

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST IN APOLOGETICS

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THAT the historical Jesus, though true man, was also true God, is a dogma of the Catholic Church, a fundamental article of the Catholic faith. It was defined by many Councils and is contained in all symbols of faith. It must be professed explicitly before one is admitted to baptism, and all Catholics believe it *fide divina*, that is, as a truth revealed by God. It is among the first theses of the treatise *De Verbo Incarnato*, and Catholic theologians prove it from Scripture, the Councils and professions of faith, the Fathers, the consent of the theologians.

Now to the trained theologian it is clear that all these arguments depend for their full dogmatic force on the authority of the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church. No need to go into that. But the question I wish to discuss now is this: Is that the only way of establishing the divinity of Christ? Or can that dogma be proved independently of the *magisterium*? Could a pagan be brought to see its truth before he admits the dogmatic authority of the Church and its *magisterium*? Or—to take a rationalist like Harnack, who persistently denied the divinity of the historical Jesus—would it be possible to convince him of this truth without first obliging him to submit to the authority of the Catholic Church (or of the Lutheran Church, of which he claimed to be a member)?

My personal reason for taking up this question is that some reviewers of my *Theologia Fundamentalis* (1940) expressed doubt on the subject.¹ It is touched on very summarily in my book.² But since the divinity of Christ constitutes the central thesis of the first part of my apologetics, and since at that stage the arguments can in no wise rest on the authority of the Church, I thought it opportune to examine the problem at greater length.

Now looking at the history of Catholic apologetics during the last century or so, we find that earlier writers confined their treatises to proving that Christ was God's legate or the Messiah expected by the Jews. Several good reasons may have prompted this limitation of

¹ *The Month*, CLXXVII (1941), 88.

² *Theologia Fundamentalis* (Weston, Mass.: Weston College, 1940), pp. 16-17.

outlook. First, this proof was sufficient to show the credibility of Christ's teaching, which was generally put down as the purpose of apologetics. Secondly, the divinity of Christ is a mystery, so much so that Peter had need of a special revelation (and grace, no doubt) to acknowledge it (Matt. 16:17); natural knowledge ("flesh and blood") was not enough. Both Mark (1:24) and Paul (I Cor. 2:8) seem to say that even the demons with their superhuman intelligence did not discover it or were not sure of it.

A strong motive for not proving the divinity of Christ in apologetics was undoubtedly the example of the older Scholastics. Both St. Thomas³ and Suarez⁴ prove it. Neither, of course, intended to write an apologetics as understood in the nineteenth and twentieth century; but modern Catholic apologetics would naturally analyze their mode of proceeding. Now their positive arguments as well as their answers to objections rest ultimately on the authority of the *magisterium*. Some modern theologians,⁵ though professing to write an apologetics, proceed as did St. Thomas and Suarez.

But latterly Catholic apologetics include the divinity of Christ as one of the theses to be established before establishing the authority of the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church. Of the authors to whom I had access I may mention the following: W. Wilmers, I. Ottiger, A. Schill, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, H. Felder, H. Dieckmann, M. Lepin, H. van Laak, J. T. Langan, J. Falcon, G. Lahousse, H. Straubinger, B. Goebel, V. Wass, L. Kösters, L. de Grandmaison, C. Lavergne. J. Huby follows the same procedure,⁶ and so does A. Michel.⁷ The same plan is followed by A. d'Alès and by L. Billot in their treatises *De Verbo Incarnato*.⁸

The modern procedure then cannot be accused of novelty, and I might rest my case on the weight of the authorities cited. However, because there is not yet universal agreement, I intend to show in this

³ *C. Gent.*, IV, 3-9.

⁴ *De Deo Uno et Trino*, Tract. III, lib. II, c. 3-4.

⁵ E.g., B. Tepe, S.J., *Institutiones Theologicae* (Parisii, 1896), I, 180-83.

⁶ *Christus* (6e éd.; Paris: Beauchesne, 1934), Chap. XVII, Sect. I.

⁷ "Jésus-Christ," *DTC*, VIII, 1186-1227.

⁸ A. d'Alès, S.J., *De Verbo Incarnato* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1930), Thesis V; L. Billot, S.J., *De Verbo Incarnato* (ed. 7a; Romae: apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1927), Theses LVI-LVIII. The question itself is discussed explicitly, though briefly, by H. Dieckmann, S.J., *De Revelatione Christiana* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder, 1930), n. 670; I. Ottiger, S.J., *Theologia Fundamentalis* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder, 1911), I, 17; Tanqueray-Bord, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae* (ed. 24a; Paris: Desclée, 1937), n. 364.

paper that proving the divinity of Christ apologetically is possible, unobjectionable, and indeed advisable. I shall also add arguments by which this can be done without leaning on the *magisterium*. Finally, I shall discuss the further question whether it is possible and advisable to prove in apologetics that Christ was the Son of God.

POSSIBILITY

I shall base my proof on the *magisterium* itself, which has followed and recommends this procedure, and I shall cite five witnesses.

1) Christ Himself proceeded in this manner. For the early Church, *docens* and *discens*, certainly believed in the divinity of Christ, as even rationalists admit today. But why? Evidently because Christ established its truth once for all, without, of course, relying on His authority, which was then in question. And, as is clear from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul, the argument with the greatest effect was undoubtedly His resurrection coupled with His claim to divinity.

No doubt, both Christ and the Apostles often appealed to the Old Testament, which was part of the Jewish *magisterium*. But there are plenty of arguments scattered up and down the New Testament, which do not rest on the peculiar authority which the Old Testament had for the Jews.

2) John the Apostle, a member of the *magisterium*, followed a like procedure. Toward the end of his Gospel he tells his readers the purpose of his book: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God" (20:31). And he claims or lets it be understood that he had personal knowledge of what he narrates, that he had been an eye-witness, implying, of course, that such testimony cannot be refused: "We saw his glory—glory as of the only-begotten of the Father—full of grace and truth" (1:14).

I may admit a certain weakness in this argument. The question enters here: For whom did St. John write his Gospel? Who were the addressees? If they were pagans or Jews, the argument would be conclusive. But while opinions differ, it seems most probable that the Gospel was meant for Christians, and these would, of course, fully appreciate the author's apostolic authority.

3) Consulting the Fathers, we come to St. John Chrysostom, the great Doctor of the Church. Among his authentic works is a homily

in which he undertakes to prove to Jew and gentile that Christ was true God, equal to the Father.⁹ That he clearly faced our problem is apparent from the introduction, where he enumerates what he does and does not suppose in his hearers.

Does this argument of ours lose some of its force because the homily was delivered at Antioch, some ten years before he was made Patriarch of Constantinople, that is, at a time when he did not yet belong to the *magisterium*? It would not seem so. We must remember that Chrysostom gave this and other homilies in the cathedral as the special appointee of Flavian, the Bishop of Antioch. We must also remember that his preaching at Antioch earned him the title of the golden-tongued orator and was at least partly responsible for his being later declared a Doctor of the Church.

4) But our star witness is Leo XIII in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, the fiftieth anniversary of which we are celebrating this year. Though this encyclical deals mainly with Scripture as the Word of God, yet—a fact not sufficiently appreciated by theologians—one paragraph contains an outline of fundamental theology with apologetics at its beginning. Let me quote it in full:

Doctrinam catholicam legitima et sollerti sacrorum Bibliorum interpretatione probasse, exposuisse, illustrasse, multum id quidem est: altera tamen, eaque tam gravis momenti quam operis laboriosi, pars remanet, ut ipsorum auctoritas integra quam validissime asseratur. Quod quidem nullo alio pacto plene licebit universeque assequi, nisi ex vivo et proprio magisterio Ecclesiae, quae 'per se ipsa, ob suam nempe admirabilem propagationem, eximiam sanctitatem et inexhaustam in omnibus bonis fecunditatem, ob catholicam unitatem, invictamque stabilitatem, magnum quoddam et perpetuum est motivum credibilitatis et divinae suae legationis testimonium irrefragabile' (*Conc. Vat.*, sess. 3, cap. 3 *de fide*). Quoniam vero divinum et infallibile magisterium Ecclesiae in auctoritate etiam Sacrae Scripturae consistit, huius propterea fides saltem humana asserenda in primis vindicandaque est: quibus ex libris, tamquam ex antiquitatis probatissimis testibus, Christi Domini divinitas et legatio, Ecclesiae hierarchicae institutio, primatus Petro et successoribus eius collatus, in tuto apertoque collocentur.¹⁰

The Pope had been speaking of the so-called *argumentum ex Scriptura* in dogmatic theology, or as he expresses it, of "ipsa demon-

⁹ PG, XLVIII, 813-47.

¹⁰ *Enchiridion Biblicum*, n. 101; cf. the recent English translation published by the Catholic Biblical Association of America, *The Encyclical Providentissimus Deus on the Study of Sacred Scripture* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 1943), p. 19.

stratio dogmatum ex Bibliorum auctoritatibus ducta.”¹¹ Now, passing over to fundamental theology he says that the authority of the Scriptures as a whole must first be proved, and that this cannot be done “plene universeque” except by basing it on the authority of the *magisterium* of the Church. But how is this latter to be established? The Pope proposes two arguments, one from the divine character of the living Church as sketched by the Vatican Council, the other from Scripture. Both arguments evidently abstract from the authority of the *magisterium*; else we should be moving in a vicious circle. Moreover, as regards the second, the argument from Scripture, the Pope says that it is necessary first of all to prove its human credibility (“humana fidés”), though he does not say to which books of Scripture this proof should extend.

But—and now we come to our point—he concludes the paragraph by enumerating the truths which should in this way be proved from Scripture: “Christi Domini divinitas et legatio, Ecclesiae hierarchicae institutio, primatus Petro et successoribus eius collatus.” Evidently then Pope Leo XIII supposes that the divinity of Christ can be proved from Scripture as human documents, and therefore independently of the *magisterium* which shields and guarantees it for Catholics.

5) Our last witness is the Congregation of the Holy Office. In its decree *Lamentabili Sane* (1907), which was approved by Pius X, there are at least four propositions which bear on our subject (prop. 27, 29, 30, 31). Though the authority of the Holy Office is of the highest in matters of faith, yet we must allow a certain weakness in our deduction. The reason is that the prime purpose of the decree was not so much to teach truth directly as to condemn Modernist errors. In spite of that, a good argument can be drawn from the four condemned propositions.

Take proposition 27: “Divinitas Jesu Christi ex evangelii non probatur, sed est dogma quod conscientia christiana e notione Messiae deduxit.” This is a compound proposition and, so it seems, primarily aimed at those who say that the Christian community evolved the divinity of Christ out of the idea of the Messiah, that the infant Church first believed Christ to be the Messiah, and then, by a sort of apotheosis, raised Him to the dignity of the Godhead. Still, the first part of the proposition cannot be wholly superfluous, and its contradictory evi-

¹¹ *Enchiridion Biblicum*, n. 99.

dently is: "Divinitas Jesu Christi ex evangelis probari potest," which Modernists (like Loisy) also denied. It seems evident that the Roman decree as well as the Modernists speak of a proof which does not rest, directly or indirectly, on the authority of the *magisterium*.

Or take proposition 29: "Concedere licet Christum quem exhibet historia, multo inferiorem esse Christo qui est obiectum fidei." Modernists loudly proclaimed that the "Christ of faith" is true God. The proposition then teaches positively that the "Christ of history," Christ as portrayed in the Gospels, is no less God than the "Christ of faith"; for it is the Gospels that give us the "history" of Christ. There is no reason whatever for suspecting that the Gospels are here meant as inspired books, whose authority is guaranteed by the *magisterium*.¹²

Again take proposition 30: "In omnibus textibus evangelicis nomen 'Filius Dei' aequivalet tantum nomini 'Messias,' minime vero significat Christum esse verum et naturalem Dei Filium." We shall later come to the distinction between "God" and "Son of God" and its bearing on apologetics. In any case, here as in the two preceding propositions, the issue is the divinity of Christ. But why does the decree insist on the meaning of "Son of God" except to imply that the divinity of Christ can be proved from certain Gospel texts?

Still, it would not do to slur over a limitation. This proposition does not cover the whole of our problem; it merely refers to what others meant when they called Christ "Son of God," or to what He Himself meant or claimed by it; nothing is said whether or how this claim was substantiated.

Finally, take proposition 31: "Doctrina de Christo quam tradunt Paulus, Joannes et Concilia Nicaenum, Ephesinum, Chalcedonense, non est ea quam Iesus docuit, sed quam de Iesu concepit conscientia christiana." Let me repeat that the decree was primarily meant to be a condemnation of Modernist errors. Yet implied at least in this condemned proposition is the positive doctrine that Christ called Himself true God; for that certainly was what Paul, John, and the three Councils taught about Christ. As is clear, the same limitation applies to this as to the preceding proposition.

If the testimony of these witnesses does not exclude a priori all

¹² One might quibble about "multo" and say that not all inferiority is here banned, but I feel sure that that was not the meaning of the Holy Office. The objection of the Arians, who argued from John 14:28, "Pater maior me est," was no issue with the Modernists.

further discussion on our problem, it certainly gives a solid dogmatic foundation for the modern procedure in apologetics.

ADVISABILITY

If it is certainly possible to prove the divinity of Christ independently of the *magisterium*, is it advisable? And is it advisable to make the divinity of Christ a central thesis in apologetics? The two questions, though connected, are not exactly the same.

There are excellent reasons why the answer to the first question should be in the affirmative. First, unless such a procedure were advisable, would so many modern authors have inserted that proof in their course of apologetics? After all, the current of tradition was strongly against it. There must have been good reasons for breaking away from the traditional method.

Secondly, Leo XIII, in the passage quoted, indicates two ways for proving the authority of the *magisterium*: his first is the Church *in facto esse*, his second the Church *in fieri*. In the first it is not necessary to prove the divinity of Christ before the authority of the *magisterium*; but very few apologists use this method alone. Most of them use both ways, but so that they give the lion's share to the second; now in that the Pope precisely urges that the divinity of Christ be proved.

Thirdly, it is commonly said that apologetics proves the fact of revelation, viz., the fact that God has spoken. A little vague, perhaps, but true as far as it goes. Now for us Christians, that revelation is the one which came through Christ, the Son of God: "Multifariam multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis, novissime diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio" (Hebr. 1:1). Christian apologetics is interested not so much in revelation in the abstract, nor in primitive revelation, nor in the revelation given to the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, but in the unique and final revelation which Christ brought down from heaven. But now, unless Christ's divinity is proved from the start in apologetics, how many of His sayings are God's word? A legate does not or need not always speak as a legate. Yet is it not true that after apologetics Christ's words are always taken as God's word, both in the rest of fundamental theology and in dogma? But how is such a procedure justified unless Christ's divinity has first been proved?

Finally, as I have shown in my *Theologia Fundamentalis*, the

adequate purpose of Catholic apologetics is to prove that the living *magisterium* of the Catholic Church is the rule of faith; for Christ meant His revelation to come to us not through books (as Protestants contend), but through the living *magisterium*. Now to prove this with all possible solidity, it is not enough to establish that Christ instituted a Church with a living *magisterium*; we must also show that the Church of Christ is indefectible, and that the *magisterium* has perdured in the Catholic Church and in it alone. The proof rests, of course, on Christ's promises: "Ecce ego vobiscum sum"; "Ego mittam Spiritum sanctum" etc. These promises are grand and carry conviction, if the one who makes them is true God. But what if a mere man makes them, be he a divine legate like Moses? And how could a mere man even dare to say: "Ego mittam Spiritum sanctum"?

My second contention is that the divinity of Christ should be made central in apologetics. There are those for whom it is merely an appendix or complement to Christ's Messiahship; they prove it, but merely by proving that the Messiah was foretold to be God and that Christ was the Messiah. I. Ottiger follows this method, though he strongly favors proving Christ's divinity.¹³ He has indeed a proof which is independent of the Messiahship,¹⁴ but it is all embedded in the discussion on the Messiah.

This leads to inconveniences. Take Ottiger's Thesis XXX. In its third part the author wants to show that Christ's doctrine, both in itself and by the way it was proposed, is *valde probabiliter* of divine origin. Why? Because Christ could not discover it by His own human reason ("non sola ingenii sui vi," "non mere humana via"). Very good. We know what Ottiger wanted to say. But now suppose that the student advances to the treatise *De Verbo Incarnato*, where Christ's human knowledge or the knowledge of His human soul is discussed. Pesch puts it down as theologically certain that Christ's human soul enjoyed not only beatific vision, but also had infused knowledge.¹⁵ Could not then Christ's doctrine have originated in His human mind? While there is no clear contradiction, yet the student of Catholic dogma must become uneasy and confused when he recalls what he learned in apologetics.

¹³ *Theologia Fundamentalis*, I, 645, 649-51. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 706-16.

¹⁵ *Praelectiones Dogmaticae* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder, 1922), IV, nn. 241-75.

ARGUMENTS

Lest our exposition be left hanging in the air, it will be well, before facing objections, to answer the further question: How can the divinity of Christ be established independently of the *magisterium*? If we cannot appeal to inspired Scriptures, nor to the solemn pronouncements of popes and Councils, nor to the teachings of the Doctors of the Church, what other arguments are there? But really there is an abundance of them. We shall first indicate the arguments themselves and then consider their probative value.

Without pretending to make our list exhaustive, we can enumerate at least six solid arguments.

1) The most common—we might almost call it classical today—takes the following form: Christ Himself made the claim to be God, and He substantiated His claim by His superhuman wisdom and sanctity, by His miracles and prophecies, especially by His resurrection. This is the procedure adopted by most of the theologians enumerated in the beginning of this paper. It does not suppose the authority of the *magisterium*. It does suppose the substantial historicity of the Gospels; but Leo XIII certainly included the Gospels among those books of Scriptures whose human credibility should be established in apologetics independently of the *magisterium*.¹⁶

2) Another argument runs thus: "Jesus aut Deus aut non bonus." It does not differ adequately from the preceding and rests on the same suppositions. The Gospels, taken merely as trustworthy human documents, clearly show that it would be the height of absurdity to say (as Reimarus did) that Christ was a fraud. But if that is so, He must be God as He claimed to be. A parallel to this argument could be formulated thus: "Jesus aut Deus aut insanus." Though a few ultra-radicals among the rationalists have made bold to deny Christ's sanity, yet His mental vigor and originality and superhuman wisdom are too evident from the Gospels to be affected by such outrageous denials. But if that is so, then Christ was God as He claimed.

¹⁶ To present this argument rightly, one should take account of the fact that Christ's self-revelation was progressive; cf. Pesch, *Praelectiones Dogmaticae*, IV, n. 11; L. de Grandmaison, S.J., *Jesus Christ*, tr. Dom Basil Whelan (New York: Macmillan, 1932), II, 20-22, 44-45; M. Lepin, *Christ and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: McVey, 1910), pp. 410-15; J. Lebreton, S.J., *History of the Dogma of the Trinity*, tr. Algar Thorold (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), I, 198-200; A. Michel, "Jésus-Christ," *DTC*, VIII, 1172-75, 1186-88; F. Prat, S. J., *Jésus Christ* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1933), pp. 132-37.

These last two arguments are sometimes welded into a trilemma: Christ either was God as He claimed to be, or He was a fraud, or a pervert. Though this form is also used by those who merely prove that Christ was a divine legate, yet it acquires additional force when the claim of divinity is made the first member of the trilemma. This is clear from our reaction to similar claims. Self-styled prophets, unless they become too obnoxious, are looked on or listened to with an indulgent smile; but those who call themselves God the Father or the Son or the Holy Ghost are quickly put away.

3) The third argument also rests on the Gospels. In them as trustworthy historical records, we study Christ's power, wisdom, and sanctity. It can be shown with some probability at least that these attributes which Christ manifested during His earthly life were not merely superhuman, but truly divine.¹⁷ A particular form of this argument would consist in proving from the New Testament (e.g., John 2:19-21; 5:21; 10:18) that Christ arose from the dead by His own power.

4) An argument which has been familiar to apologists of all ages, is this: Christ was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament; now the Messiah was to be true God; therefore Christ was true God. The suppositions of this argument are a bit wider. It will be necessary to prove not only the historical trustworthiness of many of the books of the New Testament, but also the genuinity and integrity of some books of the Old Testament.

5) An excellent argument can be drawn from the faith of the early Church, of which we already spoke. Its peculiar excellence consists in this, that today even rationalists admit the basic fact, viz., that the early Church believed firmly in the divinity of Christ. From this we argue that Christ must have claimed to be God and must have substantiated His claim to the perfect satisfaction of the Apostles, whom the early Church looked up to as their official witnesses and teachers. As P.-L. Couchoud, himself a rationalist, has shown, anything like an apotheosis or deification is utterly unhistorical and unpsychological. It was impossible that a Jew—the early Christians came from Judaism—should place another Jew on a par with Yahweh.

¹⁷ This is not exactly the same as the first argument proposed; it omits Christ's claim to divinity.

6) The last argument is taken from the history of the Catholic Church and is mentioned by Leo XIII in the passage referred to. In it the Catholic Church *in facto esse* is proved to be a social institute with a divine origin and mission. Now if the Catholic Church is divine in her mission, viz., as teacher of mankind, then at least her most fundamental articles of faith must be true, one of which is certainly and has always been the divinity of Christ. Nor does this argument rest on the authority of the Catholic Church or its *magisterium*; it merely supposes a good knowledge of what we might call the external history of the Catholic Church through the centuries.

What now is the probative force of these arguments? Do they make it naturally certain or evident that Christ was God? To answer this question, it is necessary first to define what one means by "certain" and "evident." Some call evident only what is intrinsically evident; what is extrinsically evident, they call certain or credible. But these definitions are not accepted universally; and if evidence may be either intrinsic or extrinsic, there is no difficulty in saying that the six arguments, at least if taken cumulatively, give us true evidence.¹⁸

Even then we must distinguish between perfect and imperfect evidence, meaning by the former that overpowering evidence which leaves no room for doubt and forces the assent, and by the latter that which excludes all reasonable doubt, but does not force the assent of the intellect.¹⁹ No one, as far as I am aware, ascribes perfect evidence to the apologetic proofs for the divinity of Christ. Imperfect evidence is all they will generally yield, whether taken singly or collectively.

OBJECTIONS

After what has been said on the advisability of proving the divinity of Christ apologetically, we might be excused for not bothering with the objections which some theologians still raise against our procedure. Their objections are really outdated by Pope Leo's definite pronouncement. And though his encyclical is not an *ex cathedra* decision, at

¹⁸ The same may be said of the following individual arguments: 1, 2, 5, 6.

¹⁹ This distinction was recently emphasized by Pope Pius XII before the officials of the Roman Rota: cf. *Clergy Review*, XXIV (1943), 135-38.

least not in the question here at issue, it cannot be set aside by a Catholic theologian. If one should still hesitate, he might profitably ponder the quotation from St. John Chrysostom which the Pope inserted in the encyclical: "Not merely for one kind of fight must we be prepared; for the contest is many-sided and the enemy is of every sort; and they do not all use the same weapons nor make their onset in the same way."

Nevertheless, I shall take up the objections, both because such is the custom among Scholastics, and because their solution will shed further light on the apologetic method. They may be brought under five heads: the charge of running in a vicious circle and of falling into semirationalism, the charge of encroaching on the domain of the dogmatic treatise *De Verbo Incarnato* and of destroying the nature of divine faith, finally the charge of overlooking some scriptural data.

The first charge, viz., that our procedure rests on a vicious circle, is almost too naive to be answered at all. It is said that by beginning with Christ's own claim to divinity, we suppose what is to be proved, that we suppose Christ's self-revelation in our argument, whereas that should be our conclusion. But it is clear that we do not, from the outset, take Christ's claim as a divine revelation; we begin by proving that Jesus of Nazareth, an historical person of the first century, claimed to be God. That and nothing more. Of course, that claim actually was a revelation; but we put ourselves in the position of one who does not realize this, and we do not ask him to admit it before we have proved it historically.

The principal reason, however, why some theologians still hesitate, is that the divinity of Christ is a mystery. It is indeed a profound mystery, involving two of the absolute mysteries of our faith, the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation, both of them incomprehensible to us "quamdiu in hac vita peregrinamur a Domino."²⁰ But does our procedure in any way infringe on the mysterious nature of the God-Man? No. It would if we tried, in Hegelian fashion, to deduce the divinity of Christ from a higher principle, so that it would become intrinsically evident and metaphysically necessary. But such is not our meaning. We go up, not down in our argumentation. We argue from testimony and historical facts. We try to make the divinity of Christ extrinsically evident, or, if you will, credible.

²⁰ *DB*, n. 1796.

Therefore, the charge of semirationalism against our procedure is unfounded. Apologetics makes no attempt at understanding a mystery.

But does not our procedure involve proving the hypostatic union? Le Bachelet is half inclined to allow that apologetics may prove the divinity of Christ, but he draws the line at the hypostatic union ("réserve faite de l'union hypostatique").²¹ Ottiger seems to have had similar misgivings. Though he more than once speaks of proving "Christum esse Deum," yet in one place he explains himself as meaning that Christ was "homo coniunctione perpetua cum Deo sociatus, ideoque eius directioni et auctoritati perpetuo subiectus."²² This need not imply more than a moral union, whereas the Incarnation means a physical, substantial, personal union.

The answer is that apologetics strictly limits itself to the fact of the hypostatic union, if we may use the expression. Apologetics merely proves what the Church has always believed explicitly, viz., that Christ was God and man, that the same ego which had a human nature also had a divine nature. This and nothing more. Apologetics does not discuss the exact relation between Christ's human and divine nature, between person and nature. It leaves to the dogmatic theologian the study of the further questions by which the hypostatic union is made more intelligible. This limitation of his aim also absolves the apologist from answering all the difficulties which have been or might be brought forward against the hypostatic union; their answer, too, is left to the dogmatic theologian.

From the preceding it is already clear that apologetics, by proving the divinity of Christ, does not encroach on the dogmatic treatises or make them superfluous. Dogmatic theologians may or may not suppose our proof; it is their part to prove the divinity of Christ from Scripture as inspired, from the Councils, the Fathers, and theologians. Besides, they discuss many other interesting questions which are wholly outside the scope of apologetics: Was the Incarnation necessary? In what exactly does the hypostatic union consist? Why was the Second Person of the Trinity made man, and not the First or the Third? and so on.

Some theologians fight shy of our procedure because of St. Thomas' famous principle: "Idem sciri et credi nequit." For the divinity of

²¹ "Apologetique," *DAFC*, I, 245.

²² *Theologia Fundamentalis*, I, 748.

Christ is certainly a matter of divine faith, and therefore cannot be naturally known.

First of all, that principle is not accepted universally. Many theologians hold that a truth can be believed *fide divina* although it is also known from reason. But it does not seem advisable at present to enter into that dispute.²³ Anyhow, one might distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic evidence. By "sciri" St. Thomas certainly meant intrinsic evidence, whereas our procedure is based on extrinsic evidence. Above all, St. Thomas himself says: "Non enim crederet (fidelis) nisi videret ea esse credenda."²⁴ The conclusion to be drawn from apologetics is not the act of divine faith itself, but the *iudicium credibilitatis*. It pertains to that *notitia revelationis* of which Innocent XI speaks;²⁵ it is the natural result of the *argumenta revelationis* by which the real act of faith becomes reasonable, and is not a mere *motus animi caecus*.²⁶

In the beginning of this paper another objection to our procedure was mentioned, which, however, rather touches on the probative value of the arguments for the divinity of Christ. If the natural arguments for the divinity of Christ were really evident, how, one may ask, was it that Peter did not see it, but needed a special revelation of the Father? He certainly had the same and more and perhaps better historical data than we can ever hope to have at this distance. Why, then, did he not infer Christ's divinity from them? And if his case might be judged more mildly on account of his warped conception of the Messiah, how about the demons with their superhuman intelligence?

With regard to Peter, we must remember that Christ's self-revelation was progressive, and that Peter's solemn confession was made at an early stage of that revelation. It may well be that most or all of Christ's own discourses on His divinity which are contained in the fourth Gospel fall into a time posterior to that confession. Peter certainly had not yet heard Christ declaring Himself openly before the high-priest, nor had he seen Him rise from the dead. So that we have, in a way, more and better historical data than Peter then had.

²³ My own attitude is outlined in my *Theologia Fundamentalis*, pp. 29-30.

²⁴ *Sum. Theol.*, II-II, q. 1, a. 4; cf. L. Billot, S.J., *De Ecclesia Christi* (ed. 5a; Romae: apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1927), I, 42-48.

²⁵ *DB*, n. 1171.

²⁶ *DB*, n. 1790.

Later, Christ reproached Philip, another Apostle, with being slow of comprehension: "Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known me? Philip, he who sees me, sees also the Father" (John 14:9). The same argument also holds for the demons, unless one wishes to say (with Suarez, Maldonatus, etc.) that they did know Christ's divinity for certain from His first manifestations.²⁷

CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD

One more question remains: Is it possible to prove apologetically that Christ was the Son of God? And if so, is it advisable or necessary?

To begin with the last point, it may be freely granted that this proof is not necessary. The reasons which show the necessity of proving Christ's divinity in apologetics do not apply to His divine Sonship.

But is such a proof at all possible? Yes. The apologetic arguments for Christ's divinity and His divine Sonship are about the same. Many of the Gospel passages on which the best proofs of Christ's divinity are based, are precisely those in which He calls Himself the Son of God. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fourth Gospel, where St. John intended to prove that Christ was the Son of God. Then, too, prop. 30 of the decree *Lamentabili Sane* seems to point in the same direction. Why was that modernistic proposition singled out and explicitly condemned except because it can be proved historically and apologetically that Christ called Himself the true Son of God? And why that except to imply that Christ's divine Sonship can be proved historically and apologetically?

The only Catholic apologist who strongly opposes this procedure is I. Ottiger.²⁸ His main argument is that we should be obliged to face all the difficulties which unbelievers urge against a plurality of Persons in God, and that only dogma can answer them satisfactorily. But what was just said about the limitation of apologetics, applies here also. We can limit our aim to proving the *fact* of Christ's divine Sonship, and transmit all further difficulties to the dogmatists. And such limitation is allowed, since true knowledge does not necessarily mean complete knowledge.

²⁷ Cf. Knabenbauer, *Commentarium in Evangelium secundum Marcum* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1894), pp. 51-54.

²⁸ *Theologia Fundamentalis*, I, 17, 706.

Is it advisable to prove in apologetics that Christ was the Son of God? We answer with a decided yes. The student of theology is thus made acquainted at once with the clear distinction which Christ, even as God, always drew between Himself and the Father. He claimed unity and equality with the Father, but not identity. Christ was God, indeed, yet not as the Father, but as the Son.

CONCLUSION

Proving apologetically that Christ is God and the Son of God, has two decided advantages. First, the student of theology has, from the outset, complete conformity with the historical reality as portrayed in the Gospels and with his Catholic faith. For the Gospels describe Christ as God and the Son of God, and Catholic faith tells him the same thing. The latter is indeed derived from the *magisterium*, but apologetics must abstract from that. On the other hand, apologetics does not oblige us to carry abstraction any further; abstracting also from Christ's divinity leads to inconveniences and is against the express wish of Leo XIII. Secondly, this procedure obliges the budding theologian to gather, ponder and utilize all the Gospel passages—and they are exceedingly numerous—in which Christ revealed Himself as God and the Son of God. For in apologetics it is not enough (as may be done in a dogmatic treatise) to quote one or the other text; that would be an insecure basis for an apologetic argument. Many or all passages in which Christ revealed His identity, must be taken into account.

The student thus provides himself at the outset with a broad Scriptural foundation for his own spiritual life and for future dogmatic treatises.