

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. V.—THE LIMITATION OF CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE.

CONSIDERABLE attention has been directed during the last few years to the question as to whether there was or was not any limitation of our Blessed Lord's knowledge during His humiliation, and owing to His incarnation. The question has naturally—indeed, inevitably—come into prominence in connection with what is called the “higher criticism” of the Old Testament Scriptures, on which the seal of our Lord's authority is so plainly and so frequently set. For when “Christus Comprobator” is appealed to against the decisions of the “higher criticism,” too many of the “higher critics” have shown themselves prepared to make light of His authority on the ground that, “in the days of His flesh,” at any rate, He was not omniscient, therefore did not know everything; and, therefore—they go on to say—may have been mistaken in His statements concerning, and His allusions to, the Scriptures. This is, of course, resented indignantly by those who hold that our Lord was as omniscient during “the days of His flesh” as He was before His incarnation, and from all eternity; still more so by those who maintain that it was, and is, impossible for Him to lay aside His omniscience without at the same time laying aside His essential Godhead—which all who believe in His Godhead at all must hold to be absolutely impossible. Such indignation and resentment, however, are of little force with those against whom they are directed. For some of them, alas! are quite ready to let the Godhead of the Incarnate Word go by the board along with His omniscience while on earth; and still more of them are quite ready with the reply: “You are simply wrong in thus arguing from our Lord's Godhead, or from His omniscience before His incarnation, to His omniscience during ‘the days of His flesh.’ And, besides, your argument to that effect comes too late in the day to have any weight. You must settle that question with those pillars of the Church and standard-bearers of orthodoxy who in all ages of the Christian Church have held with us and differed with you upon it.”

The fact is that the question as to our Lord's omniscience while on earth is one that can only be debated with any propriety between those who are firm believers in His essential Godhead and in His omniscience before He came into the world. That orthodox Christians are committed to His omniscience by their creeds and by the Scriptures as interpreted and understood by them has, indeed, been often maintained by Unitarian controversialists; but it has been as often denied, and with good effect, by their orthodox opponents. It

is only by an unfortunate accident that it has been mixed up with the "higher criticism" discussions of late years. It is as if, with regard to New Testament criticism, some had maintained the omniscience of its writers or the infallibility of the Council of Carthage, and had argued from these premises to the certain truth of every New Testament statement. Such might have considered the cause of the New Testament endangered or betrayed by the abandonment of those premises by its defenders. Still, its best defenders would have been found among those who most unhesitatingly did abandon them, or, rather, who never adopted them. So with regard to Old Testament criticism, the admission that our Lord was not omniscient in the days of His flesh may be deplored by some as a betrayal of the cause of Old Testament truth; but we believe that cause is safer in the hands of those who make that admission than in the hands of those who hamper themselves and their cause with the maintenance of an unnecessary and untenable opinion—with the brandishing of a controversial weapon that is utterly useless, as we have shown, against the "higher criticism." Some of the strongest statements against our Lord's omniscience while on earth—such as we shall presently put before our readers—have been made by the staunchest defenders of His authority and of Holy Scripture as under the sanction of His authority, and while defending the Old Testament from rationalistic attacks on its veracity; while, at the same time, what such have thus maintained in the arena of controversy has been held and taught by them and others as what they have learned from the Scriptures to be, indeed, an important and precious part of the great truth of the incarnation of the Son of God.

For instance, it was when writing his essay in "Aids to Faith" on "Scripture and its Interpretation," against the rationalism of the once notorious "Essays and Reviews," that Bishop Ellicott, the learned and venerated Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, wrote as follows in reference to our Lord's words in Mark xiii. 32 :

What we instinctively surmise as we read the passage, the analogy of Scripture and Faith assures us of—that when the Lord thus spake to His four chosen Apostles He does virtually assure us that He was so truly man, that when He assumed that nature He assumed it with all its limitations, and that in that nature He vouchsafed to know not what as God He had known from everlasting. Why are we to be deterred from this ancient interpretation? why are we to obelize the words with Ambrose, or regard them as a conventional statement with Augustine, when they admit of an explanation so simple, and so consonant with all that we are told of Him who vouchsafed, not only to be incarnate, but to increase in wisdom, and to be a veritable sharer in all the sinless imperfections of humanity? ("Aids to Faith," p. 445).

So also the learned Bishop Harold Browne, in "Pentateuch and Elohistic Psalms," p. 13, while opposing the rationalistic error that would impute error to our Lord because of His non-omniscience, says as follows :

Ignorance does not of necessity involve error. Of course in *our* present state of being, and with our propensity to lean on our wisdom, ignorance is extremely likely to lead to error. But ignorance is not error ; and there is not one word in the Bible which could lead us to suppose that our Blessed Lord was liable to error in any sense of the word or in any department of knowledge. I do not say that we have any distinct statements to the contrary, but there is nothing like a hint that there was any such liability, whereas His other human infirmities—weakness, weariness, sorrow, fear, suffering, temptation, ignorance—all these are put forward prominently, and many of them frequently.

These words, we may remark, are quoted by the late Canon Liddon in support of his assertion that "plainly enough, a limitation of knowledge is one thing, and infallibility is another." "Infallibility does not imply omniscience, any more than limited knowledge implies error" ("Lectures on our Lord's Divinity," pp. 701, 702). Canon Liddon, in the eighth of his valuable lectures, while he opposes the notion that there was ever any limitation of our Lord's knowledge, honestly supplies his readers with much help against his own contention.

Once more, it was in a charge delivered in 1863, in which he deals with the heterodoxy of Bishop Colenso, and especially with his denial of our Lord's infallibility, that the great and eminent Dr. O'Brien, Bishop of Ossory—"clarum et venerabile nomen"—wrote as follows about the Incarnate Son, and in reference to His words in Mark xiii. 32 :

Not only was all His heavenly glory laid by when He tabernacled in the flesh, but all His infinite attributes and powers seem for the time to have been in abeyance, so to speak. And by this is meant something more than that the manifestation and exercise of them were suspended. That is undoubtedly true, but it seems to fall far short of the whole truth. It appears that there was not merely a voluntary suspension of the exercise of them, but a voluntary renunciation of the capacity of exercising them, for the time. This involves no change of His essence or nature ; and no destruction of His Divine powers, as if they had ceased to exist, or loss of them, so that they could not be resumed. Finite beings often undergo such a suspension involuntarily, without its leading to any such consequences.

Here the Bishop gives, in a note, a quotation from Butler's "Analogy," Part I., ch. i., about the "suspension of our living powers." In the text he goes on to say :

And it can make no difference in this respect, that in the Infinite Being it is undergone by an act of His own will.

Nor are the wonderful works which were then wrought by Him at all at variance with this view of the state of the Incarnate Word. Infinitely as they transcended the natural powers of man, they did not go beyond the

powers which may be supernaturally bestowed upon man. For He Himself declares that the Apostles should not only do such works as He had done, but *greater works*. There is nothing, therefore, in their nature or their degree, to determine whether they were wrought by the proper power of the Divine Word, or by power bestowed upon the Incarnate Word. But we are not left without ample means of deciding the question.

It is not surprising that it should be generally thought that the miraculous power which was displayed by the Redeemer was possessed and exercised by Him as an essential property of the Divine element in His constitution. This, indeed, would be the conclusion to which probably everyone would come who ventured to speculate on this great mystery apart from Scripture. But Scripture gives a very different view of the nature and effects of the Incarnation. It seems distinctly to teach us that when the everlasting Son condescended to take our nature upon Him, He came, not outwardly only, but in truth, into a new relation to the Father, in which He was really His *messenger* and His *servant*—dependent upon the Father for everything, and deriving from Him directly everything that He needed for His work. All this, indeed, seems to be most distinctly declared by Himself.

Then follow quotations of the following texts, all from St. John's Gospel—John v. 19, 30; vii. 16; viii. 26, 28; xiv. 10, 24; and some remarks upon them, including the following:

They testify as directly to the fact that the state of the Son in the flesh was one of absolute and entire dependence upon the Father, both for Divine knowledge and Divine power. . . . All these passages bear witness, directly and indirectly, to the reality and depth of the humiliation of the Blessed Lord when actually in the form of man.

But there is another (Phil. ii. 6, 7), which seems to unveil to us what was done in the unseen world to prepare Him for the state to which He was about to descend. In it He seems to be shown to us when in the form of God, divesting Himself of all that was incompatible with the state of humiliation to which He was about to descend, not holding tenaciously the equality with God which He enjoyed, but letting it go, *emptying Himself*. It is one of the results of this wonderful process which the text that I have been reviewing (Mark xiii. 32) presents to us. And wonderful as the process is, and not forgetting even the intense energy of the expression *ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε* ("emptied Himself"), do not the results accord with it? Do not the passages to which I have before referred exhibit Him as actually *emptied*—emptied of His Divine glory, of His Divine power, and of His Divine omniscience, and receiving back from His Heavenly Father what He had laid by, in such measure as was needed for His work while it was going on—only doing what He was commanded and enabled to do, and only teaching what He was taught and commanded to teach?

Twelve years before these well-weighed and weighty words were spoken, the Bishop had said, in preaching the annual sermon at St. Bride's before the Church Missionary Society, in 1851:

That the Son emptied Himself of all that was incompatible with humiliation: that He laid His glory and His power by, becoming the messenger and servant of His Father.

No apology will surely be needed for the length of our quotation from this great divine. What we have quoted from

his charge so fully and so exactly expresses our own belief on the subject that it will supersede the necessity of any further statement of what we hold.

The distinction which is insisted on above by Bishop Browne and Canon Liddon between ignorance and error, between omniscience and infallibility, is not only very obvious, but most important. It is specially so when "higher critics" and others argue from our Lord's ignorance to His fallibility, and forthwith ascribe error in teaching to Him. But, further, not only is it true that "ignorance does not of necessity involve error," it is also true that error on the part of our Lord is excluded, and His infallibility guaranteed to us, by the conditions under which He acted as our Teacher. As the Father's servant and messenger He taught only "what He was taught and commanded to teach." As the Great Prophet of God that was to come into the world, with the Holy Spirit given Him without measure, He was infallible in all He taught. That is obviously all that is needed for opposition to the contentions of the "higher critics," so far as His authority as a teacher is concerned. Omniscience is not needed, except as the source in God from which "He was taught and commanded to teach." His infallibility can be maintained abundantly. His omniscience during the days of His flesh cannot. It has been given up past recall by too many of our standard-bearers, and, according to them, by our Lord Himself and His Apostles. On what ground do we receive and believe the teachings of Isaiah, of Matthew, John, Peter and Paul? Not because we believe they were omniscient, but because we believe they were inspired, and so taught of God. So we sit at the feet of Jesus as the great Prophet of God, and believe what He taught as the teaching of God Himself by His Son. Whatsoever He heard from the Father He made known to His disciples. Whatsoever He made known to His disciples He had heard from the Father. Some things—one thing at any rate, the day and hour of His second coming—He had not heard from the Father, and so did not make known unto us.

Two articles dealing with this subject from the pen of the Rev. F. Tilney Bassett have appeared in the course of this year in the *CHURCHMAN*: one on "Christ's Knowledge," in January; the other on "Mark xiii. 32," in August. They are both directed against the "limitation theory." The author states (p. 171) that our Lord "remained all that He was before His incarnation, in essence, in attributes, and powers, otherwise He would have ceased to be Divine—to be God." We do not wonder that he elsewhere brands the theory itself as a "strange heresy" (p. 170); for a "heresy" it would be indeed, of the strangest kind, and of the deepest dye, if what Mr. Bassett says of it, and

against it, were true. It is some relief to our minds, however, when we find ourselves so judged by Mr. Bassett, to find Bishops Ellicott, Browne and O'Brien, as we have shown, and Richard Hooker, Bishop Bull, Bishop Lightfoot and Canon Girdlestone, as we shall show later on—to say nothing of Drs. Dorner and Pressensé, Dean Alford and Dean Plumptre, and a host of other thoughtful divines hitherto considered strictly orthodox—in the same condemnation with ourselves. We venture to think it more probable that Mr. Bassett is mistaken in his estimate of the “limitation theory” and of those who hold it, than that those we have mentioned and alluded to have held, along with the limitation theory, the “strange heresy” that our Lord “ceased to be Divine—to be God,” “was no longer God, but only a man,” when He became man.

It is remarkable that in all Mr. Bassett's treatment of “Christ's knowledge” in his two CHURCHMAN articles he never once alludes to any enlightenment of Him by the Holy Spirit or by the Father during His earthly ministry. He never once alludes to Him as “that Prophet that should come into the world,” or as a Prophet at all. Indeed, his conviction that “perfect and eternal knowledge, being a Divine attribute, was His in all its fulness” (p. 171), from the cradle to the grave, seems to us to leave no room for any such enlightenment, or for His having ever been a Prophet of God at all. Why should the Holy Spirit have come upon Him at His baptism, and anointed Him “with power” to do and to teach, as He did, if He had all that the Holy Spirit could possibly have conferred upon Him before, as well as after, His baptism? In accordance with this omission on the part of Mr. Bassett, he naturally, but most illogically, makes every instance of “supernatural knowledge” in our Lord a proof that He was there and then omniscient by virtue of His Godhead. It was so, as Mr. Bassett thinks, when He was in the midst of the doctors in the Temple at twelve years of age, “both hearing them and asking them questions,” and when “all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and answers.” So that instead of our having here an instance of the proficiency of His perfect boyhood, especially in His Father's law, it was only an exhibition of the same omniscience as he possessed, according to Mr. Bassett, when He was a babe at His mother's breast. So, too, the fact that “He did certainly possess and exercise on this occasion supernatural knowledge, and that of a most minute and accurate kind” is put at seeming “variance” and as requiring “reconciliation” with His declaration (Matt. xxiv. 36 and Mark. xiii. 32) that He knew neither the day nor the hour of His second coming. “He must of necessity have known the day and hour, the exact particulars of which he had already

disclosed and defined, and so given proof of His omniscience" (p. 179). By the same rule Elisha, as a prophet, knowing and disclosing the circumstances of Gehazi's covetous dealing with Naaman, "gave proof of *his* omniscience"; and so with all the prophets and their "supernatural knowledge."

Of "Christ's knowledge" and the source of it, while He was on earth, Hooker's account is this: that "as the parts, degrees, and offices of that mystical administration did require which he voluntarily undertook, the beams of Deity did in operation always accordingly either restrain or enlarge themselves" (Eccles. Pol., v. 54, 6). "The parts," etc., "of that mystical administration did" not "require" the knowledge of the day and hour of His second advent, "accordingly" the beams of Deity did not "enlarge themselves" to embrace it. In the next section (7) he accounts for the illumination of the powers of Christ's soul by its "inwardness unto God," so that it must "of necessity be endued with knowledge so far forth universal" (as to "be privy unto all things which God worketh") "though *not with infinite knowledge peculiar to Deity itself.*" In these last words Hooker expressly denies omniscience to Christ while on earth.

Bishop Bull's account of the same matter is this: "That, forsooth, the Divine Wisdom impressed its effects on the human mind of Christ in the degree required by particular occasions or emergencies (*pro temporu ratione*), and that Christ, inasmuch as He was Man (*quid Homo fuit*), increased in wisdom (Luke ii. 52), and thus *for the time of His ministry* (*ἀποστολῆς*), *in which he had no need of that knowledge*, could be ignorant of the day of the general judgment, will seem absurd to no sane man." Canon Liddon seems to think that the words we have put in italics are rather strong, and "seem to hint at more than what the text of the New Testament warrants." (See the passage quoted from Bull—Dif. Fid. Nic., ii. 5, 8—by Liddon, Bampton Lectures, p. 700.) This exactly agrees with Hooker as above, and we fear that both Bull and Hooker must take their place among those whom Mr. Bassett condemns so strongly. They seem to be quite with us, unless, indeed, it be an exception that what we prefer to speak of, with Bishop O'Brien and others, as the operation of the Holy Spirit, they speak of as the operation of "the beams of Deity" and "the Divine Wisdom impressing its effects." In either case, it was knowledge communicated by God to the mind or soul of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. C. H. Davis, writing in the *Record* of November 28, 1892, after alluding to a view "of the union of the Divine and Human Nature" in Christ taken by Dean McNeile, goes on to say: "In the 'Discourses on the Humanity and Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ,' by the Rev. C. D.



As to Mark xiii. 32 (and Matt. xxiv. 36), Mr. Bassett once and again insists that it stands alone as "a solitary text" seemingly "at variance with the rest of Scripture testimony" (p. 137), that it is "a text which appears to contradict other texts, many other texts, perhaps all other texts," that it "is certainly isolated," while "the one which affords anything like a parallel only increases the difficulty." "This exceptional utterance, to say the least, seems to be in perfect opposition not only to other texts, but to the whole doctrine of the Christology" (p. 599). All this is an honest and instructive admission of great weakness in Mr. Bassett's position. From our point of view it is simply a mistake. Our Lord's words in Mark xiii. 32 are, to our mind, inconsistent with no other word of His, and with no other word of God about Him. If, to the great relief of Mr. Bassett and others, they were proved to be an interpolation in the Gospels, and never spoken by our Lord, we would miss, indeed, a great and decisive support to our opinion; but our opinion would still stand firm on many other texts of Scripture. There is for us no seeming variance between Mark xiii. 32 and any other text in the whole Bible, or between it and any part of revealed Christology. The only thing at all unique in it is that it answers, just as we would have expected, a question that, however natural on the part of the disciples, went beyond what the Father had seen fit to reveal to the Son, to angels or to men. But if they had asked to be told the exact number of the elect, or the number of people then living on the earth, they would doubtless have met with a very similar answer. What Mr. Bassett considers seemingly "at variance with the rest of Scripture testimony," and "in perfect opposition not only to other texts, but to the whole doctrine of the Christology," is just what Bishop Ellicott considers "the analogy of Scripture and Faith assures us of," and "consonant with all that we are told of Him." It is what Bishop O'Brien considers only "one of the results of the wonderful process" of self-emptying revealed to us in Phil. ii. 6, 7; while all who hold with him as to the meaning of that *κένωσις* of course agree with him here.

---

Maitland, of Brighton, this view is worked out. And Mr. Maitland agreed that the human nature of our Lord was neither strengthened nor instructed by the in-dwelling Godhead beyond any other prophet of the Lord, and that in all His works and teachings He was instructed by the Holy Spirit exactly as any other prophet of the Lord would be. So that upon that view ignorance of the day of His own second coming would be no more extraordinary than St. Paul's ignorance as to whom he had baptized, or of the events that awaited him at Jerusalem (see Mark xiii. 32; 1 Cor. i. 16; Acts xx. 22)." That such was Dean McNeile's view of the matter is the impression of the present writer, who worked with him and under him as curate for four years.

What account does Mr. Bassett give us of Mark xiii. 32, where our Lord expressly declares that He knew not the day and hour of His second coming? We have noticed above how in one place he asserts that "He must of necessity have known the day and hour" which He says He did not know. But we would be sorry to impute to Mr. Bassett the irreverence which *seems*, at any rate, to be involved in this apparently flat contradiction of our Blessed Lord. The question is, then, How does Mr. Bassett understand our Lord's words so as to feel at liberty to speak of them as he does? It is not very easy to answer this question. He seems to give two alternative explanations. One is, so far as we can gather, that the ignorance avowed by the Lord belonged to Him as the Son from all eternity. The Father never revealed the matter in question to the Son, and so the Son never knew it. Mr. Bassett naturally enough anticipates the objection that thus "the omniscience of the Son is invaded." So he amends his statement and materially alters his ground by saying: "The attribute"—of omniscience, we suppose—"is not here limited, but authority is not delegated to disclose a certain event." "If not 'said' by the Father, it is not formulated by the Son, and consequently finds no divulgence among angels in heaven or mankind upon earth. In any case, the mystery pertains to the Divine Person, and not to the humanity" (pp. 597, 598). But we submit that the question is about knowing a thing or not knowing it, and that not knowing a thing is clearly an invasion—or, rather, a negation—of omniscience; that not knowing an event is one thing, liberty not being given to disclose or divulge that event is another thing. It is the former, not the latter, that our Lord asserts of Himself. In case, however, of this "explanation appearing unsatisfactory or involved in too dense a cloud of mystery"—and we confess it appears all that, and even worse, to us—Mr. Bassett provides us with another: "The interpretation which meets the wants of the general reader seems to be that this secret was not in the commission intrusted to our Lord to impart, though," he admits, "the phrase used may be thought to go beyond this," etc. (p. 599).

Besides this, Mr. Bassett suggests, as "not to be set aside without deep consideration," the theory "that our Lord was speaking economically, not with reference to Himself or His own knowledge, but what was suitable to His own disciples and their converts afterwards." We cannot see much difference between these three explanations, except, indeed, that the "economy" employed on earth in the last seems in the first to have been practised from all eternity in heaven. In all three our Blessed Lord is made to say what is not simply and

obviously true, though what He is supposed to have meant by His words could perfectly well have been said by Him or any other teacher in almost as few words. Besides, we cannot help thinking that Mr. Bassett misrepresents some, at least, of the Fathers in imputing to them the *economy* theory which he suggests. Some of them may have used it as he does, making our Lord say what was not really true, but what was "according to the necessities of the case,"—as if there were the slightest conceivable necessity for Him to say what was not, or to refrain from saying what was, strictly and simply true in the matter. To "economize the truth" is used in the present day, as we have sometimes heard, as a somewhat jocose euphemism for what is the very opposite to speaking "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." It makes a very little truth go a very long way. We consider it simply blasphemous to ascribe any such "economy" as that to our Lord; and yet it is hard to distinguish it from what Mr. Bassett—very hesitatingly, we must admit—suggests as a possible and an ancient explanation of our Lord's words. We suspect that where the word "economy" is used in this connection by the Fathers it is used for the most part, if not always, as Canon Liddon shows it was used by Cyril of Alexandria, who, he says, "argues that our Lord's ignorance as man is in keeping with the whole *economy* of the Incarnation. As God, Christ did know the day of judgment; but it were consistent with the law of self-humiliation prescribed by His infinite love that He should assume all the conditions of real humanity, and therefore, with the rest, a limitation of knowledge. There would be no reasonable ground for offence at that which was only a consequence of the Divine Incarnation. You will remark, my brethren, the significance of such a judgment when advanced by this great father, the uncompromising opponent of Nestorian error, the strenuous assertor of the Hypostatic Union, the chief inheritor of all that is most characteristic in the theological mind of St. Athanasius. It is, of course, true that a different belief was already widely received within the Church; it is enough to point to the 'retractation' of Leporius, to which St. Augustine was one of the subscribing bishops. But although a contrary judgment subsequently predominated in the West, it is certain that the leading opponents of Arianism did not shrink from recognising a limitation of knowledge in Christ's human soul, and that they appealed to His own words as a warrant for doing so."

In a note to this Liddon, after quoting Cyril as referring to the *οικονομία*, and as speaking of "Christ's saying that He did not know on our account," and of His professing not to know

"humanly," goes on to say: "But this language does not amount to saying that Christ really did know, as man, while for reasons of His own, which were connected with His love and *φιλαυθροπία*, He said He knew not [which is just what Mr. Bassett means by the "economy"]. St. Cyril's mind appears to be that our Lord did know as God, but in His love He assumed all that belongs to real manhood, and therefore actual limitation of knowledge. The word *οικονομία* does not seem to mean here simply a gracious or wise arrangement, but the Incarnation, considered as involving Christ's submission to human limitations. The Latin translator renders it 'administrationi sive Incarnationi.'<sup>1</sup> In this sense we adopt the "economical" explanation of Mark xiii. 32. If only we could think that Cyril meant by "as God" before the Incarnation, and by "as man" "in the days of His flesh," and so kept clear of the Nestorianism of saying that He knew as God and did not know as man at one and the same time, we would claim him as perfectly agreeing with us, as, in any case, he comes very near to doing.

There is one point on which we are quite of one mind with Mr. Bassett. In his August article he has set himself to prove that "*the Son* is always equivalent to the *Son of God*, and not to the *Son of man* as such; that "*ὁ υἱός*, the Son, when found absolutely and alone, without any qualifying adjunct, is never predicated of the human nature of our Lord as such, but always of the original Divine personality." We do not quite like the way it is put in this last sentence. Still we say: Be it so. Let the ground be thus cut for ever from under their feet on which nine-tenths of those who agree with Mr. Bassett take their stand, in denying that there was any real limitation of our Lord's knowledge, and maintaining that He was omniscient, and so knew everything, including what He said He did not know. Liddon maintains that if there was any real ignorance of anything in our Lord it must have been in His human soul. He asserts that this was the belief of Athanasius, of Cyril of Alexandria, and of Irenæus.<sup>2</sup> Certainly we have heard it again and again in these days from Mr. Bassett's side

<sup>1</sup> The word "economy" is used by Hooker in much the same sense when speaking of "the exigence of that *economy* or service for which it pleased Him in love and mercy to be made man" (Ecl. Pol., v. 54, 6).

<sup>2</sup> He quotes Irenæus as rebuking "the intellectual self-assertion of his own Gnostic contemporaries" by reminding them how "the Lord, the very Son of God," confessed His ignorance of that day and hour. "The Son was not ashamed to refer the knowledge of that day and hour to the Father, but said what is true." But his proof that Irenæus at the same time "attributes omniscience to the Divine Nature of Christ in the

of this controversy, that He knew as God and knew not as man. Men are warned off this ground as distinctly Nestorian; but unless they are prepared to resort to the *economy* theory in its worst form, they must either remain on it or else come over to us. To believe that the one Person—even the God-man Himself—could really know a thing and not know it at one and the same time is, we can well believe, a tremendous difficulty. To us it is an impossibility. To divide the knowing it and the not knowing it between the two natures of the God-man is the common refuge from the difficulty. Mr. Bassett drives men out of it in the most relentless manner. We cannot but say he is right in so doing. But then, curiously enough, he says: "If this is proved," as we believe it is, "the whole argument for the limitation theory, as based upon this passage (Mark xiii. 32), crumbles to pieces." We cannot see it. We refer him to those theologians whom we have quoted—to Bishop O'Brien, for instance, as fullest and clearest—as to what the limitation theory is, how clear it stands of the Nestorianism which he implicitly condemns, and how far it keeps from that refuge from which he has expelled his friends, as well as from any of those equally objectionable resorts which he recommends to them instead. What Mr. Bassett has proved about  $\delta \nu\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$  in Mark xiii. 32 and elsewhere, as meaning the Son of God rather than the Son of man, is altogether on our side, and we thank him for the trouble he has taken in the matter.

We ought to notice what Mr. Bassett urges (p. 179) on the subject of Phil. ii. 7, 8, and the *κενώσις* there spoken of. He tells us that it was of "the *form* (*μορφή*) of God" that "Christ divested Himself;" which expression he naturally prefers to "emptied Himself," which is certainly the more exact and literal rendering of  $\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omega\sigma\epsilon$ . Then he explains that "*μορφή* (*form*) is the *recognisable* side of essential or intrinsic reality—that which makes it knowable to us. It must, therefore, be the external and intelligible tokens of the Deity of which the Lord divested Himself." Now, Bishop Lightfoot in his "Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians" gives us an exhaustive and interesting discussion on the meaning of *μορφή* in this passage as compared with *σχῆμα*, and the result he leads us to is the very opposite of Mr. Bassett's *dictum* on the subject. He says: "*μορφή* implies not the external accidents, but the essential attributes" (p. 108). "It remains,

---

clearest terms," consists in his "appeal to His example"—therefore to Him as man, not as God—and in his saying elsewhere: "The Spirit of the Saviour which is in Him searcheth all things, even the deep things of God." But is it not the Holy Ghost that he speaks of there?

then, that *μορφῆ* must apply to the attributes of the God-head." "In the passage under consideration the *μορφῆ* is contrasted with the *σχῆμα*, as that which is intrinsic and essential with that which is accidental and outward" (pp. 131, 132). So that if we put Mr. Bassett's assertion that our Lord divested Himself of the *μορφῆ* along with Bishop Lightfoot's explanation of what the *μορφῆ* is, we are landed in just what Mr. Bassett (wrongly, of course) affirms to be the real meaning of the "limitation theory," that Christ at His Incarnation ceased to be God. We object to this, as going far beyond the truth in our direction, and, preferring the Bishop's explanation of the *μορφῆ* to Mr. Bassett's, we reject Mr. Bassett's *dictum* that the *κενῶσις* refers to the *μορφῆ*. As to what He emptied Himself of, we refer our readers to Bishop O'Brien, as above quoted, and to Bishop Lightfoot's briefer statement: "He divested Himself, not of His Divine nature, for this was impossible, but of the glories, the prerogatives of Deity," among which, surely, omniscience and omnipotence are chief. Canon Girdlestone, though hesitating as to the "omniscience," for reasons very different from Mr. Bassett's, and which we confess seem to us to have little weight, agrees with us as to the "omnipotence," and thereby really gives up the whole point. "His *might* and majesty," he says, "were laid aside" (*Record*, January 22, 1892, p. 117). Unless "might" is no "prerogative" of "Almighty God," Canon Girdlestone must take his place with Bishop O'Brien and Bishop Ellicott and others whom Mr. Bassett condemns as guilty of the "heresy" of making Christ cease to be God when He became man.

In drawing this article to a close we must notice very briefly one argument against our position which has been used by Mr. Bassett and others. We hold that whatever our Lord "emptied Himself" of at His Incarnation was restored to Him again and for ever at His glorification; and that His glorification began at His resurrection. But His words after His resurrection in Acts i. 7, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" — "set within [or "appointed by," *marg.*] His own authority" (R.V.)—are quoted against this part of our position as being "the same reply, to all intents and purposes, as" (*CHURCHMAN*, p. 592) He made in Mark xiii. 32 before His resurrection. "So we may conclude that neither before nor after His resurrection . . . did our Lord know the day or the hour of the second advent" (pp. 592, 593). Mr. Bassett seems to conclude that this is the Scripture account of the matter as given in Mark xiii. 32 and Acts i. 7. But he is very far from accepting it as true, whatever our Lord says in either passage or in both. We, for our part, believe our Lord's words in both

passages, but we deny the identity of meaning which Mr. Bassett would force upon them. We adopt what is said on both passages by the late Dean Alford. Under the former he says: "All attempts to soften or explain away this weighty truth must be resisted; it will not do to say with some commentators" (the *economists*) "'nescit ea nobis,' which is a mere evasion: in the course of humiliation undertaken by the Son, in which He increased in wisdom (Luke ii. 52), learned obedience (Heb. v. 8), uttered desires in prayer (Luke vi. 12, etc.), *this matter was hidden from Him,*" etc. Under Acts i. 7, after quoting Mark xiii. 32, with its "neither the Son, but the Father," he goes on to say: "It may be observed, however, that the same assertion is not made here. . . . *The knowledge of the Son is not in question; only that of the disciples.*"

Again, we would not be understood by our silence to endorse what Mr. Bassett gives as his exposition of Luke ii. 52; viz., that He did not really "increase in wisdom" and "in favour with God," but that, "to men's appreciation, in His mental powers He appeared to grow in wisdom as He gave evidence of His abilities." "The thought is impossible," that "Jesus could really increase in God's favour"; but "the fruits of God's grace and wisdom were ever increasingly manifested," etc. All we will say in reference to this is that what Christ's inspired prophet, St. Luke, says is one thing, and what Mr. Bassett says is another, and that we believe St. Luke. We are not hampered or restrained from believing the full, plain testimony of Scripture about our Blessed Lord by any belief that He was omniscient as He lay in His cradle, and as He was taught at His mother's knee, or possibly at school with His contemporaries; or that He was omnipotent when He prayed for power to do His mighty works, and when "He was crucified in weakness." To our mind, His *κενώσις ἑαυτοῦ*, with all the limitations which it implies, is an important part of the truth of His Incarnation, and is also the key to unlock the manifold difficulties which are obviously felt by many in their endeavours to understand and explain the Scripture record which God hath given us of His Son.

W. T. HOBSON.

St. Barnabas' Vicarage, Douglas,  
August 31, 1892.

