

THE DEVIL AND THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

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THE New Testament clearly reveals not only that Christ professed to be the Son of God, but also that He was recognized as such by Peter and the relatively small group of followers who were loyal to Him. The same cannot be said of the priests who planned the crucifixion, nor of the ordinary people who witnessed it.¹ But what of the devils, the prime instigators of the passion? Demoniacs called Christ the Son of God as Peter did;² they fell at His feet;³ they trembled in His presence; they cried out that He tormented them.⁴ But did the devils who possessed these men penetrate, as Peter did, to the true character of the Son of God?

The expressions used by the demoniacs cannot, of themselves, constitute an apodictic argument. Although "Sanctus Dei" and "Filius Deo" may sound to our ears like convincing expressions, the exactness of their Scriptural meaning is by no means certain in every instance. Not only is it true that in the Old and New Testament *Filius Dei* denotes adoptive as well as natural sonship, but some scholars are of the opinion that in the Gospels it is sometimes employed merely as a messianic title.⁵ The current Jewish literature is of little help for or against this theory, since in all probability *Filius Dei* is an interpolation in the Book of Henoch, the only place where it is found in reference to the Messias.⁶

¹ "And now, brethren, I know you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders" (Acts 3:17).

² Lk. 4:41.

³ Mk. 5:6.

⁴ Mt. 8:29.

⁵ Cf., however, A. Charue, *L'Incrédulité des Juifs dans le Nouveau Testament*, Gembloux, 1929, p. 46: "Est-il exact, comme le prétend par exemple M. Lepin, que dès avant la manifestation du Christ Jésus, le Messie semble avoir porté, dans la tradition juive, le titre de Dieu?"

Cette appellation est tout d'abord absolument étrangère à l'Ancien Testament. Il arrive, sans doute, que Dieu présente ou interpelle le Messie comme *son fils*, mais, comme on l'a remarqué, autre chose est de faire dire à Dieu que le Messie sera son fils, comme Dieu d'ailleurs l'a dit aussi du peuple élu, autre chose que les Juifs appellent carrément le Messie le fils de Dieu." (Cf. Lagrange, *Messianisme*, p. 105; J. Lebreton, *Histoire*, I, 176-7).

⁶ J. Frey, C.S.Sp., "Le conflit entre le Messianisme de Jésus et le Messianisme des Juifs," *Biblica*, (1933), p. 141.

THE FATHERS

The initial difficulty found in the testimony of the Fathers relative to the devil's recognition of Christ is enunciated by Athanasius. He tells us that the satanic cries of the New Testament are not to be taken as manifestations of what the devil actually thought, because "he is a liar." Although he shouted "we know you," he really did not know Christ, *sed verbis simulabat*.⁷

St. Augustine also adds a caution. He teaches that God did not permit the devil full scope in his investigations at the time of Christ. "He allowed the devil to know as much as He wished; and He wished only as much as was fitting."⁸ Hence an accurate answer to our inquiry cannot be derived merely from a consideration of the intellectual acumen of the devil. That knowledge is useless unless we ascertain the extent to which God granted the devil the use of his intellectual faculties in observing and studying Christ.

St. Ignatius clarifies one aspect of the question. He is quoted in Jerome to the effect that God concealed the truth of the Incarnation from the devil at the time of the Nativity;⁹ and this is confirmed rather generally by the Fathers in their commentaries on the Gospels. Practically all of them assume that before the temptation in the desert the devil did not know that God had become man. He acts rather as a person who is mystified and worried by the presence of Christ; and the purpose of the temptation is to ascertain the nature of the person before him.¹⁰

⁷ *Fragmenta in Lucam*, (PG XXVII, 1398). It must be noted here that such an interpretation is rejected by other Fathers on the score that this is a forced rather than voluntary confession of the devil.

⁸ *De Civitate Dei*, IX, 21.

⁹ "Martyr Ignatius etiam quartam addit causam, cur a desponsata conceptus sit; ut partus, inquiring, eius celaretur a diabolo, dum eum putat non de Virgine, sed de uxore generatum." *In Evangelium Matthaei*, (PL XXXVI, 24).

¹⁰ "Quia audierat vocem de coelo dicentem: *Hic est Filius meus dilectus* (Mt. 3:17), audierat item Joannem tanta de ipso testificantem; denique vidit illum esurientem: incertus demum erat; neque ipsum hominem esse purum credere poterat, ob ea quae de illo dicta fuerant, neque eum Filium Dei admittere, quod videret illum esurire. Quapropter dubius animi, dubias emittit voces." Chrysostom, *In Matthaeum Homil.*, XIII, (PG LVII, 210).

"*Si Filius Dei es*. In omnibus tentationibus hoc agit diabolus, ut intelligat si Filius

That much being agreed upon, the question of how much the devil knew about Christ was reduced, for Fathers and Scholastics alike, to the reconciliation of the Gospel narratives of the forced confessions of the demoniacs and the testimony of St. Paul that, if the rulers of this world had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).¹¹

The question is definitely proposed in the *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* by the Pseudo-Augustine:

How could Mark the evangelist say that the demons knew and openly acknowledge Jesus, when the apostle denies that the princes and powers of this world knew the divinity of Jesus Our Lord? Among other things, Mark says: 'they knew Him,' but the apostle claims that 'none of the rulers of this world knew, for had they known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory' (Mk. 1:34; 1 Cor. 2:8). If the demons knew, how were the rulers ignorant?¹²

He answers that the *status quaestionis* is not exactly the same in Mark and Paul. Mark narrates that the devil recognized the messianic dignity of Christ, since he saw in Him the perfect fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Law:

But the mystery of His divinity (about which Paul writes), neither the demons nor their leaders understood. . . . At one time seeing manifestations of divine power, and at another the infirmity of a man, the devil was tormented not knowing which was true. . . . He knew Christ was the person promised in the Law through the signs of prophecy, but not His mystery, by which He was the Son of God from eternity, nor the mystery of the Incarnation.¹³

Bede, whom St. Thomas and Cajetan were later to follow, admits more penetration on the part of the devil. In his commentary on the expulsion of demons related in Luke 4:41, he writes:

They knew He was the Messiah, because when the devil saw Him wearied from the fast, he realized that He was a true man; but because he was not successful in tempting Christ, he was not sure whether or not He was the Son of God. Now

Dei sit; sed Dominus sic responsonem temperat, ut eum relinquat ambiguum." Jerome, *In Evangelium Matthaei*, (PL XXVI, 22).

"Audivit vocem coelestem latro. Iterum vidit eum esurientem, et dubitat adhuc, quomodo Filius Dei esuriat, et idcirco tentat eum ut discat." Theophylactus, *In Evangelium Matthaei*, (PG CXXIII, 179).

¹¹ A secondary text that also causes difficulty, particularly for Jerome, is the *Logion Matthaei*. ". . . no one knows the Son except the Father, etc." (Mt. 10:27).

¹² PL XXXV, 2261.

¹³ *Ibid.*

however, by the power of signs he either understood or rather suspected He was the Son of God. He did not, therefore, persuade the Jews to crucify Him because he thought Christ was not the Son of God, but because he did not foresee that he would himself be damned by His death. It is of this mystery that the apostle speaks.¹⁴

Contrary, therefore, to the Pseudo-Augustine, Bede believes that the great mystery undisclosed to the devil was not so much the divinity of Christ but rather the devastating consequences of the passion and death of Our Lord to the kingdom of satan. On the positive side, Bede is willing to admit that the devil "either understood or rather suspected He was the Son of God."

This "understood or rather suspected" is taken verbatim from the writings of Jerome, whose commentary on Luke 4:41 is worth recording:

This is not a willing confession which brings reward to the confessor; it is rather a forced extortion compelling the reluctant. Just as fugitive slaves who see their master after a long time cry out about nothing else except their punishment, in the same way the demons perceiving Our Lord unexpectedly appearing on earth, believed that He came to judge them. The presence of the Redeemer constitutes the torments of the demons.¹⁵

Jerome then goes on to refute the contention of some who held that while the demons knew who Christ was, the devil, whose malice was greater, did not know. "Since all knowledge of the disciples must be referred to the master, both the demons and the devils must be understood to have suspected rather than to have known the Son of God. 'No one knows who the Father is except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'"¹⁶

This sudden transition from "understood" to "suspected" is surprising when one considers the evidence adduced by Jerome. Everything he had previously written points to certitude rather than to conjecture, and his reserve is based solely on the subsequent citation, "No one knows who the Father is" etc. Hence Suarez justly remarks that suspicion is to be understood here not as a denial of definite judgment, but rather as an indication that it is not the clear cognition that comes from revelation, but rather knowledge that is based on signs.¹⁷

¹⁴ *In Marci Evangelium*, (PL XCII, 113).

¹⁵ *In Evangelium Matthaei*, (PL XXVI, 54).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *De Mysteriis Christi*, Disp. 44, s. 3.

The words of Bede who, as we saw, follows Jerome *verbatim*, would seem to confirm this interpretation. He adds that it is *per signorum potentiam* that the devils came to know or rather to suspect; and later he writes:

How great is the madness of Arius to believe that Jesus is a creature and not God, when the devils believe He is the Son of the most high God, and tremble! How impious are the Jews to say that He expels devils by the power of Beelzebub, when the demons confess that He has nothing in common with them; when they do not cease to confess in the shrines of idols what once they cried through the fury of demoniacs, that Christ is the Son of the most high God and that they have no peace or society with Him.¹⁸

Athanasius could be quoted to sustain either side of the question. In his commentary on Luke, he says that the demon who cried "we know you," did not really know Him but merely pretended, and for that reason Our Lord forbade his testimony even though it was objectively true.¹⁹ In the *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi*, however, he writes:

Now Christ, in whom the impious do not believe, the demons recognize as God, and for that reason they flee and fall down before Him, just as they did when He was corporeally present, crying: 'we know who you are, the Holy one of God. What have we to do with you, Son of God? I beseech you, do not torment us.' Since the demons make these confessions, and facts daily testify to the truth, let no one impudently resist it, but let all recognize as certain that the Saviour has risen and is the true Son of God.²⁰

The contribution of St. Ambrose is quite interesting because of his definite and restrictive interpretation of St. Paul's "rulers of this world." Comparing Luke 4:41 with 1 Cor. 2:8, he writes:

Although the devil was sometimes in doubt, as when he said, 'if thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down,' nevertheless, he was later convinced and departed from Him. The demons also knew, who said: 'we know who you are, Jesus, Son of God. Why have you come before the time to torment us?' Hence they knew He came whom they knew would come. But to what better document could we appeal in order to prove that the rulers of this world did not know, than to the sentence of the apostle, 'if they knew they would not have crucified the Lord of majesty?' For the malice of demons apprehends even hidden truths, but those who are occupied with worldly vanities cannot know divine things.²¹

¹⁸ *In Marci Evangelium*, (PL XCII, 176).

¹⁹ *Fragmenta in Lucam*, (PG XXVII, 1398).

²⁰ PG XXV, 151.

²¹ *Expositio Evang. sec. Lucam*, (CSEL, XXXII, 4, p. 42).

This clear distinction made by Ambrose between the devil and the rulers of this world is enough to make one suspicious of the commentary on the Epistle to the Corinthians which was at one time attributed to the Saint. In this document, not only are the demons and the rulers of this world identified, but the contention that the demons "knew Him who was promised in the Law; but His mystery by which He was the Son of God, they did not know,"²² sounds suspiciously like what is found in the *Questiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* of the Pseudo-Augustine. Some scholars, in fact, attribute the document to the same author.

Chrysostom definitely teaches that the devils recognized the divinity of Christ. In his commentary on the expulsion of the devils in Gerasa following the calming of the sea, he writes:

The demoniacs, like villainous fugitives who meet their master, cry out: 'what have we to do with you, Son of God? Have you come to torment us before the time?' Because the crowd acclaimed Him as a man, the devils come proclaiming His divinity. And those who did not know of the storm-tossed sea that had been calmed, heard the demons shouting what the sea made tranquil had already proclaimed. And, lest these words might seem to be mere flattery, the devils cry out from their own personal experience: 'Have you come to torment us before the time?' Therefore they first confess their enmity lest their supplication seem suspect. For they were being scourged internally and, more than the sea, they were themselves in turmoil, transfixed, on fire, and suffering horribly from His mere presence.²³

Gregory the Great follows in the tradition of Jerome. He tells us that the devil knew the divinity of Christ, but did not know how the redemption was to be accomplished. In his commentary on Job 40:19, "in his eyes as with a hook he shall take him," he writes:

Who does not know that on a hook the bait is shown and the prong concealed. The bait lures so that the prong can pierce. Our Lord, therefore, coming for the redemption of the human race made of Himself a hook for the destruction of the devil. He assumed a body so that the Behemoth would seek the death of His flesh as his own food. While he sought the death of Christ unjustly, he lost us

²² "Hi ergo principes crucifixerunt Christum Dominum, quos triumphavit libere in semetipso (Coloss. II, 15); quamvis dicat Marcus evangelista de daemonibus: *Sciebant enim Christum ipsum esse Jesum* (Mc. 1, 34). Sciverunt quidem ipsum esse, sed qui in Lege promissus erat; mysterium tamen eius, quo Filius Dei est, nesciebant." *In Epist. ad Corinthios I*, (PL XVII, 194).

²³ *In Matthaeum Homil. XXVIII*, (PG LVII, 352).

whom, we might almost say, he held in justice. Therefore, it was by the hook of the Incarnation that he was taken because, while he sought the food of His body, he was transfixed by the prong of His divinity. The humanity was there to lure on the devourer; the divinity was there to pierce him. The infirmity was in evidence to entice him, but it was the hidden power that transfixed the throat of the grasper. By the hook, therefore, was he taken, because in the very act of destroying he was himself destroyed.

The Behemoth had known, indeed, that the Son of God was incarnated, but he did not know how the redemption was to be accomplished. He knew that for our salvation the Son of God was made flesh, but by no means did he know that the same Redeemer would transfix him by dying. Hence it is well said that in his eyes as with a hook he shall take him. We say something is in our eyes when an object has been placed before us. The old enemy of the human race saw the Redeemer before him, and knowing Him he confessed Him, and confessing he feared saying, 'what have we to do with you, Son of God? Have you come to torment us before the time?' In his eyes, therefore, with a hook he was taken, because he knew and he bit; he knew first whom he feared, and nevertheless afterwards did not fear, since in Christ as in his own proper food he hungered for the death of His flesh.²⁴

In another section of the *Libri Moraliū*, Gregory indicates how the devil, despite his recognition of the divinity of Christ, could still blind himself to the truth and conspire against the Son of God as though He were a mere man:

The evil spirit, when he saw Him performing miracles, shouted: 'I know who you are, the Holy one of God' (Lk. 4:34). Saying these things, while knowing He is the Son of God, the devil is afraid; nevertheless, not knowing the divine plan of mercy (*vim supernae pietatis*), sometimes, while he considers Him subject to suffering, he looks on Christ as a mere man.²⁵

For Gregory, therefore, two factors explain the devil's plan for the crucifixion. First, his ignorance of the fact that the redemption would be accomplished by the death of Christ; secondly, the burning realization that the God whom he hated was now clothed in a body that could be made to suffer and die. Only a consideration of the utter malice and hatred of the devil can give us an appreciation of how completely his mind was absorbed and his desires inflamed by the possibility of attacking God in any way. It so dominated his thoughts and blinded his intellect that ultimately "he suspects that death will be the end of Him."²⁶

²⁴ *Moralium Libri*, (PL LXXXVI, 680).

²⁵ *Moralium Libri*, (PL LXXXV, 614).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

This diabolic lack of logic can not only find an adequate explanation in the hatred that dominated the devil, but in turn can also account for the devil's inconsistencies as described in the New Testament. Moreover, to my mind, it helps to reconcile some of the divergencies in the testimony of the Fathers relative to how much the devil actually knew during the lifetime of Christ. For example, the following citation from Leo the Great, which Petavius quotes to prove that the devil did not recognize the divinity of Christ, may readily be understood in the same sense as the citation from Gregory:²⁷

In order that He might free the human race from the bonds of deadly wickedness, Christ concealed the power of His majesty from the raging devil and manifested to him the infirmity of our lowliness. For if the cruel and proud enemy could have known the plan of divine mercy, he would have been eager to temper the souls of the Jews with gentleness rather than inflame them with unjust hate, lest he lose the enslavement of all his captives in the very act of attacking the liberty of Him who was in no way subject to him. In this way he was deceived by his own wickedness. The punishment he inflicted on the Son of God became the means of healing for all men.²⁸

The testimony of St. Augustine is most important. In this, as in so many other questions, he has exerted a strong influence on the Scholastics, particularly because of what he writes in the *De Civitate Dei*. To my mind, however, the generalities of that work must be supplemented and illustrated by excerpts from his sermons in order to arrive at the exact viewpoint of Augustine. In the *De Civitate Dei* he writes:

The demons have knowledge without charity and for that reason are so inflated and proud that they demanded divine honor and religious subjection, which they knew belong to God, and they still make these demands as much as they can and from as many as they can. Against this pride of demons by which the human race was possessed because of its sins, the humility of God which appeared in Christ was opposed; but the souls of men, puffed up by uncleanness, and like the demons in pride but not in knowledge, did not recognize how much power it had.

The demons, however, knew this so well that they said to Our Lord who had taken on the infirmity of the flesh: 'What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?' It is clear from these words that they had great knowledge and no charity. They feared the punishment He could give, but they did not love the justice that was in Him. He made known to them as

²⁷ *Dogmata Theologica III, De Angelis I, Cap. VIII, 14.*

²⁸ *Sermo de Passione Domini XI, (PL LIV, 331).*

much as He wished; and He wished as much as was fitting. He manifested Himself to them, not as to the good angels . . . but as far as was necessary to terrify those from whose tyranny He was to liberate the souls predestined to His kingdom. . . . He manifested Himself to the demons . . . through some temporal effects of His power and through some signs of His invisible presence which can be much more manifest to angelic senses even of evil spirits than to the infirmity of men.²⁹

Since the dictum "He revealed as much as He wished" was later a matter of speculation to the Scholastics, it is interesting to see the applications Augustine himself makes of it in some of his sermons:

Why do you wonder at the fact that the Manicheans deny that Christ came in the flesh? I tell you that all bad Catholics confess verbally that Christ came in the flesh; but deny it by their deeds. Therefore, do not act as though you were secure in the faith. Join to true faith an upright life so that you will confess that Christ came in the flesh both by the truth of your words and the goodness of your lives. For if you confess with words and deny with deeds, the faith of such evil people is almost like that of demons. . . . Will the demons be liberated from the fires of hell because they believe and tremble? You heard in the Gospel that Peter said: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Read and you will find that the demons also cried: 'We know who you are, the Son of God.' But Peter is praised and the devil is silenced. The confession is the same (una vox), but the deeds are not. What is the difference between these two confessions? Love is praised and fear is damned. It was not from love that the demons cried: 'You are the Son of God.' They said it from fear, not love. Finally, they pleaded in their confession: 'What have we to do with you?' (Mk. 1:24). But Peter cried: 'I shall be with you even unto death' (Lk. 22:33).³⁰

This identification of the content of Peter's confession and that of the devils, repeated in other sermons by Augustine,³¹ clearly manifests his teaching that Christ allowed the devil to penetrate to the true character of the Son of God.³²

²⁹ *De Civitate Dei*, IX, 20-1.

³⁰ *Sermo CLXXXIII*, (*PL XXXVIII*, 993).

³¹ Cf. *Sermo CCXXXIV*. "Quid est, obsecro vos, quid est quod dixerunt daemones? Scimus qui sis, Filius Dei. Et audiunt *Obmutescite* (Mk. I, 24, 25). Nonne hoc dixerunt quod et Petrus, quando quaesivit ab eis et dixit: *Quem me dicunt homines esse?* Et cum opinionones respondissent alienas, addidit et interrogavit dicens: *Vos autem quem me esse dicitis?* Respondit Petrus: *Tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi*. Hoc daemones, hoc Petrus: hoc maligni spiritus, hoc Apostolus. Et audiunt daemones, *Obmutescite*: audit Petrus, *Beatus es* (Mt. XVI, 13-17). Quod discernebat illos, hoc discernat et nos. Unde hoc daemones clamabant? Timendo. Unde Petrus? Diligendo. Eligite, eligite. Ipsa est fides quae Christianos a daemonibus discernit: fides non quaecumque." *PL XXXVIII*, 1116-7. Cf. also *Sermo CLVIII*, 865.

³² Other Fathers may be consulted for their opinions in favor of or against the fact of

THE SCHOLASTICS

The Augustinian conclusion is by no means universal among the Scholastic theologians. As a matter of fact, St. Albertus Magnus is very definitely of a contrary opinion. In his commentary on Mt. 8:29, he writes that the cry of the devils, "Son of God" and "I know you, the Holy one of God" (Lk. 4:34), is, according to Ambrose (*sic*), merely an opinion arising from conjectures. It is such conjectural knowledge that the devils possess, and not certain knowledge. Otherwise, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.³³ "The demon sees, not by the intellect of truth, *sed credulitate aestimationis*."³⁴ "The devil says, 'Jesus, Son of the most high God,' not through certain knowledge, *sed quasi per aestimationem*."³⁵ "He makes a confession of truth, but it is forced; because the demon of his own will speaks nothing but lies. . . 'You are the Son of God' is said, not from knowledge, *sed vehementer opinantes*."³⁶

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the foundation of St. Albert's viewpoint is not located, as he believed, in the works of St. Ambrose. I can find it neither in his commentary on Luke nor in the Pseudo-Ambrose's commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul. As a matter of fact, from the citations we have already made from the works of the Bishop of Milan, it seems quite impossible that this could have been his viewpoint. In the first place, he distinguishes between the rulers of this world and the demons, while the author here cited identifies them. Secondly, St. Ambrose tells us of the certitude of the devil, and not of the conjectures that he made. As he says, "they knew he came whom they knew would come."³⁷

St. Bonaventure is of the same mind as Albertus Magnus. He writes that the devil confesses that Christ is the destroyer of demons and the sanctifier of men, but he did not know His identity with certain knowledge, since according to the Epistle to the Corinthians he never

the devil's recognition of Christ. In the first group, Hilary, *De Trinitate*, (PL X, 196); Cyril of Jerusalem, *De Filio Dei Unigenito*, (PG XXXIII, 698); Petrus Chrysologus, *Sermo XVI* (PL LII, 241); Theophylactus, *In Evangelium Marci*, (PG CXXIII, 503). In the second group, Cyril of Alexandria, *In Joannem*, (PG LXXIV, 174); *In I ad Cor.*, (PG LXXIV, 863-4).

³³ Alberti Magni, *Opera Omnia*, (Paris: 1894), XX, 409.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, XXI, 446. ³⁵ *Ibid.* ³⁶ *Op. cit.*, XXII, 349.

³⁷ *Expositio Evang. secundum Lucam*, (CSEL XXXII, 4, p. 42).

would have crucified Him. His knowledge was merely conjectural.³⁸ However he does not hesitate to write later that the errors of the Arians who considered Christ a pure creature is refuted by the devils themselves who profess He is the Son of the Most High God.³⁹

St. Thomas introduces the problem by considering the question of whether the intellects of the devils were darkened by their sin. He says there are two generic types of knowledge: one which is natural, the other produced by grace. This latter is either speculative, as when one receives truth through divine revelation; or affective, producing the love of God. The natural knowledge of the demons was neither taken away nor diminished. Their speculative knowledge was diminished, not in the sense that they lost remembrance of all they had learned before the fall, but in the sense that divine secrets were revealed to them subsequently only according to what was fitting, either through some temporal effects of the divine power, or through the good angels. The good angels, however, not only received revelation of more truths in the beatific vision, but their perception of these truths was also clearer.⁴⁰ This doctrine, as St. Thomas says, is in conformity with that of St. Augustine, and is derived from *De civitate Dei*, IX, 21.

St. Thomas also teaches that all the angels from the very beginning knew in some way of the mystery of the kingdom of God which was fulfilled in Christ. The chief source of that knowledge, however, was the beatific vision, a blessing which the devils never enjoyed. Hence while Christ was living in this world, the devils had less knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation than the good angels. Those of the angelic host who remained faithful derived their knowledge from the enjoyment of the participated eternity of the Word; but only as much was manifested to the devils as was necessary to terrify them by some temporal effects of the divine power.⁴¹

That St. Thomas understands by the "mystery of the kingdom fulfilled in Christ" that the Son of God would come to this world, is clear in his explicit treatment of the powers of recognition exercised by the devil during the lifetime of Christ. St. Thomas first accepts the principle of Augustine that God made known to the devils as much as He wished, and then he quotes the commentary of Ambrose on the words

³⁸ *Opera Omnia*, (ed. Quaracchi) VII, 106.

⁴⁰ *Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 64, a. 1, conc.

³⁹ *Op. cit.* VIII, 203.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ad 4.

of the devil at the temptation of Christ, "Si Filius Dei es." "What is the meaning of the beginning of this conversation, unless the devil knew that the Son of God would come, but did not know that He would come in the infirmity of the flesh?" According to St. Thomas, therefore, the devil knew before his fall not only of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, but also of the coming of the Son of God into this world.⁴²

That fact being established, St. Thomas then follows the Pseudo-Augustine and Bede in determining how much the devil recognized in Christ. According to the former, the devil did not have certain and firm knowledge of the presence of God on earth; and according to the latter, "by the power of signs he knew or rather suspected that He was the Son of God."⁴³

Cajetan treats at some length of this doctrine of St. Thomas.⁴⁴ Like many of the theologians, he makes the question twofold: did the devil recognize Christ as the Messias promised in the Old Testament? Did he know Christ was the Son of God? The first question is answered easily on the authority of St. Mark who states explicitly that the demons knew He was the Christ.

Cajetan holds no certitude on the second question. One disconcerting fact for him is that, although the devil can say "You are the Son of God," he is a liar and some of the Fathers say that he is speaking *explorative*. However, Cajetan is willing to accept the teaching of Bede to the effect that the words of St. Paul "if they had known" do not refer to either the messianic dignity or the divinity of Christ, but rather to the efficacy of His passion and resurrection. The text of the epistle can have this meaning, thinks Cajetan, and it fits well with the context.

But then the difficulty arises, how rationalize the devil's attempt to incite the Jews to put Christ to death, if he knew or even suspected He was the Son of God? Cajetan's first answer is that the pride of the devil is so vicious that even if he had been certain Christ was God, he still would have procured His death. To understand how this attitude was possible, we must first remember, says Cajetan, that the knowledge of the devil was based merely on the testimony of Scripture and the miracles he witnessed. Hence by knowing Christ to be the Son of God,

⁴² *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 44, a. 1, ad 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Cajetanus, *In III*, q. 44, a. 1, ad 2.

he would not necessarily have known all the consequences of the Incarnation. For that reason, the devil in his pride determined to fight against Christ, to deprive Him of life, honor, reputation, disciples, etc., thinking that: "if He is not God, but merely Messias-man, I have overcome Him. And if He is true God, I have accomplished at least something in having this victory over God Himself; and then later we shall see what God does." In this way the devil thought he was choosing the safer course in winning the first victory, overcoming God in this world, not knowing what would subsequently take place. And therefore, to the mind of Cajetan, the Venerable Bede was quite correct when he wrote that if the demons had known the hidden mystery of the result that followed the death of Christ, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. It was not fear that would have prevented them from opposing God since "superbia eorum qui te oderunt ascendit semper"; but where fear was no deterrent, self-love would have been. It would have checked them from any action involving their own downfall and the ultimate victory of the Redeemer and Saviour.

All these observations deserve acceptance whether one holds that the devil recognized the divinity of Christ or not. To be joined with them are the very pertinent comments of Toletus on the utter hatred of the devil. "His malice is so great that he would injure God if he could, and when he saw that God could be injured in the flesh, that is precisely what he wished to do."⁴⁵ This viewpoint seems to be in perfect conformity with the doctrine developed by Gregory the Great in his commentary on the Book of Job.

Despite these observations, however, Cajetan is unwilling to subscribe to the conclusion that the devil recognized the divinity of Christ.⁴⁶ He therefore faces the question, if the miracles of Christ, joined to His doctrine, sufficiently prove He is the Son of God, how was it possible that the demons, so gifted in intellect and so zealous in their investigations, remained in doubt as to His divinity?

With Suarez and Toletus, we can augment the difficulties involved in that question. Suarez writes: "In the Old Testament it was clearly predicted that the future Messias would be the Son of God,"⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Toletus, *In III*, q. 44, a. 1.

⁴⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁷ Suarez seems to overemphasize the clarity with which the Messianic prophecies treat of the divinity of Christ. We may, however, follow the conclusions of Fr. Vaccari in his

but the devil knew the Scriptures and also that Jesus was the Messiah; therefore also that He was God. Secondly, he not only heard the testimonies given by the heavenly Father, but he also often heard Christ claim to be one with the Father and the Son of God. And he witnessed miracles performed by Christ in confirmation of this truth.⁴⁸ Toletus adds that since the miracles of Christ were performed to prove His divinity, the demon, who certainly knew such phenomena demanded the exercise of divine power and that God could not set His seal of approval on falsehood, must have concluded that Christ was the Son of God.⁴⁹

Cajetan, it must be admitted, does not answer these difficulties too well. He insists on the fact that miracles, even when joined to the doctrine of Christ, were not sufficient to cause *notitia evidentiæ*, but only the knowledge of compelled or voluntary faith. Therefore the devils could have persisted in their doubts as long as they were not absolutely necessitated to conclude from the miracles and doctrine of Christ to the grace of personal union in the God-man.⁵⁰

Any of three causes, according to Cajetan, could account for this persistent state of doubt in the devil's mind. In the first place, the exact significance of the miracles and doctrine of Christ was not as clearly manifest at that time as it was to be at a later day. Objectively, it is true, the miracles were sufficient to establish the truth of Christ's identity, but they constituted effective proofs only for those who penetrated their real meaning. That real meaning was not forced on the devils by the miracles performed by Christ because miracles do not necessarily postulate the hypostatic union in the person performing them. Nor did the divine prerogatives and titles attributed by Christ to Himself compel the devil to accept His claim literally. Since there was always the possibility that these titles and prerogatives could be understood in a metaphorical sense, he

study "De Messia Filio Dei in Vetere Testamento." "... Contendo: 1° effata de Messia in Ps. 2, 7 et Is. 9, 5 eius esse naturæ ut ex usu V. T. sinceri lectoris mentem inclinet ad tenendum Messiam in iis prædicatum esse verum Deum; 2° hoc plane sufficere ad hoc, ut, quando Jesus Nazareus sese exhibuit ut Messiam et ut verum Dei filium, nempe vere ac proprie Deum, Judæi hæc audientes debuerunt non statim præiudicata sententia illam condemnare tamquam blasphemum." *Verbum Domini* XV (1935), 86. What is said here of the Jews could be applied *a fortiori* to the evil spirits.

⁴⁸ *De Mysteriis Christi*, Disp. 44, s. 3.

⁴⁹ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁰ *Loc. cit.*

was always left with at least the suspicion that Christ was not divine. According to Cajetan, the circumstances facing the devil were similar to those of a man who had witnessed the raising of an individual from the dead. The necessary conclusion from such a scene would be that supernatural power had been operative; but the relation of God to that power and the person exercising it would not be obvious. Hence, being in doubt, the witness could only wonder.

The second reason advanced by Cajetan is based on the depraved envy and pride of the devil. Although, because of his self-love, he watched Christ closely and tempted Him in order to ascertain whether He was the Son of God, nevertheless, because of his pride he found it absolutely impossible to believe that human nature could be so elevated above angelic nature that a man should truly be divine. An added difficulty for his intellectual acceptance was the fact that for natural reason, whether human or angelic, the Incarnation of God was an impossibility. Hence, despite indications to the contrary, the devil could turn his mind from such a truth as something absolutely unthinkable.

Cajetan's first two reasons, therefore, may be summarized as follows. Although the devil had heard Christ was the Son of God, he never solved the question of whether He was the natural Son of God, or only in a metaphorical sense. The former was not forced on his intellect because of the probative power of miracles since they did not indicate absolutely that He who performed them was divine. Nor did the divine prerogatives claimed by Christ solve the question, since they could be understood in a metaphorical sense. As a matter of fact, the devil's mind would have tended toward the acceptance of the lesser sense, because in his self-love and pride he never would have considered even the possibility of human nature being elevated above his own. He could not have thought otherwise because, before the actual event, the Incarnation was an impenetrable mystery for angelic as well as for human minds.

Although Suarez says that this method of argumentation explains why some saints claimed that the devil had merely a fearful suspicion of the divinity of Christ, he nevertheless calls it an evasion and adds that the reasons adduced were sufficient neither for the formation of the contrary judgment in the mind of the devil, nor for the suspension

of assent.⁵¹ To my mind, the reasons adduced are not completely founded on fact.

Perhaps the principal foundation of Cajetan's theory is the contention that the devil knew absolutely nothing about the possibility of the Incarnation. Yet St. Ambrose,⁵² St. Gregory,⁵³ St. Thomas,⁵⁴ and Suarez⁵⁵ teach that the devil knew not only of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but also of the fact that the Son of God would come into this world. Hence, when he faced Christ, the devil's reluctance to accept the truth could not be fortified by the conviction that the presence of the Son of God on earth was an impossibility. As a matter of fact, the cry of the demons, "Have you come to torment us before the time" would indicate, on the contrary, that they expected some such visitation.

Moreover, the true meaning of the miracles and the claims of Christ to divinity was not as difficult for the devils to ascertain as Cajetan would lead us to suppose. Even the Jews, whose perspicacity cannot be compared to that of fallen angels,⁵⁶ recognized with certainty that Christ was claiming physical unity with the Father since they wanted to stone Him because "thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (J.10: 30-32); they knew He attributed to Himself an existence proper to Jahweh (J.5: 58-60), equal omnipotence with the Father (J.5:19), the power to judge men on the last day (J.5:22), etc. If the Jews could understand these truths so clearly, there was nothing to prevent the devils from coming to the same conclusion.

The devils were also in an excellent position to understand the probative power of the miracles of Christ. They heard Him appeal to His miracles as proof of His divinity; they knew well that these

⁵¹ *Loc. cit.*

⁵² "Et ideo venisse cognoverunt, qui praecognitum habebant esse venturum." *Expositio Evang. secundum Lucam*, (CSEL XXXII, 4, p. 42).

⁵³ "Sciebant enim quod pro redemptione nostra incarnatus Dei Filius fuerat." *Moralium Libri*, (PL LXXVI, 680).

⁵⁴ "Mysterium regni Dei quod est impletum per Christum, omnes quidem angeli a principio aliquo modo cognoverunt." *Sum. Theol.* I, q. 64, a. 1, ad 4.

⁵⁵ "Nam imprimis daemon non ignorat Deum habere naturalem Filium (mysterium enim Trinitatis a principio creationis agnovit); similiter ante incarnationis tempus cognovit Filium Dei fore incarnandum." *De Mysteriis Christi*, Disp. 44, s. 3.

⁵⁶ Fr. Huby mentions also "la perspicacité que donne la haine." *Évangile selon Saint Marc*, p. 31.

miraculous phenomena were derived from a divine source; they realized that God would never have permitted them to be performed unless He wished to confirm the truth of what was being said. Contrary to Cajetan, therefore, the devils could easily have recognized the relation of God to the miraculous power and to the person exercising it. It would have been impossible for them not to know that Christ was God unless the Father deliberately blinded them during the lifetime of His Son on earth.

It is precisely to this blinding of the devil that Cajetan appeals as his third reason that could explain why diabolic minds could not penetrate to the true identity of Christ: "The mystery of the hypostatic union was kept so concealed by divine providence that the devils were not certain of the truth until the mystery of human redemption was consummated, lest it be impeded or delayed."⁵⁷

But how was this accomplished? Did God prevent the devil from being acquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament? It does not seem so, since the evangelist says that the devil not only knew He was the Christ, but could also quote messianic prophecies while tempting Him. Could it be that he was prevented from hearing the teaching of Christ, the testimony of the heavenly Father, of John the Baptist, of Peter, etc.? This is difficult to believe since some of the Fathers claim that the temptation in the desert was prompted by the devil's desire to clarify for himself the testimony of the heavenly Father which he heard at the Baptism in the Jordan. Was he prevented from witnessing the miracles which established the truth of Christ's claim to be the Son of God? This is hardly possible since in the case of the demoniacs, at least, the devil himself was the direct object of Christ's miraculous intervention.

This appeal to divine providence is, to my mind, not only unproven, but also an unnecessary extension of a rather restricted teaching of the Fathers. As we noted, Jerome and others held that the truth was concealed from the devil at the time of the Nativity, but they did not claim that it was always so concealed. St. Thomas, who teaches the same doctrine, says the reason for the concealment was to prevent the devil from persecuting Christ at a time when He had disposed neither to suffer nor to manifest His power.⁵⁸ Obviously, that reason no

⁵⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁸ *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 29, a. 1, ad 3.

longer applied when Christ had begun His public life and had set His face toward Calvary.

It would seem, therefore, that no proof can be advanced for this postulated blinding of the devil. Without that postulate, the principal difficulty in this whole matter is derived, as we saw, from Paul's epistle; but as Cajetan is willing to admit, the passage can readily be interpreted as referring to the devil's ignorance of the effect of the passion rather than of the divinity of Christ. Such an interpretation is not only possible, but it also allows for the most consistent explanation of the other elements that enter into the question. In the first place, it allows such expressions as "Son of God," "Son of the Most High God," etc., to retain their normal meaning, a natural phenomenon under the circumstances, since these confessions of the devils are involuntary utterances forced from them by the presence of Christ. Secondly, it is in strict accordance with what we know of the intellectual brilliance of fallen angels to suppose that they, as well as ordinary mortals, could make the illation between the miracles and the truth of Christ's self revelation, particularly since in some instances, they felt the direct effect of His omnipotence. Finally, if they knew the Son of God was to come into this world, as some Fathers and theologians teach, it is altogether improbable that the devils would ever use the title "Filius Dei" merely in a metaphorical sense. Its literal meaning, with all its connotations, was imprinted much too deeply in their minds.



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