

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SAYING THAT JESUS IS HUMAN AND DIVINE?

INTRODUCTION

There are different ways by which we can approach this question to arrive at what is meant by saying that Jesus is human and divine. It is such a popular question that has been in the minds of people as far back as the time of Jesus Himself. It was in the calm which followed the storm which Jesus had subdued with a word that this question of ages was first framed by those astonished disciples of His; "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Mathew 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25).

The question has since opened up a network of debates that dominates the Christological agenda of philosophers and Christian theologians around the world till this present day. In this paper however, I would try to explain what we meant by saying that Jesus is/was human and divine. But first, I would like to mention in brief, some of the viewpoints held in the centuries past, and then move-on to exploring the Biblical facts that illustrate 'the humanity of Christ' on the one hand and 'the divinity of Christ on the other.

CHRISTOLOGICAL VIEWS

In the early days of Christianity, there were a number of arguments and counter-arguments about the person of Jesus. First of these that flourished in the early centuries of Christian era is known as Ebionitism. It regarded Jesus as an ordinary human being, the human son of Mary and Joseph. Another viewpoint known as Docetism, declared that Christ did not suffer in reality, but suffered only on in appearance, and was thus not truly human. The Church moved very swiftly to reject these viewpoints as heretical.

The Nicene Creed speaks of the Son as being "of one substance" (homoousios) with God the Father, and Chalcedon affirms that Jesus Christ is "fully divine and fully human", two natures united in one person (hypostasis) without confusion, change, division, or separation. When writing on the status of Christ, Arius argues that "the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning". According to him, the fact that God cannot change is itself a powerful argument against the incarnation.

Nonetheless, Origen and Athanasius were in support of the 'two natures of Christ'. Origen set out the case for the necessity of a mediator between God and humanity, noting the respective importance of both Christ's divine and His human natures in relation to His work. In his own writing, Athanasius argues for the divinity of Christ on 'soteriological' (works of Christ) grounds, while affirming the full humanity of Christ. In fact, there are a number of other writers like Apollinarius of Laodicea and Gregory of Nazianzen, other schools of thought like the Alexandrian school and the Antiochene School whose viewpoints are conflicting with one another on the issue.

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

His whole manner of life was genuinely human. Luke tells the story of His birth and gives a glimpse into His boyhood. After this he tells us, 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.' (Luke 2:52) He possessed those human elements of soul which distinguish man from the animals and which make Him more than a different type of somatic creature. He ate, drank and revealed those properties of mind like joy, sadness, anger, compassion and will, characteristic of the human individual. He was in subjection to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51), He paid taxes (Matthew 17:24f). In fact, Jesus knew Himself to be a man, as His response to the first temptation shows, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4).

The gospel of John records a great deal of His teaching. One phrase occurs over and over again in its pages, and is highly relevant to our subject. He described God as 'Him who sent me' (John 4:34; 5:23f.). In fact, after 'Father' and 'God' this is the most frequent designation of the Almighty to be found in this gospel. He lived His life therefore as the agent of somebody else, determined to do His will and to walk in His ways. This too shows real manhood.

We also find Him asking questions. It is quite true that many of them were rhetorical and did not expect an answer. Others were intended to make His hearers think deeply about Him and His teaching. Others however seem to have been asked with a genuine desire to know. When confronted with a demoniac boy, He asked the father, 'How long has he had this?' (Mark 9:21). When Lazarus was in his grave, He asked, 'Where have you laid him?' (John 11:34). These would seem to be perfectly straightforward questions asked with no motive other than a desire for information, as I would also do. By this we mean that Jesus was human.

One striking saying takes us further still. Mark 13 contains much of His teaching about the future, and especially about His second coming. Towards the close of it, He says to His disciples, 'But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Mark 13:32).

There are other elements of humanity in His life, which are not always given the recognition they deserve. This particularly applies to His prayer-life. It is only human beings who pray. It is quite true that there were very deep dimensions to His praying, and that He appears to have known God in a particularly deep way. But these are special qualities in an experience, which was genuinely human. It is only a dependent being who prays, for it is only a dependent being who needs help from God. The prayer-life of the Saviour shows every evidence of being as real as other elements in His life. In fact, in Gethsemane prayer and suffering were merged into one. 'Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground' (Luke 22:44).

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

The doctrine known as the virgin birth might be more accurately renamed the virgin conception, although the usual less exact expression is not really misleading. It is taught very clearly in the New Testament. It is true that the incarnation and the virgin birth are not identical, but they are very closely related. The incarnation is the fact that God became man, while the virgin birth is the method by which this took place. This means that a nature which can neither diminish nor develop was joined to a nature in the raw, a nature destined, like our own nature to grow physically and to mature intellectually, emotionally and in other ways. If therefore, we consider the New Testament to be a reliable source, then we would not have problem in understanding what is meant by the divinity of Jesus.

In the Old Testament days, men and women were called to do many different kinds of work in the service of God. There were prophets, priests and kings, there were judges and great national leaders like Moses and Joshua. What differentiates the Lord Jesus from all who came before Him is the fact that in Him all the most significant offices are found in one person. Jesus Christ is the supreme servant of God because not only do all these forms of service find their point of focus in Him but he performs each with utter perfection. This puts Him entirely in a class of His own, and this is really what being divine means.

One of the most remarkable things in Jesus' ministry is the quiet assurance with which He unhesitatingly applies to Himself titles from the Old Testament which are indisputably used of God (Jehovah). Moreover, the New Testament writers ascribe such titles to Christ. For example, in the book of Revelation Jesus assumed the title 'First and the Last' (Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13); God referred to Himself as 'I am' when speaking to Moses in Exodus 3:14. In a controversy with the Jews Jesus declared Himself also as 'I am' (John 5:58); 'Bridegroom' is frequently used either implicitly or explicitly of God (Hosea 2:16 and Isaiah 62:5). This same title is used to depict Jesus in the New Testament (Mark 2:19 and Hebrew 25:1-13).

According to the Old Testament, there are certain attributes and functions that are solely of God in the Old Testament, but which are claimed by Jesus and attributed to Him in the New Testament. For example, 'I will sit to judge all the nations round about' (Joel 3:12). Now from (Matthew 25:31-46) we learn that Christ will occupy the throne of glory-and there can be none more eminent than this-and preside at the last judgement; God alone is frequently described as 'Saving God or Saviour' in the Old Testament (Isaiah 43:1). Yet, in the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as the Saviour of the world (Matthew 1:21; John 3:17; Acts 4:12); In (Isaiah 42:8) we read 'I am God and I shall not give my "glory" to another'. But in (John 17:5) Jesus says 'And now glorify me, Father, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was'. These references also illustrates what is meant to say that Jesus is divine.

It is difficult to read through a single passage in any of the gospels without coming to the conclusion that Jesus was more than man. Jesus did show a most remarkable knowledge on occasions when we might have thought that a merely human individual would have been ignorant. Thus he knew the thoughts of His friends (Luke 9:47) and of His enemies (Luke 6:8,

etc.) John tells us that He knew the secret experience of Nathaniel (John 1:47f.), the past life of the woman of Samaria (John 4:29) and so on and so forth.

Let us take for example His miracles. They are without parallel in the entire Bible. Although, it is quite true that He is not the only worker of miracle in the Bible. There were miracles performed by God through Moses and Joshua, through Elijah and Elisha and other characters of the New Testament Scripture. Some of them even restored people to life. But the sum-total of Jesus miracles points beyond mere humanity.

CONCLUSION

I must say that knowledge of Jesus Christ is not simply "academic or historical knowledge". It is faith knowledge. Also is the need to accept the fact that, Jesus Christ cannot be properly understood in a vacuum; He can be rightly identified only within the context of God's purpose and activity in the history of the people of Israel and throughout the cosmos. This is because I'm convinced that Jesus is greater than all of our confessions and creeds and surpasses all of our theological reflection on Him.

In the final analysis, I remain in broad agreement with the early Christological confessions and with the intent of Chalcedon's affirmations of Jesus Christ as "fully Human, fully Divine". If for example, God in Christ is not present to us in the depths of our human finitude, misery, and godforsakenness, then all that Jesus said and did cannot be a saving event for us who know finitude, misery, and godforsakenness all too well. If God in Christ does not enter into solidarity with the hell of our human condition, we remain without deliverance and without hope and then the gospels are totally unreliable as historical documents.