

**INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: The Consciousness of Christ
Concerning Himself and His Mission, 1985.**

FIRST PROPOSITION

The life of Jesus testifies to his consciousness of a filial relationship with the Father. His behavior and his words, which are those of the perfect “servant”, imply an authority that surpasses that of the ancient prophets and belongs to God alone. Jesus drew this incomparable authority from his unique relationship with God, whom he calls “my Father”. He was conscious of being the only Son of God and in this sense of being God himself.

1.1. The postpaschal apostolic preaching, which proclaims Jesus as Son of God, is not a late development in the primitive Church: it is already in evidence at the very heart of the most ancient formulations of the *kerygma*, of the Confessions of Faith, and of the hymns (Rom 1:3f; Phil 2:6ff.). Saint Paul reaches the point of summing up his entire preaching in the expression “the Gospel of God about his Son” (Rom 1:3, 9; cf. 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 1:16). The “mission formulas” are of particular significance in this respect: “God has sent his own Son” (Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4). The divine sonship, then, is at the center of the apostolic preaching. It can be understood as an explanation, in the light of the Cross and Resurrection, of the relationship of Jesus with his own “Abba”.

1.2. Indeed, calling God “Father”, which is the pure and simple Christian usage now, goes back to Jesus himself. This is one of the very best attested data in the historical-critical study of Jesus. Not only, however, does he call God “Father” or “my Father” in general: as he turns to him in prayer, he invokes him as “Abba” (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), and this marks a novel element. The way in which Jesus prays (Mt 11:25) and the way he teaches his disciples to pray (Lk 11:2), implies a distinction (explicit after Easter; see Jn 20:17) between “my Father” and “your Father” and also implies the singular and nontransferable character of the relationship uniting Jesus and God. Before the mystery of Jesus was revealed to men, there was already in the consciousness of Jesus a personal perception of a most sure and profound relationship with the Father. From the fact that he called God “Father”, it follows by implication that Jesus was aware of his own divine authority and mission. There is good reason, then, for finding the term “to reveal” in this context (Mt 11:27, par.; cf. 16-17). Knowing himself to be the one who knows God perfectly, Jesus as a result knows that he is at the same time the bearer of God’s definitive revelation to men. He knows and is conscious of being “the” Son (Mk 12:6; 13:22).

In the strength of such consciousness, Jesus speaks and acts with the kind of authority that belongs to God alone. And man’s eternal salvation is decided on the basis of his attitude to Jesus (Lk 12:8; Mk 8:38; Mt 10:32). From now on Jesus can call on his followers (Mk 1:17). To follow him means loving him before one’s own parents (Mt 10:37), putting him ahead of any earthly good whatsoever (Mk 10:29), being ready to die “for my cause” (Mk 8:35). He speaks as the sovereign lawgiver (Mt 5:22-28), surpassing prophets and kings (Mt 12:41-42). He alone is the Master (Mt 23:8). All will pass away except his word (Mk 13:31).

1.3. The Gospel of John states more explicitly the origin of such unheard-of authority: it is because “the Father is in me and I in the Father” (10:38). “The Father and I are one” (10:30). The “I” who speaks and acts as sovereign lawgiver is of the same standing as the “I” of Yahweh (Ex 3:14).

Even from a historical point of view we have every reason for stating that the earliest apostolic proclamation of Jesus as Son of God is based on the very consciousness that Jesus himself had of being the Son and emissary of the Father.

SECOND PROPOSITION

Jesus was aware of the purpose of his mission: to announce the Kingdom of God and make it present in his own Person, in his actions, and in his words, so that the world would become reconciled with God and renewed. He freely accepted the Father’s will: to give his own life for the salvation of all mankind. He knew the Father had sent him to serve and to give his life “for many” (Mk 14:24).

2.1. The apostolic preaching on the divine sonship involves equally and indissolubly a soteriological significance. In fact, the sending of Christ and his arrival in the flesh (Rom 8:3), under the law (Gal 4:4), his self-humiliation (Phil 2:7), are all aimed at lifting us up: to justify us (2 Cor 5:21), to make us rich (2 Cor 8:9), and to render us sons through the agency of the Spirit (Rom 8:15f; Gal 4:5f; Heb 2:10). Such a sharing in the divine sonship, which comes into being in faith and is especially expressed in the prayer of Christians to the Father, presupposes the consciousness Jesus himself had of his own Sonship.

The entire apostolic preaching is based on the conviction that Jesus knew he was the Son, the Father’s emissary; and without such a consciousness Christology and soteriology as well would lack a foundation.

2.2 The consciousness Jesus has of his unique filial relationship is the foundation and presupposition of his mission. Inversely, we can argue from mission to consciousness. According to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus knows that he has been sent to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Lk 4:43; cf. Mt 15:24); it is for this end that he “came forth” (Mk 1:38, Greek) and has come (Mk 2:17). Filtered through his mission to mankind we can at the same time discover him whose emissary he is (Lk 10:16). With gestures and words Jesus manifested the purpose of his “Coming”: to call sinners (Mk 2:17), “to seek and save what was lost” (Lk 10:16), not to abolish but to complete the law (Mt 5:17), to bring the sword of separation (Mt 10:34), to cast fire on the earth (Lk 12:49). Jesus knows he has “come” not to be served but to serve “and to give his own life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).⁸¹

2.3. This “Coming” of his can have no other origin than God. The Gospel of Saint John makes explicit in its mission Christology (*Sendungschristologie*) the more implicit Synoptic witness to Jesus’ consciousness of his incomparable mission. He knows he has “come” from the Father (Jn 5:43), “come forth” from him (8:12; 16:28). The mission he received from the Father is not something imposed by an outside source. It belongs to him so intimately as to coincide with his

¹ Cf. “Quaestiones selectae de Christologia”, IV, B-C, pp. 624-27.

whole being. It is his whole life (6:7), his food (4:34), he seeks nothing else (5:30), his will is consumed entirely by God's will (6:38), his words are the words of his Father (3:34; 12:49), his works are the Father's (9:4), so much so that he can say of himself, "He who sees me sees the Father" (14:9). The consciousness Jesus has of himself coincides with the consciousness of, say, a prophet's mission, granted at a particular time, even if it were "from the womb" (like Jeremiah, Jer 1:5; the Baptist, Lk 1:15; Paul, Gal 1:15). Even more, this mission is rooted in a first-time "emergence" from God, "because I came out from God" (8:42), all of which presupposes, to be at all possible, that he had been "from the beginning with God" (1:1, 18).

2.4. The consciousness Jesus has of his mission also involves, therefore, the consciousness of his "preexistence". His mission (in time), in fact, is not essentially separable from his (eternal) procession: it is a "prolongation" of it.⁹² His human consciousness of his mission "translates", so to speak, the eternal relationship with the Father into the idiom of a human life.

This relationship of the incarnate Son with the Father presumes in the first place the mediation of the Holy Spirit, who must therefore be always included in the consciousness of Jesus as Son. Already his purely human existence is the result of the action of the Spirit: from his baptism on, all his work—whether actively or passively among men or his communion in prayer with the Father—is realized only in and through the Spirit (Lk 4:18; Acts 10:38; Mk 1:12; Mt 12:28). The Son knows that as he fulfills the Father's will the Spirit guides and sustains him all the way to the Cross. There his earthly mission ended, "he gave up" (*paredoken*) "his Spirit" (*pneuma*) (Jn 19:30), a particular in which some discern the introduction of the gift of the Spirit. From his Resurrection and ascension onward, he becomes, as glorified man, that which he had been as God from all eternity: "a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17), a Lord fully able to pour out the Holy Spirit on us so as to raise us in him to the dignity of sons.

But this relationship of the incarnate Son with the Father is all the same expressed in a "kenotic" fashion.¹⁰³ To realize a perfect obedience, Jesus freely renounces (Phil 2:6-9) all that might impede that attitude. He refuses, for example, to call on the legions of angels at his disposal (Mt 26:53), he wishes to grow as a man "in wisdom, age, and grace" (Lk 2:52), to learn and to obey (Heb 5:8), to face temptations (Mt 4:1-11, par.), to suffer. None of this is incompatible with the affirmations that Jesus "knows all" (Jn 16:30), that "the Father has shown him all his works" (Jn 5:20; 13:3; Mt 11:27), if these affirmations are taken to mean that Jesus receives from the Father all that enables him to accomplish his works of revelation and of universal redemption (Jn 3:11-32; 8:38-40; 15:15; 17:8).

THIRD PROPOSITION

To realize his salvific mission, Jesus wanted to unite men with the coming Kingdom and to gather them around himself. With this end before him, he did certain definite acts that, if taken altogether, can only be explained as a preparation for the Church, which will be definitively

² Cf. St. Thomas, *In Sententias* I, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, sol.; I, q. 43, a. 2 ad 2.

³ Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Bible et Christologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), n. 2.2.1.3, pp. 93-95; cf. also p. 45; trans. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Scripture and Christology. A Statement of the Biblical Commission with a Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

constituted at the time of the Easter and Pentecost events. It is therefore to be affirmed of necessity that Jesus willed the foundation of the Church.

3.1. According to the apostolic testimony, Christ and the Church are inseparable. In a recurring phrase in Saint Paul, the Churches are “in Christ” (1 Thess 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thess 1:1; Gal 1:22); they are the Churches of Christ (Rom 16:16). To be a Christian means “Christ is in you” (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5); it is “to live in Christ” (Rom 8:2): “You are all one in Christ” (Gal 3:18). This unity is most of all expressed in terms of analogy with the unity of the human body. The Holy Spirit is the unifying principle of this body: “the Body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27), or “in Christ” (Rom 12:5) and also “Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). Christ in heaven is the source of life and growth of the Church (Col 2:19; Eph 4:11-16). He is “the Head of the Body” (Col 1:18; 3:15; etc.), the “fullness” (Eph 1:22f.) of the Church.

Now this unbreakable unity between Christ and his Church is rooted in the supreme act of his life: the giving of his own life on the Cross. Since he loved her, “he gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), because “he wanted to present the Church to himself all glorious” (Eph 5:27; Col 1:22). The Church, the Body of Christ, takes its origin from the Body consigned to the Cross, from “the precious blood” (1 Pet 1:19) of Christ, which is “the price of our redemption” (1 Cor 6:20). In the eyes of the apostolic preaching the Church is the very purpose of the work of salvation brought about by Christ in his life on earth.

3.2. When he preaches the Kingdom of God, Christ is not simply announcing the imminence of a great eschatological change; he is, first of all, calling mankind to enter the Kingdom. The germ and the beginning of the Kingdom is “the little flock” (Lk 12:32) made up of those Jesus came to call around himself, and of whom he himself is pastor (Mk 14:27, par.; Jn 10:1-29; Mt 10:16, par.), he who came to gather together and free his sheep (Mt 15:24; Lk 15:4-7). Jesus speaks of such an assembly in using the image of guests invited to a wedding banquet (Mk 2:19, par.), of a sowing by God (Mt 13:24; 15:13), of a fisherman’s net (Mt 13:47; Mk 1:17). The disciples of Christ form a city on a mountain summit visible from afar (Mt 5:14); they constitute the new family of which God himself is Father and where all are brothers (Mt 23:9). The parables of Jesus and the images he uses in describing those he came to call as followers involve an “implicit ecclesiology”.

It is not a question of stating that this intention on the part of Christ involves an outright will to establish and give firm shape to all the institutional aspects of the Church in the way these have developed in the course of the centuries.¹⁴ Instead, it is necessary to state that Jesus did will to give the community, which he gathered around himself, a structure that will remain until the full realization of the Kingdom. At this point note must be taken of the choice, first of all, of the Twelve and Peter as their head (Mk 3:14ff.). Such a choice, and what is more a deliberate one, aims at the definitive eschatological foundation of the people of God, which will be open to all mankind (Mt 8:11f). The Twelve (Mk 6:7) and the other disciples (Lk 10:1ff.) have a share in the mission of Christ, in his power, but also in his fate (Mt 10:25; Jn 15:20). In them Jesus himself comes, and in him the one is present who sent him (Mk 10:40).

⁴ International Theological Commission, *Themata selecta de ecclesiology* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1985), I.4, pp. 11 ff.

The Church will also have a prayer of her own, that which Jesus has given her (Lk 11:2-4). Above all, she inherits the act of remembrance of his Supper, the center of the “New Covenant” (Lk 22:20) and of the new community reunited in the breaking of bread (Lk 22:19). Jesus taught those he had called around himself “a way of acting” that was new and different from that of the ancients (Mt 5:21, etc.), of the pagans (Mt 5:47), and of the great of this earth (Lk 22:25ff.).

Did Jesus will the foundation of the Church? Yes, but this Church is the people of God that he brings together, beginning first of all with Israel, through whom he aims at the salvation of all peoples. In fact, it is to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6; 15:24) that Jesus knows himself to have been sent first, and to these he sends his disciples. One of the most moving expressions of the consciousness of his own dignity and mission on the part of Jesus is this lament (the lament of the God of Israel!): “Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not” (Lk 13:34; 19:41-44). God (Yahweh), indeed, in the Old Testament seeks without pause to unite the people of Israel into a single people, *his* people. That very “and you would not” does not change, to be sure, the intention, but the path followed by the calling together of all mankind around Jesus. From now on it will be “the times of the Gentiles” (Lk 21:24; Rom 11:1–6), principally, which will indicate the *Church* of Christ.

Christ was conscious of his saving mission. This brought with it the foundation of his *Church*, that is, the calling together of all mankind into “God’s family”. In the last analysis the history of Christianity is founded on the intention and the will of Christ to found his Church.

3.3. In the light of the Spirit the Gospel of Saint John sees the whole life of Christ as illuminated by the glory of the risen One. In that way the vision enjoyed by the circle of the disciples of Jesus is already open to all those who “will believe in me through their word” (17:20). Those who were with him in his life on earth, those whom the Father had given him (17:6), whom he had guarded, and for whom “he had consecrated himself” (17:19) by giving his life, already represent all those who will have loved him (1:12) and who will believe in him (3:36). By faith they are united to him as shoots are to the vine, without which they would become desiccated (15:6). This intimate union between Jesus and believers, “you in me and I in you” (14:20), has on one hand its origin in the Father’s plan when he “gives” the disciples to Jesus (6:39, 44,65), but it is realized definitively by means of freely giving his life (10:18) “for his friends” (15:13). The paschal mystery is the permanent source of the Church (19:34): “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (12:32).

FOURTH PROPOSITION

The consciousness that Christ had of being the Father’s emissary to save the world and to bring all mankind together in God’s people involves, in a mysterious way, a love for all mankind so much so that we may all say: “The Son of God loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20).

4.1. From its earliest formulation the apostolic preaching involves the conviction that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3), that “he gave himself for our sins” (Gal 1:4), and this was according to the will of God the Father, who “delivered him to death for our sins” (Rom 4:25; Is 53:6), “for us all” (Rom 8:32), “to redeem us” (Gal 4:4). God,

who “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4), excludes no one from his plan of salvation, which Christ embraces with all his being. The entire life of Christ, from “his entrance into the world” (Heb 10:5) to the giving of his life, is a single and unique gift “for us”. And that precisely is what the Church has preached from the very outset (Rom 5:8; 1 Thess 1; 5:10; 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Pet 2:21; 3:18; etc.).

He died for us, because he loved us: “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). That “us” means all the people whom he wishes to reunite in his Church. “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Now, this love has not been understood by the Church as just a general attitude but as a concrete love expressed in terms of personal consideration for every individual. This is how the Church sees things as she hears Saint Paul emphasize respect for the “weak”: “Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; 2 Cor 5:14f). To the faction-riddled Christians of Corinth, the same Paul puts the questions: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?” (1 Cor 1:13). And concerning the matter in hand, Paul, who never knew Christ “in the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:7), will be able to say: “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20).

4.2. The apostolic witnesses mentioned above to the death that Jesus underwent for love, in a most personal way, “for us”, “for me”, and “for my brothers”, hold together in a single glance the unbounded love of the preexisting “Son of God” (Gal 2:20), the One who at the same time was acknowledged as the glorified “Lord”. That “for us”, full of the love of Jesus, has its foundation in the preexistence, and endures in the love of the glorified One who—having loved us (Rom 8:37) in his Incarnation and his death—“intercedes for us” now (Rom 8:34). The “preexistent” love of Jesus is the continuing element that characterizes the Son in all these “stages”—preexistence, earthly life, glorified existence.

This abiding nature of his love we find expressed in the words of Jesus. According to Luke 22:27, Jesus expresses the sum of his life on earth and his behavior under the image of “one who serves at table”. “To be the servant of all” (Mk 9:35, par.) is the basic rule in the circle of disciples. Love as service reaches its climax in the farewell Supper, during which Jesus sacrifices himself and offers himself as the one who must die (Lk 22:19f, par.). On the Cross his life of service is transmuted into a death of service “for many” (Mk 10:45; 14:22-24). The service Jesus gave in life and death was also after all a service of the “Kingdom of God” in words and acts, to the point that he can even go so far as to present his life and works in his future in glory as “a waiting at table” (Lk 12:37) and as an intercession (Rom 8:34). It was a service of love that links God’s deepest love with the love, full of self-abnegation, of one’s neighbor (Mk 12:28-34).

The love to which the whole life of Christ witnesses is first of all shown to be a universal love, in the sense that no one who approaches him is excluded. This love goes in search of “the one who was lost” (Lk 15:3-10, 11-32), publicans and sinners (cf. Mk 2:17; Lk 7:34, 36-50; Mt 9:1-8; Lk 15:15), the rich (Lk 19:1-10) and the poor (Lk 16:19-31), male and female (Lk 8:2-3, 7:11-17, 12:10-17), the sick (Mk 1:29-34, etc.), the possessed (Mk 1:21-28, etc.), the anguished (Lk 6:21), and the persecuted (Mt 11:28).

This deliberate opening of the heart of Jesus to all and sundry is meant to transcend the limits of its own generation, as is evident in the “universalization” of his mission and promises. The

Beatitudes surpass his contemporary audience; they have in mind all the poor, all the hungry (cf. Lk 6:20). Whoever accepts one of these little ones accepts Jesus himself, and by the same token him by whom he was sent (Mk 9:37). Only at the Final Judgment will it be clearly seen how far this presently hidden identification was actually developed (Mt 25:31-46).

4.3 This mystery is at the heart of our Faith: the inclusion of all mankind within this eternal love with which God so loved the world as to give his own Son (Jn 3:16). “By this we know love, that he [Christ] laid down his life for us” (Jn 3:16). Indeed, “the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep” (Jn 10:11); he knows them (Jn 10:14) and calls them each by his own name (Jn 10:3).

4.4 Simply because they have known this love,¹²⁵ personal to each, multitudes of Christians have dedicated themselves to the poor in love, without distinctions, and they continue to give testimony to this love, which knows how to identify Jesus in every one of “these smallest brothers of mine” (Mt 25:40). “Each and every single person is in question, since each one was included in the mystery of the redemption and Christ has united himself to each, forever, by means of this mystery.”¹³⁶

⁵ ¹² Cf. Gaudium et Spes 22.3.

⁶ John Paul II, Redemptor Hominis 13; Gaudium et Spes 22.