THE HUMAN CHRIST

By BRO. MARTIN SHEA, O. P.

MODERN writers on religious subjects and questions of social order are insistent that the world needs faith. We are told again and again that science has not been an unqualified blessing; that its prying scrutiny of nature has aroused a spirit of incredulous inquiry that demands physical demonstration of every conclusion; that men do not want to believe what they cannot see and touch. However strong among non-Catholics may be this tendency to rationalism no one contends that Catholics have lost their belief in the supernatural and the reality of the unseen. The steady tramp, tramp of the Christmas crowds working their way to church at the midnight hour or in the early dawn is proof enough of the vitality of the Catholic Faith in the unseen divinity of the Christ Child. Catholics generally think of Jesus Christ as the God that came from heaven and remains on earth only within the hush and awe of the tabernacle. Perhaps it would be worth while in this Christmas season to think somewhat more of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Long, long ago in the stable at Bethlehem the Virgin Mary gave birth to a Son. Because of the privilege of her Immaculate Conception and her fecundation through the power of the Most High she bore her Son without the travail and difficulties of ordinary childbirth. She needed no assistance, she suffered no pain. Kneeling down she adored the fruit of her womb, but picking Him up she nursed the Child of her flesh. He was divine and yet He was human.

The shepherds on the hillside were told by angels that the Christ was born and they came to adore the Saviour of Israel. They saw the small form of a child and the gentle heaving of the breast, the puckering of the mouth told them that life dwelt in that little body. Life within a human body meant that a human soul was present. The little breathing body that lay before the eyes of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds was, indeed, a real and true human body and contained a human soul. There was no deception about it. Years later men that had never seen Christ were to rise up and teach that the body of Christ was not a real

body; and others that He did not have a complete human soul; but these men did not stand at the cradle in Bethlehem. They came after the Christ Child and the Man God had left this earth. They thought it was not fitting for the majesty of God to assume a human body and soul. It is melancholy entertainment for us to contemplate these tardy arrivals instructing God in the etiquette of salvation, telling Him what conventions He should observe in redeeming man.

The deniers of the reality of the body of Christ were called the Docetes. There were two forms of Docetism: Manichaeism and Gnosticism. The Manichaeists taught that all matter was from an evil principle and, therefore, the most holy Christ could not have taken a material body to Himself. It must have been a shadow of a body. But shadows do not bleed. An interesting sidelight on the sect of the Manichaeists is furnished by the opinion of Basilides that Christ had only the shadow of a body until He reached the top of Calvary and that forthwith He changed bodies with Simon the Cyrenian and Simon suffered on the cross while Christ ridiculed the Jews.

There were so many errors concerning the soul of Christ that we could not take time to consider all of them. Lucian of Antioch would not concede that Christ had a human soul: the Word took the place of the soul. Eunomius and Apollinaris would not acknowledge a human intellect in Christ. The Monotheletes would deprive Christ of a human will. And divers men taught other strange and conflicting doctrines concerning the humanity of Christ, but we cannot catalogue them all. From the different errors we have collected concerning Christ's humanity, however, we can readily see what a ludicrous saviour these heretics would make of Jesus Christ. One takes away the human soul, another deprives Him of the human intellect, while yet another excludes the human will. They leave a rather dismantled and dilapidated saviour! Queer reverence, indeed!

The Church's simple doctrine regarding the body and soul of Christ is workably stated in the trite phrase adapted from St. Paul (Heb. iv, 15): Christ is like us in all things save sin. The reality of the body of Christ is gathered from the words of St. Luke (xxiv, 39): "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me to have. And when he had said this, he shewed them his

hands and feet." And the reality of the soul of Christ from St. John (xii, 27): "Now is my soul troubled." And St. Matthew (xxvi, 38): "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." The Councils of Rome (Denzinger 65), Chalcedon (ibid. 148), and Florence (ibid. 708-710), the Apostles' and Athenasian Creeds teach with unquestionable frankness that Christ had a human body and soul specifically like our own. Indeed Christ's body and soul were so much like our own that if it were not for an unfortunate connotation and association in the public mind this part of the doctrine of the Incarnation could be expressed by picking and choosing the words of Shylock: "I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons . . . warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer—? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die?"[1]

The body and soul that Christ assumed were indeed a true human body and soul. They were like our bodies and souls in all things that pertain to the nature of man. Since Christ came to redeem man from sin He assumed the obligations which sin had placed on man. "He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins." (Isa. liii, 3, 4). But because of original sin our first parents lost those wonderful privileges of original justice by which they were exempted from toil and from pain, from sickness and from death, from all those inconveniences which we call the burdens of life. Every son of Adam, therefore, has been born into a life subject to hunger and thirst, heat and cold, fatigue and death. Christ chose to be a man and He did not seek any amelioration of conditions for His own comfort. He accepted human nature as it was and assumed it with all those limitations which are a part of it. However, it should be noted that to say Christ had certain "limitations" does not imply any opprobrium. It does not mean that either Christ's or our own human nature is fragmentary.

It is human nature to hunger; "and when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry" (Matt. iv, 2). It is human nature to tire after much exertion; "Jesus therefore being wearied with his journey sat thus on the well." (John iv, 6).

[1] Merchant of Venice. III, sc. i.

It is human nature to take some rest after long labors: "the boat was covered with waves, but he was asleep." (Matt. vii, 24). Jesus willingly accepted all these corporal restrictions and irritations that are a part of human nature and consequently fall to the lot of every true man. He thirsted, He hungered, He tired, He would have died some day if He had not been crucified.[2] However, Christ did not take on Himself those blemishes which result either from defective generation or come as the direct or indirect consequence of personal sin. For instance, He did not suffer from any of those diseases which are contracted from misuse of the emotions or which are passed down through heredity because of some imperfection in the parents. Some Christians, nevertheless, have thought that Christ bore a touch of leprosy. They arrived at this conclusion from reading amiss the fourth verse of chapter fifty-three in Isaias: "We have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted." Christ could not have incurred any disease resulting from abuse of the emotions since He was God and could not sin; neither could He inherit any disease since the Blessed Virgin was the purest of God's creatures and she was "overshadowed" by the Spirit of God.

Indeed, Christ possessed the most perfect body that has ever trod this earth. Physicians agree that where there are no impediments to generation the child will be beautiful by Nature's gentle art alone; that the normal type of man is beautiful and that each man diverges from type in so far as he falls away from the standard of beauty. This seems perfectly reasonable. By this token Christ must have been beautiful if there were no impediments in His generation; if the power which formed Him did not lack full vigor; if the matter from which He was moulded did not have a flaw; if the soul burning within Him was not too feeble to shine through the thin veil of flesh. When we turn to the facts and begin to verify these conditions we find that the body of Christ was the handiwork of the infinite love and power of the Holy Ghost, who, as St. Thomas says, "cannot err or fail"; His body was fashioned from the most pure and virginal blood of the Blessed Virgin; and animated by the most perfect soul that has ever been joined with flesh to constitute a

[2] S. Thomas. III, Sent., dist. 16, q. I, a. 2; and Salmant. disp. XXIV, dub. 1., n. 10.

man. Furthermore, the formation of Christ's body was not only free from obstacles from which imperfections might have naturally resulted; but moreover the body of Christ was formed miraculously, and since the miraculous is generally superior to the natural, we may conclude that Christ's body was even more than naturally beautiful. St. Thomas says: "His body was endowed with a most perfect constitution, since it was fashioned miraculously by the Holy Ghost; just as some other things made by miracles are better than others, as Chrysostom says (Hom. xxii, in Joan.) respecting the wine into which Christ changed the water at the wedding feast." And in his commentary on the third verse of the forty-fourth psalm St. Thomas is even more explicit: "He had in the highest degree such corporal beauty as suited his vocation and became the reverence and graciousness of his countenance, so that a certain ray of divinity shone in his face and all men, as St. Augustine says, venerated him."

Just as Christ accepted a human body with all its natural limitations but rejected every defect that carried any suggestion of opprobrium, so He chose a human soul equipped with the natural limitations of a human soul but free from "all taint to sin allied." Some, such as Guenther and Canon Farrar, have opined that Christ could have sinned even though as a matter of fact He did not sin.[3] They have gone too far. The humility of Christ did not involve Him in contradictions. Christ, being God, did not and could not commit actual sin, and neither did He inherit from Mary the taint of original sin. Although Christ was a son of Adam and the sons of Adam bear the mark of original sin, He was not a son of Adam in the crippled and tainted manner that we are. Our whole being, except for the direct infusion of the human soul by God, comes through a defiled line from the loins of Adam; but Christ was born from an immaculate virgin who conceived through the power of God Himself. The Holy Spirit, of course, was not infected with original sin, and neither was Mary. Thus, Jesus Christ as man was free from the touch of original sin. Furthermore, it is impossible to reconcile the presence of any kind of sin, actual or original, with the Godhead of the Son.

The soul of Christ had the ordinary human passions or emotions that go to make up a complete man. But since the passions

[3] Guenther. Vorschule. II, 441; Farrar. The Life of Christ, c. IX.

of Christ were subject to His reason and He enjoyed the plenitude of grace, He did not suffer those excesses of passion or emotion that are sinful or vicious. In the ordinary course of human existence He suffered the same reactions to the stimuli of life that we do. The Scriptures are full of testimony concerning His love and His anger, His sorrow and pain, His fear and His wonder. He wept over the death of His friend Lazarus, and the stubborn blindness of Jerusalem; He was angry with the money-changers in the Temple; He suffered a bloody sweat of fear and sorrow in Gethsemane and eventually succumbed to the tortures of Calvary.

Although the passions or emotions of Christ were human they differed in three ways from our own. In the first place, since the whole mystery of the Incarnation was inaugurated and completed for the salvation of men, nothing was done that did not tend in some way to man's instruction or redemption. Therefore, the passions of Christ ever had for their object something noble and useful. Our passions, however, are frequently mere foolish flurries of our souls. Secondly, the passions of Christ were ever under the direction of His reason. With us, on the contrary, the passions often tyrannize over or conflict with our reason. Finally, our passions frequently whirl our reason out of its dignified course and swing it along in a wild pursuit which the reason could never justify. The passions of Christ never interfered with the action of the reason but consistently aided the reason in handling truth.

Christ had a fourfold knowledge.[4] Being the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity He knew from His divine nature all things, past, present and future. Besides this divine wisdom, Christ as man received the beatific vision from the first moment of His conception and in this wise had all the knowledge that comes to the souls in Heaven from seeing God face to face. Also Christ received from on high a direct infusion of knowledge even greater than Adam had before the Fall. Lastly, Christ possessed human knowledge which He acquired and used just as we earn and use the fruits of our intellect. Since we are considering Jesus Christ particularly as He was a man like ourselves there is no need for us to mention anything about the divine wisdom that pertained to Him as God or the beatific vision that resulted

[4] Decree of the Holy Office. June 7, 1918.

from seeing God, or the infused knowledge miraculously accorded Him. We shall confine ourselves, therefore, to the knowledge which Christ acquired in a purely human way.

Although Catholic writers have commonly recognized human knowledge in Christ there have been discussions on the manner in which He acquired this knowledge. Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Durandus and even St. Thomas in his younger days thought that this knowledge was infused in Christ.[5] They came to this solution because they reasoned that our human method of learning by means of the senses, imagination and intellect implied a dependence on things outside Christ; and they did not want to concede such a dependence in Christ. The more common opinion of theologians, and that which St. Thomas teaches in his Summa, is that Christ really acquired knowledge step by step as we do through the action of the senses, imagination and active intellect.[6] Although the Church has never explicitly defined that Christ acquired human knowledge, yet she has declared that truth in equivalent words. For example, the third Council of Constantinople, held in the year 680-681, stated that in Christ there were "two natural operations."[7] Since knowing is the first of the natural operations, Christ must have had human knowledge besides His divine, beatific and infused knowledge.

Unless we concede that Christ acquired knowledge in a purely human way, it is impossible to admit the literal sense of certain passages of Scripture. For instance, St. Luke says: "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men." (Luke ii, 52). In this passage St. Luke seems to have established a parallel between Christ's growth of body and of mind. Since His body really grew as ours does, then His human mind grew also as ours does. "We have no right," says Père Lagrange, O. P.,[8] "to understand these words as being the expression of a mere appearance." Again, when the centurion said to Jesus: "Only say the word, and my servant shall be healed" (Matt. viii, 8, 10), St. Matthew notes that "Jesus hearing this, marvelled." But a man marvels when he sees something new.

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[5] III, Sent., dist. 14, q. 3, a. 3.
[6] Summa Theol. III, Q. VI, a. 4.
[7] Denzinger. 291-292.
[8] Evang. selon St. Luc.

Finally, Christ had a perfect human soul and a human soul can not be perfect without a human intellect; and there would be no use in having a perfect human intellect if it never were used. When Christ worked in the carpenter shop of Joseph he learned one day to fit a joint, one day to plane a plank, one day to do some other job, just as we would have done. Unquestionably He learned very quickly, for Christ learned all things possible for a man to learn,[9] but nevertheless He learned gradually as we do.

Just as Christ knew things in a human and divine way, so He willed them in a human and divine way. In the study of the human will of Christ men can find more consolation and encouragement than in the study of any other thing about the human nature of Christ. There we realize that Christ is truly and really a model for us, not some distant dream of an idealist; we see that He has actually experienced and conquered the trials which we are undergoing today. The human will of Christ, even as ours, was naturally attracted by what is pleasing and repelled by hardships; His human will, just as our own would have done, shrank before the looming Passion and found pleasure in the companionship of friends.

In the action of every human will we can note two movements. The first is automatic by which the will is attracted by that which is desirable in itself and repelled by that which is undesirable in itself. The second movement is intentional by which the will chooses that which the reason directs it towards and rejects that which the reason advises against. No man can sin by the first movement of the will; man sins only by the second movement of the will when he goes against that which right reason indicates as the real good in relation to the will of God. In us the first movement of the will is indeliberate and frequently contrary to right reason; a man suffering from hydrophobia feels a tremendous desire for water; this desire is natural, automatic and without reflection; it is both indeliberate and against the better judgment. In Christ, too, the natural desire was sometimes excited by things which His intelligence had to reject for a higher motive.[10] This does not mean, however, that Christ was afflicted with that proneness to evil which is part of the patrimony of the sons of original sin. He had no inclination to evil.

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[9] Summa Theol. III, XII, a. 1. ad 3m.
[10] Summa Theol. III, Q. XVII, a. 5.

However, this freedom from any inclination to evil did not prevent Christ from naturally desiring some things which He later willed not to have. In other words, He knew that same conflict that we suffer between duty and desire. His prayer in the Garden is a fine example. "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. xxvi, 39). The threatening Passion terrified Him and His human will naturally shrank from the impending agony. All this was automatic and natural. But Christ realized that the will of His heavenly Father must be fulfilled; that for Its sake He must embrace that which repelled Him. And so Christ said: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." We go through the same process every time we resist an inclination to desert our tasks for pleasure; we are attracted by the pleasure certainly and naturally enough, but our reason shows us that duty rather than pleasure must be our choice.

A little knowledge of the human nature of Christ gives us a great deal of insight into the mission of Christ the Redeemer and Model of the human race. We begin to feel the full import of those words: "Learn of me" (Matt. xi, 29). It seems so much easier to learn of Him when we know He was one so much like ourselves. The human appeal of Christ becomes so much more effective when we realize that He was one of us. Then we know there is nothing figurative but a wonderful reality in His last discourse to His Apostles: "I will not now call you servants . . . But I have called you friends." (John xv, 15). We feel the real truth of that title He seemed to love so humbly—The Son of Man.