

“How did Jesus think of himself on the eve of the Last Supper in AD 30?”

When I set this question, I remarked that I would be better pleased with quotation from the OT (i.e., the Scriptures *Jesus* knew as God’s Word)¹ than with quotes from the NT. At your worst (and some of it was very poor) you have been quoting principally from the Christological Councils up to 450 AD, and even the Catechism of 1994.

I see no reason to think that Jesus of Nazareth consulted such sources in reaching his self-understanding. The reason why I mentioned AD 30 and the eve of the Last Supper was precisely so that they might be excluded from your consideration.

Let me emphasise something I’ve already said to you:

God does not think in human language

The consecration of forms of human words as “God’s Word” does not imply that God has chosen to express himself so (as one would, say, to no-one in particular, in the bath). He is addressing himself to human ears of a particular time and place by means of an individual human author. The *words* are those of the author. *The Word* is the Word of God. In order to “hear” the Word of God, you have to take those variables into account, and to transcend them.

You will have discovered that the designation of Jesus as “God” or “divine” does not pack the pages of the New Testament. You may well wonder why not, since it is not only fairly frequent in the Church documents you have been quoting, but is actually their principal content. The aim of the exercise is really to assess whether you can present a good rationale for the idea that Jesus – even within the sanctuary of his own mind and heart – might have used such terms for *himself*. To ask that question means examining what we know of the Jewish mind at the time (or at any time) and to watch the way in which the word “God” is used. The question you next progress to, is whether it is humanly possible for one who uses the word “God” at that time and place ever to think, *I am God*. If you’ve got as far as asking yourself that, well done.

The majority of you have made a fair attempt to examine these questions honestly. Some of you have not really got hold of the point. You can’t treat the question, *Is He God?* as if it were the question *Is He Jewish?* or *Is He An Old Age Pensioner?* If this man is divine, it means a wholesale revolution of understanding, since a major component of the concept of divinity is “not human”. In almost every detail the category “divine” excludes the category “human” in Jewish thought; you may quote *the image and likeness of God* in Genesis, or speak about the gift of Wisdom in that section of the Writings; but listen to St Paul in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, and you will soon forsake the fond notion that, after all, God and Man are pretty close to each other. We have “modern” “democratic” notions like this in our minds, and they are not only blasphemous but dangerous to our hope of salvation. They lead to a presumptuous complacency that robs us of the urgency of Christian faith. They are suburban and unholy, reducing to our dimensions the Eternal God. They are present in our vulgar “religious” art and music, in our compromised morality, in our negligent, self-centred prayer, in our self-deceived “spiritual” voyages into brainwashing and aromatherapy.

¹ At least one of you suggests that Jesus already knew, not only what was going to happen to him in AD 30, but the details of the way the Evangelists would write it down sixty years later.

Amid this torrent of invective, you may be asking, has Father anything positive to offer about the question he has posed, or is he just overdue for his next holiday?

I suggest that you read the following parts of the NT that speak of the Incarnation:

- Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-18; 4:14 - 5:9
- Philippians 2:5-11
- Luke 2:12; cf Isaiah 1:3, and Wisdom 7:1-6

You will see here the positive value set by the Scripture on the true humanity of Jesus. Like our life, Jesus' life is a *process* or *progression*. Like Solomon, he enters the world as we do, and learns wisdom as we do. He does not pass through our midst as a disguised prince in a fairy-story. For this process to run to its completion Jesus must also die as we die. Until he lies in the grave he will not complete his task of *becoming* human. He *learns obedience through sufferings*. This process is not easy or comfortable, but punctuated by prayer, *aloud and in silent tears*. Any notion of his possessing divine knowledge in any sense that would make this process unnecessary or nonsensical must be resisted. If you consult the line in Gothick print above, you may conjecture that *the thoughts of Jesus of Nazareth*, as they passed tumultuously through his fevered brain in the Garden of the Agony, are of a different kind from *the thought of God*, which is single and simple, limitless and eternal. *Who has known the mind of God?* is a correct question for us to ask. But the thoughts of Jesus the man, at this juncture of his life, are and have always been the object of our meditation; and the fruits of this may easily be seen by reading

- John 13 – 17

which is a Scriptural (and thus overwhelmingly authoritative) attempt to answer the question posed in your essay. It tells us what he thought of his disciples, and their future, about the Church he was leaving, and the Spirit that would only come to it if he goes; it tells you his thoughts about the world outside the Church, and about his departure, and its meaning – in terms of his personal future with the Father. Now, you may examine those chapters, and decide that it is hugely influenced by the theologising of two or three generations of Christian proclamation. But don't say that it is some kind of impiety to try to imagine the state of mind of Jesus on the eve of his death. It is actually the most vital task for all of us to perform, and it is not accomplished by quoting lines from Catechisms.

