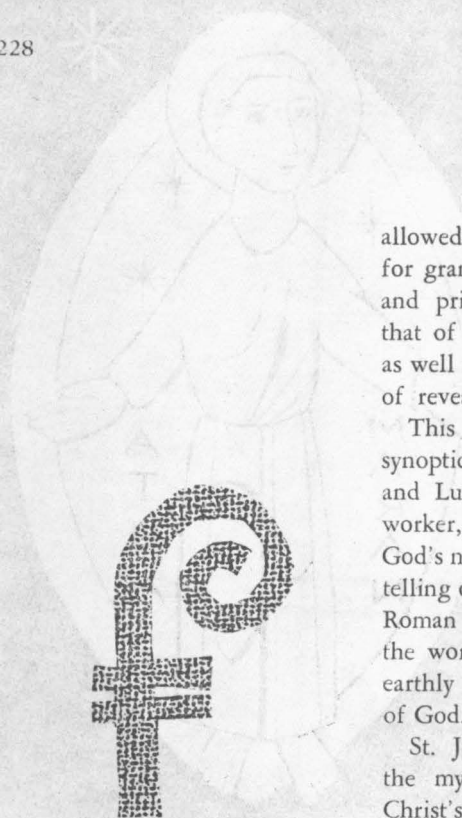


CHRIST: THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE FATHER'S GLORY

Jesus Christ has allowed us to know God. Our penetration of this mystery depends upon our understanding of just who Christ was. It is puzzling that we concern ourselves so little and so infrequently in achieving such an understanding, since our every year and every day is marked, sealed, so to speak, with the name of this Christ whom we call "Lord."

This is the year of our Lord, 1962, an extension of time and motion and activity which we universally measure in relation to the birth of Jesus Christ. It would seem radically disappointing that the mystery of who Christ really is should be



allowed to rest in obscurity or be taken for granted. Insisting that the primary and principal mission of Christ was that of savior and redeemer, we must as well insist that His mission was that of revealer.

This should be most obvious. The synoptic Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, portrayed Jesus as miracle worker, as dispenser of the riches of God's mercy and love. In St. Matthew's telling of the Passion, the words of the Roman centurion might well figure as the words of all witnesses of Christ's earthly life: "Truly this was the Son of God."

St. John probed more deeply into the mystery. He left no doubt of Christ's origin, beginning his Gospel rendition with the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." For John, Christ was this preeminently: the Word, spoken and sent forth by the Father; so that immediately after assuring us, "no man has ever seen God," he adds in explanation of his knowledge of Jesus' heavenly origin, "except the only begotten Son." And this difficult mes-

sage, a test even for the ken of the familiar band of Apostles, was reaffirmed at the very end of Christ's mission. Christ told a Philip, who at the hour before the Passion requested a glimpse of the Father, "Have you been with me so long, Philip, and you do not know me? Philip, he who sees me sees the Father."

It is necessary for the Christian to be on his guard against apathy toward Christ as revealer. It might be possible to become too privileged, too familiar with the things of religion. The scientist atmosphere of our world might flatten the richness and intoxication of mystery. Or what is worse, religion might seem to us too subjective a thing for us to realize that it is God's prerogative, not ours, to establish the dimensions and relationships of our encounter with divinity.

At least we must exclude for ourselves the excuse of the Jews. To speak now historically, despite the wealth of meaning of the centurion's words at the Cross, those words for a Jew of Christ's time did not necessarily convey the mystery of divine nature in the person of Christ. The way of God with His chosen people had been from the beginning, from Abraham, a story of election, choosing the Hebrews as God's own nation, as His sons. Various through the pages of the Old Testament, the Chosen People are named "Sons of Yahwe," or, as in Deuteronomy, the chiefs of the people and the Israelites themselves are called "Sons of God." When the expression "son of God" is used in the psalms of the messiah king, it is not with a clear implication that this hero of God will be anything more ontologically than a mere human hero.

This tradition of Israel might have blinded the eyes of the Jews towards Jesus; they might have failed to realize the meaning of the assertion when Christ called Himself "Son of God." But this cannot be our excuse for failing to understand the Christ; it is, indeed, no real excuse for the Jews. The works of Christ—especially the great sign of the Resur-



rection—made brilliantly apparent the clear and staggering sense of the "Sonship" of the Lord Jesus.

For ourselves, however, there seem to be signs which indicate a failure to grasp the meaning of Christ's role as revealer. What, for example, would be our conclusion from a sociological study made in recent years which shows large numbers of "converts" flocking from other Protestant sects to that one called by the name of Unitarian for the reason, says the study, that so many find it so difficult today to accept the person of Christ as divine. What lies behind the unravellable fear to bring God into the forum of public life which could prompt the recent Supreme Court decision forbidding a public prayer in the classrooms of our public schools? We see so many take three steps to 'safety' in religion: make overtures of religion in case there is a God; caution against becoming too involved for fear it all might be useless superstition; and above all, guard against making a definite commitment, for fear of losing the upper hand or not remaining socially fluid.

The upper hand, indeed, is just what we fear of granting God.

There seems to be an insight into our modern God-problems in these words of Father Yves Congar:

When God is not content merely to speak to men, but Himself becomes the human Word of Revelation, He evidently delivers the last revelation. The prophets spoke of Another; in Jesus Christ, *God speaks of Himself*. The first generation of Christians and the Fathers of the Church had most vividly experienced the great joy of this tremendous novelty: 'Jesus Christ has allowed us to know God.' Today, however, we are practically insensible to this realization. Religion appears to consist substantially either in good intentions, sincerity of heart, or in good works. Salvation without any knowledge of God would suit us fine. But the Christians of antiquity had been surrounded by a paganism devoid of any knowledge of God, devoid even of the desire of having such knowledge or of the conviction that it was possible. They tasted the joy and assurance of having passed, thanks to Christ Jesus, from ignorance to the knowledge of God; for them this was itself the object of constant thanksgiving. Christ, the Word made flesh, was first of all for them, the revealer of God, that is to say, the revealer of the Father "Who dwells in light inaccessible."

There is something of comfortable unconcern in our attitude toward the mystery of the Incarnation. The emphasis on the infant Jesus as savior can lead to the neglect of the important and dynamic mystery of the divine Lord as revealer of the eternal secrets of the Godhead.

How is Christ the revelation of God? How does He open for us the mystery of the divine? The answer is given fundamentally in these words of Pope St. Leo the Great: "God, invisible in His own nature, has become



visible in ours." St. Paul spoke of Christ to the same effect: "He is the image of the invisible God . . . the brightness of his glory and the image of his substance."

The Council of Chalcedon gave dogmatic expression to this mystery by defining that Christ is "one person in two natures." That is to say, one and the same person, the Son of God according to eternal generation, has chosen to manifest Himself under the form of a human being. St. Thomas Aquinas writing in *The Union of the Incarnate Word*, described the mystery: "The Word of God is personally man." Elsewhere he said, "In Christ, the human nature has been so assumed that it belongs to the person of the Son of God" (III, 2, 10).

From this it can be seen how the actions of Jesus Christ who is, though one Person, both God and Man, manifest the abundance of goodness which is hidden from us in the Godhead. All that Jesus does as Man is an act of the Son of God, a translation and transposition of divine activity into human activity. To use the words of Father Henri Schillebeeckx, O.P.:

The humanity of Jesus is willed concretely by God as the accomplishing of His promises of salvation; this is the messianic reality. The intention of the incarnation, redemptive and messianic, includes this, that the encounter between Jesus and His contemporaries may be on His part always a proposal of grace under a human form. The love of the Man Jesus is, in effect, the human incarnation of the redemptive love of God, an appearance of God's love in visible dimensions. And because these human acts of Jesus are the acts of God—acts of God humanly manifested—they possess essentially a divine power for salvation; they are salutary; they are a cause of grace.

If, then, the very presence of God in human flesh is a proposition of grace, if the Incarnation is the revelation of God's merciful love for men, if the acts of Christ are essentially possessed of salvific power, then obviously the revelation of Jesus Christ is something more than pure knowledge. It is instruction and holiness. Jesus 'revealed' by actions as well as by words; He washed the feet of His "friends"; He personified patience in a silence which saved the adulteress from stoning; He obeyed—even to the death of the Cross. This is also a revelation of God, in His mercy and His love for men.

One is reminded by way of example of two miracle stories in the Old Testament. In the one, the prophet Eliseus condescends to the foreign general, Naaman, a leper; he sends him a message which will cure him, but only through an intermediary. He himself will not see or touch the leper. In the other story, Eliseus restores life to the only son of the Sunamitess widow in a dramatically different action. He applies his own life to the body of the boy; he lies on top of him, body upon body, face upon face, and breathes his own life's breath into him. Both of these episodes depict the merciful action of God's approach to men. But in the first, it is in a distant way; in the second, the prophet through his immediate contact

brings back life to the widow's son. This latter figure is an appropriate simile for Christ's role as revealer of the Father. Christ reveals the divine prerogatives of the Father toward mankind not merely as a messenger of the good will of the Father, but as the eternally generated Word sent forth from the Father, equal to Him in divinity and majesty. These words of Saint Paul recall this:

God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, *last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son by whom he made the world; who being the brightness of his glory and the image of his substance . . .* has taken his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

As Eliseus lay upon the dead boy, Christ has taken upon Himself our human flesh, to bring it to life with the very life of divinity. Christ has made a new creation of mankind, not just through His role of redeemer and savior, but also as High Priest of the divine cult of Christian worship wherein we become other Christs as members of His body and His worship of the Father.

It is in this sense that Greek theologians stress the *theosis*, the divinization of Christians or, literally, the "deification" of man. The incarnate *Logos*—the divine Word—according to St. Irenaeus in his work, *Against the Heresies*, "became what we are, so that He might make us what He is."

St. Athanasius agreed: "He became man that we might become gods." What these two holy Fathers of the Church convey in these words is the expression of the Christian's participation in the inner life of God through the supernatural virtues of faith, hope and charity. Thus in the New Testament notion, "here we have no lasting city," the soul of the Christian pines for the fulfillment of this life of supernatural love in the eternal Jerusalem wherein the Father reigns in majesty and the Son sits in glory at His right hand. This is the vision of Christ's revelation; this is the glory revealed by Christ of the outpouring of the Father's mercy and creative love.

This message of Christ as revealer is most opportune at the present moment. For *this* Christmas, we have good reason to need an orientation to the promises of the heavenly Jerusalem. The world of guided missiles and nuclear warheads taxes our minds and hearts with fear and anxiety. But how much of this fear and anxiety comes from the sheer grossness of our attachment to the materiality of this world? Compare it with the cry of the early Christian, grateful for the revelation of God's overtures of love, who cried at the feast of Christmas, "*Maranatha*," "Come, Lord Jesus." This call was indeed a herald of joy for the feast of Christ's embodiment. But it was also a melancholy cry for the coming of that day of fulfillment on which he would enter the heavenly city of eternal life wherein the revelation of the Father's love finds its fulfillment, through Christ Our Lord.

PRAYERS FOR THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY

I Thus says the Lord:

You shall draw waters with joy out of the savior's fountains; and you shall say in that day: Praise ye the Lord, and call upon his name. Rejoice, and praise, O thou habitation of Sion; for Great is he that is in the midst of thee, the Holy One of Israel. *Isaias 12:3 ff.*

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Lord,
 how glorious is your name over all the earth!
 What is man that you should be mindful of him,
 or the son of man that you should care for him?
 You have made him little less than the angels,
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
 O Lord, our Lord,
 how glorious is your name over all the earth!

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, You Who come again in the midst of us to reveal the glory of the Father, make us understand the richness of the waters of knowledge and love which flow from the heart of Your divine mercy, that we may drink of them in joy. Amen.

II Thus says the Lord:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

Isaias 11:1, ff.

Psalm 15

Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge;
 I say to the Lord, "My Lord are you.
 Apart from you I have no good."
 O Lord, my allotted portion and my cup,
 you it is who hold fast my lot.

Let us pray

O Lord God, Father Almighty, grant us the wisdom to rejoice in the gifts of Your Holy Spirit, that attentive to the gentle impulse of His directions, we may be led to eternal life, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Thus says the Lord:

Behold I send my angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face. And presently the Lord whom you seek, and the angel of the testament whom you desire, shall come to his temple. Behold he that cometh, saith the Lord of Hosts. He is like a refining fire. *Malachias 3:1, ff.*

III*Psalm 26*

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
 whom should I fear?
 The Lord is my life's refuge;
 of whom should I be afraid?
 One thing I ask of the Lord;
 this I seek:
 To dwell in the house of the Lord
 all the days of my life,
 That I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord
 and contemplate his temple.

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, Your own Son is the refining furnace for our minds and hearts: You have enkindled our minds with the knowledge of Him and our hearts with the promise of His never-ending love; now mercifully lead us to rest in this promise with ever stronger faith. Amen.

IV Thus says the Lord:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion! Shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold thy King will come to thee, the just and savior: he is poor and riding upon a colt the foal of an ass. And he shall speak peace to the Gentiles, and his power shall be from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the end of the earth.

Zacharias 9:9 ff.

Psalm 62

O God, you are my God whom I seek;
 for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts
 like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.
 Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary
 to see your power and your glory.
 For your kindness is a greater good than life;
 my lips shall glorify you.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, King of the humble, Who have shown Your mercy to all nations, speak peace to us: by Your creative love renew in us that right order wherein our hearts are fixed in You alone in perfect tranquillity. Amen.

V Thus says the Lord:

Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Behold the Lord God shall come with strength, and his arm shall rule. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather together the lambs with his arm, and shall take them up in his bosom, and he himself shall carry them that are with young. *Isaias 40:1 ff.*

Psalm 22

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
 Beside restful waters he leads me;
 he refreshes my soul.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
 all the days of my life;
 And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
 for years to come.

Let us pray

Almighty Father, You have sent Your beloved Son to be our shepherd and our king. Do not abandon us to our own weakness and ignorance, but constantly direct us and support us, that we may follow after Him, Your Son, Who leads us back, through green pastures, to You. Amen.

Thus says the Lord:

Yet one little while, and I will move the heaven and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. And I will move all nations, and the desired of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory; and in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts. *Aggeus 2:7 ff.*

Psalm 28

Give to the Lord, you sons of God,
 give to the Lord glory and praise,
 Give to the Lord the glory due his name;
 adore the Lord in holy attire.
 The Lord is enthroned above the flood;
 the Lord is enthroned as king forever.
 May the Lord give strength to his people;
 May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Let us pray

Lord God, Heavenly Father, You have sent us Your only Son so we could see the revelation of Your glory in His words and His works. Once again, we beg you, move heaven and earth: touch the minds and hearts of all men, and move us to accomplish the integrity of harmony in charity, so that as Your holy community we may move toward the fulfillment of Your promises, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

VI

VII Thus says the Lord:

Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people; but the Lord shall be upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. *Isaias 60:1 ff.*

Psalm 118

A lamp to my feet is your word,
 a light to my path.
 Your decrees are my inheritance forever;
 the joy of my heart they are.
 I intend in my heart to fulfill your statutes
 always, to the letter.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, Light of the world, we give thanks for Your coming; for You have not only given light to our feet, but have shown us the way to reach Eternal Truth from Whose mouth we have been spoken forth into reality. We pray for Your Light to be with us, to keep our minds strong in faith and our hearts hopeful of Your promises. Amen.

VIII Thus says the Lord:

And I saw no temple therein. For the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine upon it. For the glory of God lights it up, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. And the nations shall walk by the light thereof; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it. And its gates shall not be shut by day; for there shall be no night there. *Apocalypse 21:22 ff.*

Psalm 17

I love you, O Lord, my strength,
 O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

My God, my rock of refuge,
my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!
Praised be the Lord, I exclaim,
and I am safe from my enemies.

Let us pray

Almighty Father, Who has shown us through Your Son Jesus Christ the glory of Your eternal dwelling, we worship You with glad hearts. Through Your Holy Spirit, the gift of the Son and the soul of our souls, enlighten, guide, strengthen and console us. We promise to be submissive in everything You permit to happen to us; only show us what is Your will, through the same Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

—Paul Philibert, O.P.

