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Comment: *Did Jesus know?*

Did Jesus *know* he was God? — assuming he *was*! 'From a biblical viewpoint', according to Raymond E. Brown, the most distinguished English-speaking Catholic New Testament scholar in recent times, 'this question is so badly phrased that it cannot be answered and should not be posed'. In contrast, the Anglican scholar, Bishop Tom Wright, asks: 'Can you have a serious Christology without having Jesus aware of it?' For Pope Benedict, in his new book *Jesus of Nazareth*, there is no doubt about it.

Benedict wants to undercut what he takes to be the common view among scholars, Catholics included, that the 'paschal experience' shed a new light on the identity of Jesus which was projected back, implying that the original words and deeds of Jesus — let alone his self-awareness — cannot be reconstructed. 'This impression has in the meantime pervaded the common consciousness of Christianity. Such a situation is dramatic for the faith, making its point of reference insecure'. (That this has pervaded the common consciousness of Christianity outside the educated elites of Western Europe seems exaggeration.)

Of course there are New Testament scholars equally without doubt: for example, the French Dominican François Dreyfus with *Jésus savait-il qu'il était Dieu?* (1984, ET 1989), and John Cochrane O'Neill, who occupied the NT chair at the University of Edinburgh, with *Who did Jesus think he was*? (1995).

It seems a legitimate question. And it seems natural enough to reply in the affirmative. Yet, when you think about it, aren't there problems? — not just about Christ's knowing his own identity but what it means for any of us to do so. Who did Jesus think he was? But then — who do you think you are? Who would you say I am? When and how would the question arise? What kind of reply would you expect? Then again, hasn't there been a massive shift in our understanding of what self-consciousness, involves — since Descartes, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud? How much awareness of who I am do I have independently of how I have been seen by other people over many years and in many different situations?

There was once a furious debate in Catholic theology. In 'Dogmatic reflections on the knowledge and self-consciousness of Christ'

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(*Theological Investigations* volume 5, 1966) Karl Rahner recalls the literature that dealt with the question of the 'I' of Christ — 'Io di Cristo' — 'la moi de Jésus-Christ' — contributed to by famous theologians, such as Galtier, Parente, Garrigou-Lagrange, Lonergan, Grillmeier, and Galot, culminating in Gutwenger's *Bewusstsein und Wissen Christi* (1960) which Rahner is pleased to see reviewed by Professor Josef Ratzinger, saying what Rahner himself wants to say.

We have to do some philosophy. The debate 'usually starts with the tacit presupposition that human knowing consciousness is the famous *tabula rasa*' — to which Rahner responds by recalling what knowing is actually like — *any* knowing. There is explicit and unreflected knowledge; propositional knowledge, permitted and suppressed knowledge, and so on.

In short, if we recollect how complex knowledge of any kind is, and secondly what self-transcendence to the absolute is like in our own case, the notion that Jesus knew he was God might become less problematic.

Add to this that we need to question 'the Greek ideal of human nature', which ' cannot but think of any ignorance merely as a falling short of the perfection towards which man is orientated' — as if nescience, *Nichtwissen*, is something simply to be overcome. There is such a thing as *docta ignorantia*. Moreover, we cannot deny the place in intellectual growth of ' challenge, of going into the open, of confiding oneself to the incalculable, the obscurity of origin and the veiled nature of the end' — *das Wagnis, der Gang ins Offene, das Sichvertrauen an das Unübersehbare, die Verborgenheit des Ursprungs und die Verhülltheit des Endes* — (it is a lot better in German!) In short, in any serious conception of knowledge, and of self-knowledge, there is always unknowing.

Finally, when we speak of Christ's vision of God, 'we instinctively imagine this vision as a vision of the divine essence present before the mind's eye as an object, as if the divine essence were an object being looked at by an observer standing opposite it, and as if this divine object were brought into Christ's consciousness from without and occupied this consciousness from without'. With this 'imaginative scheme' — not adopted consciously — we 'unconsciously and naturally' regard the divine essence offering itself 'like a book or a mirror image', before Christ's mind's eye. A picture holds us captive, we might say.

Perhaps assumptions about self-consciousness might be one reason for a certain hesitation in acknowledging that Jesus must have known who he was.

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