

Chapter Two

THE HUMAN NATURE IN CHRIST

SUMMARY.—In Christ the human nature perfectly realises those characteristics which St. Bernard demands for a Spouse of the Word—The human nature in Christ is devoid of personality—It is given up entirely to the Word—It lives only for Him—In entire dependence on Him—The wonderful fruitfulness of this divine union—This union is the model of the union of the Soul with the Word.

The fathers of the Church saw primarily in the “Canticle of Canticles,” the symbol of that marvellous union which exists in Christ between the Word and the human nature.

The Word, the eternal Wisdom, is the Bridegroom; He chooses for Himself a spouse: a human nature. The immaculate and virginal womb of Mary is the nuptial chamber where this marvellous union was fashioned, a union so wonderful, so elevated, that it needed as artisan none other than the Holy Ghost Himself, so intimate that it is ratified by substantial Love. But if we carefully observe the sacred Humanity in this union with the Word, we shall see that it marvellously and most fully realises those characteristics that St. Bernard wished to see in a spouse of the Word.

It can be said that the human nature in Jesus is absolutely free from self-seeking and any attachment to creatures: *relictis omnibus*. That it is authentically human, you know; Jesus belonged entirely to our race, He was “perfect man” as well as “perfect God” : *Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*.¹ The human nature in Christ is complete: an immortal soul united to a human body, with its faculties, senses, and powers of action. “In all things except sin, Christ was like unto His brethren” : *Debit per omnia fratribus similari . . . absque peccato*.² However this humanity possessed nothing of its own, it had no personality in itself, it remained stripped of that which in us is the inmost centre, the plenitude of autonomy³ which constitutes the “me,”⁴ the highest part of a rational being. There are two natures in Jesus, but only one person, the Divine Person of the Word, which replaces and supplies superabundantly for the human personality. Where shall we look for a human nature which was so radically, so absolutely despoiled? *Relictis omnibus*.

Having then nothing, belonging to nothing, the human nature in Jesus “adhered to the Word with all its powers” : *Verba votis omnibus adherere*. The bond which united them cannot be expressed. Outside the ineffable union which unites the three Divine Persons in the essential unity of their nature, no union is closer, none more intimate than this. The sacred Humanity is truly *one* with the Word. If *one*, then all is common between them the actions of the human nature participate in the unique and splendid beauty which adorns the words of the eternal Wisdom ; they acquire that transcendent worth, that infinite value which only attaches to the Works of God Himself. If *one* with the Word which has caused it, the human nature must be adored as divine. An indissoluble union: once realised, it ceases not; death itself did not break it, and in the ages which will never finish, the elect will contemplate, admire, hymn and adore the humanity united to the Word.

¹ Creed attributed to St. Athanasius.

² Heb 2:17; 4:15

³ This autonomy is evidently relative: for by essence every creature is finite, we depend upon God both for existence and for the conservation of our existence.

⁴ Ontologically and juridically.

What an absolute possession of the humanity by the Word, yet also what an absolute surrender of itself by the human nature, and in its free acts, what a transport of love towards the Word! Between the human nature and the Word, there was a perfect and unceasing community of thought, sentiments, will and action. All its life, all its activity, its very essence was consecrated to the glory of the Word, “lived for the Word” : *Verbo vivere*. If the human nature holds from the Word, life, existence, the most sublime gifts, in return it gives itself up wholly to his operations. What Christ said of His life as Word with regard to the Father, the sacred humanity, keeping due proportion, can say of the Word. “My doctrine is not Mine”;⁵ but His to whom I am united”; “I do not judge of myself, but according to the views of him who possesses me in Himself... I act as I see Him do⁶

The human nature in the hands of the Word is an absolutely submissive and perfect instrument; it is ruled by Him. *Verbo se regere*. Having in the order of being no personality, it possesses none in the domain of activity. “The Word presides in everything, holds all in his hands ... The man (the human nature) is elevated, but the Word is not limited in any way: unchangeable, unalterable, He rules always and everywhere the nature that is united to Him. From hence it comes that in Jesus Christ the human nature is in all things absolutely submissive to the direction of the Word, who so elevates all to Himself, that thoughts and actions are divine. All He thinks, all He wishes, all He says, all He hides within Himself, or manifests externally, are animated by the Word, guided by the Word, worthy of the Word.⁷ ... “The sacred humanity is for the Word, the channel of its graces, through it He appeared to men to reveal the divine secrets, to instil into hearts those words of wisdom, by which the eternal Goodness and unchangeable Love are manifested.

The dowry of that nature which possesses nothing of itself, is to give the Word life as man here below, so that He may conquer, draw souls to Himself and thus gain His kingdom. The sacred Humanity lives fully for the glory of the Word, in absolute dependence, but full of love until death, for by it the Word possesses what He could never find in the divine riches; a means by which to suffer, expiate and die for men. The human nature could say to the Word from the first moment of union with Him: “A bloody spouse thou art to me: *Sponsus sanguinum tu mihi es*.”⁸ Delivered to Him, to execute with and in Him the will of the Father, the human nature did not cease during the whole of its earthly course to stretch forward to that “baptism of blood”⁹ which consummated the marvellous and inexhaustible fecundity of that inexpressible union. It was actually by death that the Sacred Humanity “conceived of the Word what it should bring forth,” *de Verbo concipere quod pariat Verbo*. From death life issued, from the pierced heart of Jesus flowed that stream of living water which rejoices the city of souls, after having brought them forth by grace. The fruit of that union consummated on Calvary between the Word and the human nature, is the Church, that multitude of souls of which St, John speaks,¹⁰ the elect “of every tribe, tongue, people and nation, redeemed”¹¹ by that blood to form for ever the resplendent and glorious Kingdom of the Bridegroom and Bride.

⁵ Jn 7:16

⁶ Cf. Jn 5:19, 30

⁷ Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle, 2^e partie*, Chap. XIX, *Jesus Christ et sa doctrine*.

⁸ Exod 4:25

⁹ Cf. Lk 12:50

¹⁰ Apoc 7:9

¹¹ Apoc 5:9

The marvellous artisan of all these works is love, the love of the Word for the human nature, the love of the Sacred Humanity for the Word. Their union is only realised by the Holy Spirit, substantial Love; it was love that made them meet in the womb of the Virgin, who “conceived by the Holy Ghost.” Love commenced this union, consecrated and sealed it; Love preserved it,

Love also consummated it. Christ, said St. Paul, “ by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted unto God.”¹²

Such is to tell, in stammering fashion, the ineffable mystery of the divine nuptials of the Word with human nature. This mystery is at the same time, the model and source of the union of the Word with consecrated souls. The Incarnation, the hypostatic union, unique in its specific character, becomes universal by a mystic extension. The Christ, the God-man, the Incarnate Word, contracts with souls in differing degrees that union which makes Him the Bridegroom and the soul the Bride. The condition of the Bride is assuredly infinitely inferior to that of the human nature in Jesus;¹³ it is, however, so fruitful, that it ravishes and transports the souls who are its objects.

Oh, Lord Jesus, if the Psalmist can proclaim “that Thy friends are made exceedingly honourable,”¹⁴ what praises can fitly celebrate the infinite condescensions of your love towards those souls called to imitate your sacred humanity in the dignity of spouse?

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Next in the series: Chapter Three, *Relictis Omnibus**

¹² Heb 9:14

¹³ The union of the Word with the human nature is substantial and personal; the two natures being united in the unity of person. In the soul the union with the Word is by its nature accidental and moral, that is to say that the human being keeps its own personality in the domain of being; the union with the Word is realised in its activity (knowledge, love and actions).

¹⁴ Ps 139(138):17

* Editor’s note: “leaving all things” – the virtue of detachment