

To Be Another Christ

John F. Nieto

1. There must first be a 'Christ' before there is 'another Christ'. To be another Christ is to be conformed in some way to Christ Himself. For this reason I shall first discuss, very briefly, what it is to be Christ. (6-12) Then I shall consider what it is to be another Christ. (13-32)

2. But, even before examining the 'definitions' of Christ, I wish to point out that God's power is great enough both to beatify us and to save us from sin without Christ. (2-5) For God's power is sufficient to raise a creature to the life of grace, even had He not become man.¹ Before the coming of Christ, we see in the angels and the saints of the Old Testament something of this power. Grace is given them without the mediation of Christ's body and soul. This grace is admittedly given them with some reference to the Christ who is to come, but they cannot yet be 'other Christs' because He has not yet come.²

3. Had God willed our beatitude without Christ, we could have attained grace in this life and we could arrive in the next at the sight of God's essence. For grace, which we now possess imperfectly, is a share in the divine life, in God's knowledge and love of Himself. When separated from the body, the soul that has been purged of all impediments possesses its share in the divine life completely and enjoys the sight of God. So our Lord stated first what constitutes beatitude absolutely, when he said, 'Eternal life is this, to know you Father, the one true God...'³

4. Further, each of these Persons does not differ in any way from God, but only from one another. This is the mystery of the Trinity: three divine persons, distinct from each other, are identical with the divine essence. Those who see God must therefore know and love each of the Persons of the Trinity. This 'inner' life of God, however

¹ Cf. III *Summa Theologiae* Q.46, a.1.

² They do of course participate in the idea of Christ.

³ John 17:3.

much it transcends every created nature, cannot be hidden from any mind that has, by sharing the divine life, been made 'another god'. For to such a mind God is now the proper object. Thus Christ was not necessary even to make it possible that in eternal beatitude we see the Trinity.

5. God did not therefore will that there be a Christ because He could not otherwise achieve these purposes. Nor, of course, did He do so to obtain anything that could add to His own eternal goodness and beatitude. Rather, God chose to become man because it better manifests both the goodness of His essence and the Trinity of persons. For by becoming man God draws the blessed even further into His interior life. To be 'another Christ' consists, both in this life and in the next, in a greater share in the interior life of the Trinity.

6. To consider this share in the Trinity's interior life to which God has called us, one must first understand somewhat about Christ. Consideration of three things is helpful: what the name 'Christ' means and two ways of applying this name to Him, insofar as the name signifies an anointing by His grace (8-10) or by His divinity. (11-12)

7. Now the Second Person of the Trinity has many names. Two prominent names, Son and Word, belong to Him from eternity. These express, each in its own way, His procession from the Father.⁴ The name Jesus names the same Person, but it does not belong to Him from eternity. This name is given to Him by Joseph and Mary.⁵ It names the man who is a divine Person. In other words, it names the Second Person of the Trinity insofar as He has a human nature. The name Christ also names the same Person, and it too does not belong to Him from eternity. For the name Christ, or Messiah, expresses an anointing of this Person. This is not, of course, an anointing of His divinity, which cannot be raised to anything higher, but an anointing of the man or an anointing of the Person in His humanity. The man Jesus is raised to the office of Christ. In this office He saves the human race.

⁴ Cf. I *Summa Theologiae* Q.27, aa.1-2.

⁵ Matt. 1:21, 25; Luke 2:21.

Note 1. Though doing so is fraught with difficulties, what is rightly said of this Person according to one name can be said of Him insofar as He is named through another name.⁶ So we say that God died on the cross, that the Word suffered for our sins, or that Jesus is God. Nonetheless, the theologian must consider the name through which each of these predicates is first said of this Person. Thus God is said to have died on the cross because of the humanity He assumed. Since He was given the name Jesus insofar as he assumed this humanity, the statement ‘God died on the cross,’ is reduced to the statement ‘Jesus died on the cross,’ or ‘Christ died on the cross.’

8. In the most proper sense Jesus is anointed insofar as He is elevated to this office by grace. In this sense His grace is the oil that anoints Him priest, prophet, and king. The fullness of grace by which He is eminently holy and from which charity, the infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost arise in Him makes Him fit for the work by which He will restore all things to the Father.⁷ In this manner He is anointed and constituted Christ by the Holy Spirit, who rests upon Him.⁸

9. Two things are worth noting here. First is that this anointing occurred at the moment of the Incarnation. Second is that from that moment, although His human organs were not yet formed, Christ immediately⁹ used the grace, virtues, and gifts received in this anointing to offer Himself to the Father. He does this with His human intellect. This is taught in the Letter to the Hebrews: ‘Coming into the world, [Christ] says:...Behold, I come...to do your will, O God.’¹⁰

10. Now this grace is nothing other than a share or participation in the divinity.¹¹ By grace the creature is raised above its nature so that it can live the divine life, a life that consists in knowing and loving God Himself. In other words, by grace the creature can do, beginning in time and in a finite manner, what God does from all eternity and infinitely. Thus the grace poured into Jesus’ soul at His Incarnation is a share in the

⁶ Cf. III *Summa Theologiae* Q.16.

⁷ Cf. III *Summa Theologiae* Q.7.

⁸ Isaiah 11:2.

⁹ Cf. III *Summa Theologiae* Q.12, a.2, ad 1.

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:4.

¹¹ 2 Peter 1:4.

same divine life that He lives from all eternity. As God, He possesses this life eternally and in an infinite manner; as man, He possesses it temporally and in a finite manner.¹²

11. In a sense more fundamental, though less proper, Christ is said to be anointed insofar as there is a union in Him of the divine and human natures. So Saint John Damascene teaches,

In His own person He anointed Himself; as God anointing His body with His own divinity, and as Man being anointed. For He is Himself both God and Man. And the divinity is the anointing of the humanity.¹³

Here the divinity itself is conceived as the oil by which Jesus is anointed. The coming together of these two natures in one Person is an anointing of the humanity such that the man Jesus is in truth God.

12. According to this sense, Jesus is not called Christ because of the grace which raises Him to a share in the divine life and thus to a certain office. Rather, He is thus said to be anointed because in His divinity He lives the divine life in its fullness. But this life is lived by the very Person who has become man, namely by Jesus Christ.

13. Now I shall consider what it is for any of us to be 'another Christ'. This is precisely to show how we are conformed to Jesus Himself, understood as Christ in each of these two ways. I shall discuss first how we are conformed to Christ insofar as Jesus is named the Christ according to the grace in His human soul. (14-18)

14. In this sense of 'Christ', one who possesses grace that dwells first in the soul of Jesus Christ can be called 'another Christ'. This occurs insofar as the grace in His soul causes the grace in our souls. Before the Incarnation, grace was infused by God immediately. But afterwards this infusion of grace is mediated by Christ's body and soul. The grace present in His humanity is the instrument through which grace is caused in others.

15. Now it should be noted that this grace does not pass from one to another as if it moved from Christ's soul to ours. Rather, without any loss the grace received in

¹² III *Summa Theologiae* Q.7 a.11.

¹³ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3.3.

Christ from His divinity is the cause of the grace that comes to be in our souls. So the cookie cutter causes the shape of the cookie without any loss of its shape.

16. The grace in our souls is in this manner Christ's grace. The man who possesses this grace now 'looks' like Christ, just as any effect is in its own way 'like' to its cause. For his soul possesses grace that is first in Christ. This is similar to the particular way in which a child can be said to be 'like' its parent. However much any other persons might be like one another, they are not like in this sense, namely that the one who is like has received this quality from the one whom He is like. Hence, in Isaiah, Christ is called 'Everlasting Father' or 'Father of the world to come'.¹⁴

17. Further, note well that although this likeness to Christ is a likeness to Him insofar as He is a man who possesses grace, it is a likeness to the Person of Christ. For the Person, rather than His human nature,¹⁵ possesses this grace, although He possesses the grace in His nature.

18. This manner of being another Christ is perhaps most apparent in Christian suffering. For Christ's grace pertains to the passion and death by which He restored all things to His Father. Thus we become most conformed to Him in obedience and suffering. But such conformity is also achieved in an eminent manner through our sacramental union with Him at Holy Mass, where we unite our wills to His will to offer Himself on the Cross.

19. Now we are also other Christs insofar as Christ signifies the union of the divine and human natures in the one Person of the Word, that is, the divinity anointing the humanity. For in each Christian is found the human nature by which he is constituted a person and a likeness of the divine nature, namely grace. The Christian possesses his human nature essentially and the divine nature only by similitude and participation. Yet such a possession of these two natures makes the Christian like to one divine Person, the Word, who has both the divine nature and a human nature

¹⁴ Isaiah 9:6 (5).

¹⁵ If the nature were to possess this grace, we would all have the same grace that Christ himself possesses.

essentially. Although grace absolutely considered makes us like God, grace united to a human nature makes us like the Second Person in whom a human nature is united to the divine nature.

20. From this it follows that, just as through his human nature each man is a brother, that is, a relative, to the Person of the Word insofar as He is the Son of man, through grace any Christian is a brother to this Person insofar as He is the Son of God. Further, just as the divine nature is essential to Christ and He is therefore a natural Son to the Father, so the share in the divine nature given to the Christian establishes him as an adopted son of God, indeed an adopted son of God the Father.

Note 2. The natural relation to a divine Person mentioned here is not sufficient as a foundation of beatitude or glory. Nonetheless, great dignity accrues to the human race through this brotherhood. The most obvious effects are the resurrection of the body and thus the immortality of the whole man, over and above the immortality natural to the soul alone. These are common not only to the blessed, but to all mankind.

Note 3. One must recognize in the Blessed Virgin not only the adoptive relations that follow grace but also the natural relation by which she is the Mother of God. This relation to the divine Person of Christ is the foundation of her Motherhood to us. For she obediently willed to bear the incarnate Word as the first of many brothers.

21. As with the first sense of the name Christ, so according to this second, we are conformed in particular to one divine Person. Neither the Father nor the Holy Ghost possesses both the divine and human nature. Let me dwell upon this point. God knows all creatures through His own essence. He knows these creatures insofar as they are like this essence. While He knows these creatures in His Word, he does not know them as a likeness to the Word, but to His essence. But He knows each Christian, insofar as He is a Christian, as a likeness of this Word. He knows the Christian as like a divine Person according to His distinction from the other divine Persons.

22. Thus our share in the divine life must be conformed to His 'manner' of possessing this life. Some attention should therefore be paid to how the Word has the divine life. Since God is a spiritual being, His life consists in knowing and loving and

precisely in such operations by which He brings forth His Word and His Spirit.¹⁶ So I will divide my brief comments on the Word's divine life according to these operations.

23. Of course, the Word possesses the divine life with such fullness that He is the divine life and the divine essence itself. Yet He is distinct from the Father insofar as He proceeds as the Father's Word and therefore expresses the Father. Any word is called a word insofar as it manifests or expresses something. As Saint John reveals, Jesus is God's Word. He expresses therefore what God knows, which is Himself. So Saint John also teaches: 'No man has seen God. The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has told of Him.'¹⁷

24. Now He tells of the Father or expresses Him in two ways: insofar as the Father is God and insofar as the Father is Father. For the Word possesses the divine nature by which He expresses the Father's divine nature. Thus He expresses the Father's substance and 'tells' what He is. But He possesses this nature as *from* the Father. Insofar as the Word is God *from* God, He manifests God as *that from which* He possess the divine nature, that is, He manifests God as Father. For one cannot understand that one is from another unless one understands that one is 'from' and the other is 'that from which'.

25. Further, the Word also expresses both Himself and the Holy Ghost,¹⁸ though this cannot be shown here except in outline. Being the divine essence, He manifests the substance of each Person. But He also expresses Himself as Word precisely insofar as He is *from* the Father. And He expresses the Holy Spirit insofar as with the Father He breathes forth this Spirit.

26. The Word, therefore, from all eternity knows God and each divine Person and manifests within the Trinity this supreme truth of Three Persons in one God. But this manifestation surpasses all creation. God manifests this truth to creatures through the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ.

¹⁶ Cf. I *Summa Theologiae* Q.27.

¹⁷ John 1:18.

¹⁸ Cf. I *Summa Theologiae* Q.34, a.1, ad 3.

27. The same Jesus Christ subordinated every operation of His intellect and will to His divine intellect and will. Every thought was brought forth from His human mind with the most perfect conformity to His eternal expression of the divine nature and the divine Person. Thus the worship offered by Jesus to the Father, and preeminently the worship offered on the Cross, is united to His eternal Personal manifestation of the same Father. Thus Christ does not merely offer God worship on behalf of all creation. Since His very Person is the expression of the Father, He offers to the Father the worship of God precisely insofar as God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

28. As other Christs, we offer the same worship that He offered on the Cross, the worship He has offered since His incarnation, although made public and complete on the Cross. In us this worship proceeds through the faith by which we share the divine knowledge. We do not now see His eternal expression of the Trinity. At present we are joined by *faith* to His worship of God and to its foundation, His eternal knowledge of the Father. Thus through faith we worship God with a real union to God's inner life.

29. Now the Catholic faith also teaches that God is love, a subsisting act of love, and that in this act a Spirit or impulse of love proceeds.¹⁹ This Spirit does not proceed outside the divine essence, but within the divine essence from the Persons of the Father and the Son. This Spirit of love proceeds from the Father through the Son, and we can say that this proceeding love is the Son's love for the Father and the Father's love for the Son.

30. In Catholic worship, therefore, the conformity to Christ by which each of us is another Christ unites the needy movements of our intellect and will not only to the Son's eternal expression of the Father, but also to His proceeding love for that Father. Insofar as each of us is another Christ, our acts of faith, hope, and love are joined to Christ's love of His Father in the Holy Spirit. We are not joined to God as other Spirits, but as adopted sons who share in the natural Son's love for His Father. This worship draws us so intimately within the divine essence that even now in faith our created

¹⁹ Cf. I *Summa Theologiae* Q.27, a.3.

operations are united dynamically to the processions of the Word and Spirit from God's uncreated operations. We love God with a charity that conforms us to the Holy Ghost and we meditate upon His interior life, however poorly, with a wisdom that conforms us to His Son.²⁰ Thus our worship is truly a worship of the Father in His Spirit and in His Truth.

31. Now this Spirit is also the Father's love of the Son. Just as we share in the Son's love of His Father, so we share in the Father's love for the Son. But as we are conformed to the Son, by this share of that love we ourselves are loved. Here I cannot overemphasize. This is not merely a greater share in God's love for creatures that have some likeness to His essence. Such love has its effects outside the essence in some created perfection in the creature. Rather, by our conformity to Jesus Christ, we are loved through the personal love of the Father for His Son. This love draws us into union with God's inner life.

32. At present we cannot see how we have entered into the divine life. For we do not yet see God. We must believe. At times one may 'feel' that he loves God or that God love him. At other times one may feel nothing. Sometimes these feelings correspond to the movements of the intellect and will. Sometimes they are delusions. Thus Saint John of the Cross teaches us to act only through faith in God's promises. We have utter certainty that He wills to draw us into His life as His adopted sons. We ourselves must *will* to be such sons, we must *will* to be each another Christ, so that one day we may each hear the Father say, 'This is my beloved son.'

²⁰ Cf. I *Summa Theologiae* Q.43, aa.5-6.