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“FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH” (JOHN 1:14): THE FULLNESS OF
KNOWLEDGE IN CHRIST AND HIS PROGRESSIVE KNOWLEDGE

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER is to give the main lines of a theological accounting for the fullness of knowledge in Christ from the time of his conception. We follow the doctrine of St. Thomas and we take into account some objections which are relatively modern.

The idea of this work comes from an article by Fr. Gilles Mongeau.¹ Even if we take a different position on the subject, we do it in the same spirit as Mongeau, that is to say, trying to offer a systematic articulation that is faithful to the Tradition and the doctrine of the Church and also concerned with faithfully interpreting the whole biblical narrative in our preaching.² In particular, we have in mind Mongeau's question: "If from the beginning [Jesus] has all knowledge, how could he learn, which is such a fundamental part of a genuinely human existence?"³

We try to connect the issue of the knowledge of Christ with the reasons for the Incarnation. The limits of space in this paper do not allow us to give the subjects the extension they deserve but, as we have said, we give only the main lines of our thought.

First, we show that our theological accounting finds support in the Magisterium and in the Bible. Secondly, we try to articulate systematically the reasons for affirming the fullness of human knowledge in Christ and the progression in his acquired knowledge.

I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS IN THE MAGISTERIUM AND IN THE BIBLE

Because our purpose is to show that our thesis is not against Church doctrine but according to it, we use only two magisterial sources, namely the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁴ and the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* of Saint John Paul II.⁵ In addition to the references from the Magisterium, we provide some Scriptural references that may be helpful.

1 Gilles Mongeau S.J., "The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2005): 30–42.

2 *ibid.*, 30, 42.

3 *ibid.*, 31.

4 For the doctrinal authority of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, in *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* (Madrid: EDIDEA, 1993), 8–9. From now quoted as CCC with number. However, the Latin and English quotations in the text are taken from the Vatican website.

5 See John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001.

The section in the *Catechism* on the human knowledge of Christ is found in numbers 472–474. This section is articulated in two parts: in the first part (472), we see the limits and progression of the human knowledge of Christ:

This human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge. As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time. This is why the Son of God could, when he became man, “increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man,” and would even have to inquire for himself about what one in the human condition can learn only from experience. This corresponded to the reality of his voluntary emptying of himself, taking “the form of a slave.”

In the second part (473–474) we find the affirmation of the fullness of knowledge in Jesus, a fullness belonging to him in his human nature due to the hypostatic union:

But at the same time, this truly human knowledge of God’s Son expressed the divine life of his person. “The human nature of God’s Son, not by itself but by its union with the Word, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God.”⁶ Such is first of all the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father. The Son in his human knowledge also showed the divine penetration he had into the secret thoughts of human hearts.

By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal. What he admitted to not knowing in this area,⁷ he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal.⁸

6 St. Maximus the Confessor, *Qu. et Dub.* 66, PG 90, 840A.

7 Cf. Mark 13:32.

8 Cf. Acts 1:7

As a general remark, it may be noted that the doctrine is articulated in a very Thomistic way: in fact, the experiential knowledge is mentioned when discussing the limits (472); the reason for the fullness of knowledge is the hypostatic union; and the confutation of the question regarding Mark 13:32 is made with the same text used by St. Thomas, Acts 1:7 (473–474).⁹ Also, the connection between the two sections must be noted. In fact, *Sed eodem tempore* (“At the same time, however”) implies that the limits established earlier (472) are not in opposition to the fullness of knowledge, which is subsequently affirmed (473–474).

Regarding the first part, the reason given for the limitation of Jesus’ human knowledge is the following: *in condicionibus historicis suae in spatio et tempore exercebatur existentiae* (“his existence developed in time and space, in historical conditions”). The reference to historical conditions is, in our view, perfectly coherent with the following mention of experiential knowledge, depending essentially on time and space. The mention of Luke 2:52 is in the middle and not necessarily literally connected; however, if we do connect the three stances, we conclude that Jesus’ knowledge developed in history regarding his experiential knowledge. Ignorance is not mentioned—only learning is mentioned.

It is also interesting to note that the biblical quotations regarding Jesus’ learning and his acquisition of knowledge are questions Jesus addresses to other people.¹⁰ Why did Jesus ask those questions? In our view, just as Jesus wanted to be fed by his parents and to be given water by the Samaritan woman, he wanted us to provide him with the experiential knowledge he could acquire. This is for two reasons: to show us his true humanity (capable of acquiring knowledge) and to give us the opportunity to do good to him.

The second part attributes to the human knowledge of the Incarnate Word a “divine” knowledge and the knowledge of everything (quoting St. Maximus the Confessor), which is explicated in three contents: (1) intimate and immediate knowledge of the Father, (2) inner thoughts of human beings and (3) particular events in the plan of salvation, and this in fullness. The reason for this amazing knowledge is always the hypostatic union. His apparent ignorance in Mark

⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, ST III, q.10, a.2.

¹⁰ Cf. *Mark* 6:38 (“how many loaves do you have?”); 8:27 (“who people say I am?”); *John* 11:34 (“Where have you laid him?”); etc.

13:32 is balanced with the affirmation of not having the mission of revealing “the day and the hour” (Acts 1:7). This is the same solution given by St. Thomas in the *emphSumma* (cf. ST III, q.10, a.2).

Other texts in the *Catechism* refer to the extension of the knowledge of Christ. Christ wills “humanly. . . what He himself with the Father and the Holy Spirit had divinely decided for our salvation,”¹¹ and so he knows these things. This knowledge embraces his whole life:

Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us: “The Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).¹²

From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father’s plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission.¹³

The desire to embrace his Father’s plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus’ whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation.¹⁴

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II writes a beautiful contemplation of the face of Jesus (nn. 16–28) from which we want to extract a few remarks. In n. 24, in which the Pope deals directly with the question of the self-consciousness of Jesus (*conscientia sui ipsius*), he affirms four times an absolute certainty on Jesus’ part regarding his own identity, beginning with the text of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:49). The Pope also underlines strongly (at least twice) the Church’s certainty regarding this

¹¹ “Humane [...] quidquid Ipse cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto pro nostra salute divine deciderat,” (CCC 475).

¹² “Iesus in vita Sua, in agonia Sua in Suaque passione nos cognovit et amavit omnes et singulos atque pro unoquoque nostrum Se tradidit: Filius Dei ‘dilexit me et tradidit Semetipsum pro me’ (Gal 2:20),” (CCC 478).

¹³ “Filius a primo instanti Incarnationis Suae consilium divinae salutis amplectitur in Sua missione redemptrice,” (CCC 606).

¹⁴ “Hoc optatum amplectendi consilium amoris redemptivi Patris totam Iesu animat vitam, quia Eius passio redemptrix est Incarnationis Eius ratio,” (CCC 607).

The progression in grace of Jesus can be understood as a progressive manifestation: “Filius unicus Patris, tamquam homo in utero Virginis Mariae conceptus, est ‘Christus,’ id est, a Spiritu Sancto unctus, ab initio Suae existentiae humanae, licet Eius manifestatio non nisi progressive deducta fuerit in rem” (CCC 486; cf. also 606, 608 and 610).

doctrine. This text, however, does not say explicitly that *the content* of this certainty is always exactly the same, but most noteworthy are the words he uses when he refers to a progression in this sense:

Although it may be *licit to believe* that, because of the human condition which made him grow “in wisdom, in stature and in grace” (Lk 2:52), his human awareness of his own mystery would also have progressed until the full manifestation of his glorified humanity, it is not licit to doubt that already in his historical existence Jesus was aware of his identity as the Son of God.¹⁵

What is the meaning of “*Although* it may be *licit to believe*”? Is this not a startling phrase? We notice also that the progression of knowledge is connected with the expression (*declarationem*) of the glorified humanity. Moreover, as is clear, the emphasis of this text is the indubitable affirmation of the self-consciousness of Jesus as the Son of God during his earthly life.

Now we draw the reader’s attention to some biblical texts that will be important for the theological articulation which follows.

“Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me’” (Heb 10:5). We consider this text very important, because the *Catechism* relates it directly to the mystery of the Incarnation¹⁶ and speaks about a clear knowledge of the mission for which Jesus has been sent.¹⁷ If we add that the priesthood of Jesus begins with the Incarnation,¹⁸ we may better understand one of the reasons for affirming the fullness of knowledge since the Incarnation: all of Jesus’ actions are redemptive in the sense that all of them are offered in a priestly way.¹⁹

The justification of John the Baptist in Elizabeth’s womb (Lk 1:39-45) is interpreted by St. Louis Marie de Montfort in his *Treatise of the*

¹⁵ “*Quantumvis credere liceat* propter humanam condicionem quae faciebat ut Iesus cresceret ‘sapientia, aetate et gratia’ (Lk 2:52), humanam etiam mysterii illius conscientiam progressam usque esse ad plenam humanitatis glorificatae declarationem, dubitari non licet iam habuisse sua in historica vita Christum conscientiam suae veritatis, se nempe esse Dei Filium.” John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 24. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Cf. CCC 462.

¹⁷ Cf. CCC 606.

¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday* 1996, March 17m 1996.

¹⁹ ST III, q. 10, a. 2, ad 1. We do not mean to give these actions the place of the paschal mystery for Redemption. Cf. *Ibid.*

True Devotion to Mary as Jesus' first miracle of grace, which is performed through his Blessed Mother.²⁰ John is said to have leapt for joy. Now, Jesus' humanity is the instrument of the divinity for the salvation of humankind. Moreover, God respects the nature of every creature. For this reason, we suggest that the redemptive action of Christ toward John the Baptist implies freedom and, therefore, knowledge. Similar considerations may be made regarding the mysteries of Jesus' childhood: if these mysteries are redemptive, then Jesus needs a knowledge suited for his mission.

For St. Thomas, the most important text for the affirmation of the fullness of grace and knowledge in Jesus is John 1:14. He quotes this text many times in the most important instances of his treatise.²¹ In one of these texts, he explains his exegesis:

The habitual grace pertaining to the spiritual holiness of the man is an effect following the union, according to John i. 14: *We saw His glory, . . . as it were of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*:—by which we are given to understand that because this Man (as a result of the union) is the Only-begotten of the Father, He is full of grace and truth.²²

For John Paul II as well, John 1:14 is the highest expression of the mystery of Jesus.²³ St. Thomas sees in this text that there is a clear connection between being the Only-begotten Son and being full of grace and truth. The same connection was seen earlier in the *Catechism*.²⁴

20 Cf. St. Louis Marie de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary* (Charlotte, NC: St. Benedict Press, 2010), 9.

21 Cf. ST III, q. 34, a.1; ST III, q. 7, a. 10; ST III, q. 10, a. 4; ST III, q. 15, a. 3, ad 1; etc.

22 “Gratia autem habitualis pertinens ad spirituales sanctitatem illius hominis, est effectus quidam consequens unionem, secundum illud Ioan. I, “Vidimus gloriam eius sicut Unigeniti a Patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis”; per quod datur intelligi quod ex hoc ipso quod ille homo est Unigenitus a Patre, habet quod per unionem habet plenitudinem gratiae et veritatis” (ST III, q. 6, a. 6). English trans. from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 4 (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981), 2059.

23 Cf. “Only/emphthe experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery which finds its culminating expression in the solemn proclamation by the Evangelist Saint John: ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’ (1:14)”, John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 20.

24 Cf. CCC 473–474.

A similar meaning may be found in John 5:27.²⁵ Jesus' authority to judge (and therefore the required knowledge) depends on his being the Son of Man.

The text of Mt 11:27 may be added, in which 1) Jesus' knowledge appears to be complete ("All things have been handed over to me by my Father"), 2) his knowledge of the Father is said to be reciprocal ("no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son") and 3) both knowledges (of all things and of the Father) refer to the human nature since the Son, as the one who knows, is also the one who "chooses to reveal him." What makes revelation possible is the unique human knowledge of Jesus,²⁶ and *this knowledge is compared with the knowledge of the Father*.

Our impression in reading the Gospels has always been the same: Jesus always appears confident, majestic, in control of every situation, and knowing everything. The texts that speak of a limitation in this regard appear striking and mysterious, precisely because they seem to be an exception.²⁷ Moreover, since in the past those texts have had, in our view, a satisfying explanation, we consider more theologically correct the affirmation of a fullness of knowledge. We now refer to only some of these explanations.

Two texts are the most important. The first is Luke 2:52. We will consider the explanation of St. Thomas²⁸ in the second section. The fact that Jesus is said to progress in knowledge does not necessarily mean that he did not have any knowledge of the same things beforehand—and a clear knowledge. As some difficult texts in the Scriptures are explained through the distinction of the natures in Christ, these texts can be explained through a distinction of the knowledges (*scientiae*) in his human nature.

The second text is Mark 13:32. In our view, St. Thomas' explanation is consistent:

²⁵ "And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man" (Cf. ST III, q. 10, a. 2).

²⁶ Cf. Mongeau, "The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word," 38; ST III, q.7, a.9; SCG, IV, cc. 54 and 55; CCC

1.

²⁷ I believe it is also the impression of John Paul II in NMI, 24. A beautiful text, in the frame of a vivid discussion, is John 8:55 "Scio eum, et sermonem eius servo." Cf. ST III, q. 9, a. 2.

²⁸ Cf. ST III, q. 7, a. 12, obj. 3; ST III, q. 12, a. 2 and a. 3, ad 3.

He is said, therefore, not to know the day and the hour of the Judgment, for that He does not make it known, since, on being asked by the apostles (Acts i. 7), He was unwilling to reveal it; and on the contrary, we read (Gen. xxii. 12): *Now I know that thou fearest God*, i.e. *Now I have made thee known*. But [in Mark 13:32] the Father is said to know, because He imparted this knowledge to the Son. Hence, by saying *but the Father*, we are given to understand that the Son knows, and not merely in the Divine Nature, but also in the human, because, as Chrysostom argues (*Hom. Lxxviii, in Matt.*), if it is given to Christ as man to know how to judge—which is greater—much more is it given to Him to know the less, viz. the time of Judgment.²⁹

The *Catechism*, as we have seen, appears to take the same position in its explanation of the text,³⁰ that is to say, the use of Acts 1:7 to show that Jesus did not have the mission of revealing the Day of Judgment. Moreover, Aquinas' argument regarding Genesis 22:12 has to be taken seriously: the Lord says, "Now I know that you fear God." Evidently, we cannot say that God did not know it before. Therefore, "I know" means here "I make known", either to others or to Abraham himself. This is possible because sometimes we say the cause (here, to know) in place of the effect (here, to make known), because of the relationship between them.³¹ This gives us an important feature of the correct exegetical interpretation of texts: if we use a "too literal" interpretation of a text as the final proof of a theological assumption, we will have to deal afterwards with problems arising from the

29 ST III, q. 10, a. 2, ad 1: "Dicitur ergo nescire diem et horam iudicii, quia non facit scire, interrogatus enim ab apostolis super hoc, Act. I, hoc eis noluit revelare. Sicut e contrario legitur Gen. XXII, 'nunc cognovi quod timeas Deum,' idest, nunc cognoscere feci. Dicitur autem Pater scire, eo quod huiusmodi cognitionem tradidit Filio. Unde in hoc ipso quod dicitur, 'nisi Pater,' datur intelligi quod Filius cognoscat, non solum quantum ad divinam naturam, sed etiam quantum ad humanam. Quia, ut Chrysostomus argumentatur, si Christo homini datum est ut sciat qualiter oporteat iudicare, quod est maius; multo magis datum est ei scire quod est minus, scilicet tempus iudicii." English trans from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2081.

30 Cf. CCC 474.

31 This linguistic phenomenon is called "metonymy" and is defined as a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept. We use it for example when we say that "children are the joy of the family". Because children are the cause of joy, we say that they are joy. We use the name of the cause (children) to indicate the effect (joy). Or when we say that the sun burns our skin, meaning that its rays do.

same approach to other texts. We do not mean to say that the senses of the Scriptures are not grounded in the letter (the phenomenon of metonymy belongs to the letter as well), but rather, to point out a real problem one needs to face in the interpretation of the letter: sometimes there are reasons to believe that the straightforward literal interpretation is not the right choice. Finally, Chrysostom's argument, as well, is convincing: if Jesus knows how to judge, even more does he know the time.

In order to understand St. Thomas' interpretation, the following considerations may help. The Son of Man does not know "the day and the hour" from himself, but from the Father as source. In the Scriptures, whatever belongs to someone by participation, that is, as received from the source of perfection, is said sometimes "not to be". To the one who calls him good, Jesus says, "Only God is good" (cf. Mark 10:18), because only God is good in himself and by himself: all other things receive goodness from God. Jesus also speaks about "hating" (not loving) father and mother (cf. Luke 14:26), because whoever loves them in God, does not love them "in and for themselves", but in God and for the love of God. Therefore, the reason Jesus can say that he does not know is that he does not know as the source of that knowledge (his own knowledge comes from the Father as source); and also because, even if he knows, he does not become for the Apostles the source of that knowledge (the Apostles do not receive this knowledge from Him). That is, because truly knowing is connected to being source of knowledge, and Jesus does not have the mission of revealing this particular knowledge to others, Jesus says that he does not know. We believe that this is what Aquinas thought.

In this first section, we pointed out some references that show at least the possibility of taking this doctrine, i.e., the fullness of human knowledge in Christ—since his conception—as a position founded in the doctrine of the Church and in important sources.

II. THE FULLNESS OF THE HUMAN KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST SINCE THE INCARNATION

We present our systematic articulation in its main lines only. We see first the reasons for the Incarnation; second, some consequences related to our subject.

1. The Reasons for the Incarnation

The reason for the Incarnation (i.e., God's purpose) is to make mankind a perfect partaker in God's beatitude (cf. John 3:16; Heb 2:10) or, in other words, God wants to give himself to humankind insofar as it is possible. This implies, substantially, the beatific vision and, accidentally, the resurrection of the body. We will call this reason the "remote end," which is actually the purpose of the universe: union of the rational creature to God. The "proximate end" is the redemption of mankind from sin and its consequences, through the Cross.³² This distinction is important: "God became man so that man may become God," and for this reason "God became man in order to suffer death in expiation for our sins." In other words, the mystery of sin is the reason for which God chooses to communicate his salvation to humankind through the blood of his Cross; but the purpose of the Cross is to purify human beings and make them able to partake in God's beatitude.

Thus, if the Incarnate Word must be a perfect victim and the high priest of the sacrifice of himself for the whole world, it belongs to him to possess the perfection of knowledge. Knowledge increases suffering and is fitting for priestly action.

Also, God wanted to work the redemption of mankind through "the man Jesus Christ" (cf. 1 Tm 2:5). Christ is the principle of salvation. God wanted to communicate his salvation to humankind through Jesus and, therefore, Jesus must be perfect in every respect,³³ including knowledge, because he is the principle of salvation in its totality, and it is from his fullness that we receive grace upon grace (cf. John 1:16).

In other words, to Jesus—as principle of salvation—properly belongs all perfection³⁴ but, because the salvation of humanity required the expiation of sin, he needed to be passible and, then, perfected in suffering.³⁵ In order for that suffering to be perfect, the one to suffer

32 Cf. SCG IV, c.55; Augustine, "Sermo Guelferbytanus 3," in *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 2 (Catholic Book Publishing, 1976).

33 Cf. Col 1:19–20; John 1:14; Col 2:3; Rev 5:12; III, q.7, a.1 and 9.

34 Cf. Col 1:19–20 "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

35 Cf. Heb 2:10 "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."

had to be a perfect man and perfectly passible. This in turn requires the perfection of knowledge.

Finally, God wants to communicate himself totally—insofar as possible—to humanity. To work this plan, He gives himself totally to the human nature in Jesus: the hypostatic union. In order to most properly order that human nature to himself, God gave it the fullness of grace, which implies the beatific vision. If God gave to that human nature the gift of his Person, he could not have denied it what was fitting to that gift, i.e., the fullness of grace.

In our view, in order to accomplish salvation, God gives to the human nature of Jesus all possible gifts, except those that are not fitting to the work of redemption which is to be accomplished on the Cross. In other words, the reason that God gives every fullness to the human nature of Jesus is that this is exactly his intention: to communicate himself as much as possible to humanity.

2. Consequences Related to our Subject

a. Necessity of Beatific Vision

The main reason that Jesus must have the beatific vision is that he must have the fullness of grace.³⁶ The latter belongs to him because of his closeness to God and his being principle of salvation for all.³⁷ The *Catechism* states that the hypostatic union is the reason for Jesus' intimate and immediate knowledge of the Father (474).³⁸ Therefore, since the hypostatic union takes place in the moment of the Incarnation, the fullness of grace and, consequently, the beatific vision belong to Jesus from that very moment.

There is nothing in the soul of Jesus that could prevent it from having the beatific vision or any other infused knowledge.³⁹ A human soul is a *tabula rasa* and is naturally actualized through knowledge coming from experience. This knowledge comes to perfection

³⁶ Cf. ST III, q. 34, a. 4; ST III, q. 12, a. 2.

³⁷ Cf. ST III, q. 7, a. 1. See especially: "Secundo, propter nobilitatem illius animae, cuius operationes oportebat propinquissime attingere ad Deum per cognitionem et amorem. Ad quod necesse est elevari rationalem naturam per gratiam." This text is in our view a "furtive" mention of the self-consciousness of Jesus in an article that is the foundation for many developments. The first and the third argument will be often repeated though this one will not. Cf. also ST III, q. 7, a. 9; ST III, q. 7, a. 12.

³⁸ St. Thomas explains the fullness of knowledge of particulars as coming from the fullness of the gift of counsel by infused knowledge. Cf. ST III, q. 11, a. 1, ad 3.

³⁹ The doctrine of Aquinas on Jesus' infused knowledge can be found in ST III, qq. 9–11.

only after the correct development of the senses and organs that are related to experience. In the case of the beatific vision, however, the soul is actualized “from above.”

b. What is it like, this Beatific Vision?

It is not a confused knowledge. Beatific vision is without species, because no species can represent the divine essence,⁴⁰ but it is true knowledge of the essence of God. This affirmation is grounded in the Scriptures,⁴¹ in the omnipotence of God, in the natural desire of knowing the truth and in the transcendental openness to being proper to any intelligence. Beatific vision is a proper understanding, although it is not comprehensive.

For several reasons, this vision cannot be progressive. First, this vision is the opposite of the state of *viator*, and so it implies the end of the way.⁴² Second, if there were any progression, and this progression in turn depended on another kind of knowledge,⁴³ the perfect grace of beatific knowledge would be receiving perfection from a knowledge that is less perfect, and this is not possible. Third, the fullness of grace depends on the hypostatic union, and this union is not progressive.⁴⁴ Fourth, the beatific vision cannot have degrees on the part of the object (the essence of God) nor on the part of the subject (because it is in the term).⁴⁵

40 Cf. ST III, q. 9, a. 3, ad 3; ST I, q. 12, aa. 2 and 9. Mongeau says: “Because it is an immediate knowing of God without the mediation of the *ordinary operations* of human knowing, it cannot, even for the person who receives the gift of such knowledge, be articulated as a content of consciousness in itself” (Mongeau, “The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word,” 38-39). Emphasis added. I do not think it is the same to say that beatific vision is without species as to say without the mediation of the ordinary operations.

41 It is called “vision” and is such vision that makes us like God (cf. 1 John 3:2).

42 Cf. ST III, q. 9, a. 2 and ad 2; ST III, q. 7, a. 12. It is important to underline that the beatific vision belongs to Jesus not only because he needs that knowledge in order to reveal the Father to humankind, but primarily because of the fullness of grace. Actually, Jesus does not need to reveal anything in his Incarnation but his knowledge allows him to offer himself to the Father and have merits (cf. ST III, q. 34, a. 3). On the other hand, the fullness of grace implies that there cannot be progression in the *habitus of grace*. Again, the text of Lk 2:52 is to be understood as progression in the manifestation (cf. ST III, q. 7, a. 12, ad 3; CCC 486).

43 This seems to be the position of Fr. Gilles Mongeau, (Mongeau, “The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word,” 38-42).

44 Cf. ST III, q. 10, a. 4, ad 2.

45 According to St. Thomas, the things that are known in God are seen as the effects in the cause, in the essence of God, and so not in a progressive way. Whoever sees the

c. The Progressive Knowledge in Jesus

Because experiential knowledge depends strictly on space and time, it is not possible that Jesus received this knowledge from the moment of the Incarnation. Moreover, it was necessary that all of the spiritual faculties of Jesus be used and perfected, and so the agent intellect functioned in Jesus as it does in everyone else, and his possible intellect received species by the work of the agent intellect.

Jesus' experiential knowledge did not make him know anew things he did not know, but it made him know in another way what he already knew *perfectly*. On the other hand, this knowledge was something truly new in Jesus' possible intellect.

This is explained by St. Thomas in a few places in the *Summa*,⁴⁶ and the main point could be articulated in this way: knowledge (*scientia*) is a *habitus*. The word *habitus* has a very helpful double meaning: it means a specific quality of a faculty, but it can also mean "relation." This relation *qualifies* the intelligence. Now, the intelligence has two possible relationships: one to what is superior (by infused knowledge) and another one to what is inferior (phantasms of the sensitivity). With respect to that which is superior, Jesus' intelligence is already actualized by infused knowledge. The same intelligence acquires a new relation to the *phantasmata* and to the surrounding world through the species abstracted by the agent intellect. This new relation (or respect) is something real in the possible intellect of Jesus.

Therefore, we have two different *habitus* or relations. In that way, we can affirm a real progressive knowledge regarding certain objects and can say, at the same time, that he knew those same objects from before. He knew those things before, because by the species infused from above, he had a perfect knowledge of everything. But there was a real progressive knowledge because the same things were known in a new way—the possible intellect of Jesus referred to the same things already known but by means of the species abstracted from the phantasms.

The intelligence is the same, and the things known are the same; but the relationship of the intelligence to the things is different: by means of infused species, in one case, and by means of abstracted species in the other case. Different relations qualify the intelligence

essence of God already sees as much as one can.

⁴⁶ Cf. ST III, q. 9, a. 4 ad 2 and ad 3; ST III, q. 12, a. 2.

in different ways and so produce different *habitus*, different sciences. Now, because the agent intellect abstracts from the senses—and so not everything at once—the *habitus* coming from these species could progress and increase.

d. Was Ignorance Fitting for Jesus?

If the reason for the Incarnation is the salvation of humankind, ignorance should play a role in that salvation. But ignorance is not helpful for redemption; knowledge instead was convenient for meriting, teaching, forgiving sins, offering his life for everyone, etc.. Knowledge was also fitting in order to suffer, because knowledge increases suffering,⁴⁷ which needed to be assumed for expiation. Moreover, we have already said that the human nature of Jesus was the first fruit of redemption, receiving the greatest possible gifts from God: the hypostatic union and the fullness of grace. Therefore, no gift of knowledge (*scientia*) could be missing in him except experiential knowledge. For this reason, ignorance could have no place in Jesus.⁴⁸

e. Could Jesus Learn?

It is important to note that science and knowledge are opposed to ignorance, but they are not necessarily opposed to learning. The Bible applies learning to Jesus especially in the context of suffering.⁴⁹ As we have seen, the *Catechism* does also (472). As we have suggested, this is because, by learning, Jesus did not come to know something he did not know before, but he did *come to know* the same thing in another way. What is essential to learning is not the ignorance that it presupposes in us, but the acquisition of knowledge, which did take place in Jesus. Moreover, the moral perfection of learning, which is based on obedience and humility, also took place in Jesus, so he could also be an example of learning for us.

Was Jesus not like us in every respect, “yet without sin” (*Heb* 4:15)? The fact that Jesus had no ignorance does not mean that his human nature was not perfectly human. Ignorance is not a perfection of our nature. Moreover, Jesus was in many ways “different” from us, as John Paul II says.⁵⁰ The hypostatic union was one of those differ-

47 Cf. Mongeau, “The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word,” 40.

48 Cf. ST III, q. 15, a. 3.

49 Cf. *Heb* 5:8; 12:1-13; Mongeau, “The Human and Divine Knowing of the Incarnate Word,” 41.

50 Cf. “The crowds are able to sense a definitely exceptional religious dimension

ences. But these things do not make his human nature less human. His amazing attributes are perfections of nature or grace, and the hypostatic union is a difference not at the level of nature but at the level of being (*actus essendi*⁵¹). Finally, ignorance was also absent in Adam, at least in some respects, because he was the father of humankind; this, however, is not a reason to say that Adam was less human.

CONCLUSION

The fullness of human knowledge in Christ since the beginning is fitting to the dignity of his soul and to the salvation of mankind. We have tried to show that this doctrine is in agreement with the exigencies of the doctrine of the Church regarding the mystery of Incarnation. The explanations of St. Thomas are still useful, and we believe they address the modern objections in a way that merits a more serious consideration.

The purpose of God in redemption is the utmost communication of his goodness, the salvation of humankind. God wanted to work this salvation through Jesus, in whom divinity and humanity were united in the person. From the moment of the Incarnation, the humanity of Jesus received the fullness of grace, a fullness fitting the gift of the divine person. This fullness implied beatific vision and all possible knowledge. Moreover, Jesus, as the principle of salvation, needed to be full of the gifts of God, so that “from his fullness we may receive grace upon grace” (John 1:18). On the other hand, the salvation of humankind—because of original sin—required the expiation of sins on the Cross: for this reason, Jesus did not have the supernatural gifts that would have prevented him from suffering. Science would not have prevented Jesus from suffering, but it helped make him a perfect victim and a perfect priest. This is why ignorance had no place in Jesus.

According to Scriptures, there was in Jesus a progression in science (*scientia*): “He progressed in wisdom” (Lk 2:52). That progression regards the habit of acquired science, which is different from

to this rabbi who speaks in such a spellbinding way, but they are not able to put him above those men of God who had distinguished the history of Israel. Jesus is really far different!” John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 19.

⁵¹ Crucial in Thomism is to rediscover the distinction between essence and being, almost forgotten or misunderstood in the Scholastics until the work of Cornelio Fabro. Cf. his classic Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*, vol. 3, Opere Complete (Segni, Italy: EDIVI, 2005).

infused science; the latter is perfect from the beginning. Jesus progressed in the habit which originated from the relation of his intellect to sensitivity: his possible intellect always received new species by the action of his agent intellect. But, for Jesus, the things known in those species were not new—because he already knew them by means of infused species. The intellect of Jesus was actualized both from above and from below. This possibility of a double relation in the intellect allows us to speak of two habits, two sciences, one depending on the development of time, and the other depending on the power of God. These two relations are possible in the same subject because—although they refer to the same things—they do not refer to them under the same respect.

Further studies should include the relationship between species and science, the distinction between the *knowledge* of something and the *science* referring to that same thing, the kind of being of the *habitus*, the double aspect of the species (content and bearer of content), the progression of knowledge in Jesus regarding language⁵² and perceptual schemes, etc.. We hope that our efforts in this paper will provide—if not some light—at least some desire for illuminating these questions with greater accuracy.

THOMISTIC THOUGHTS

Why so many distinctions and complications? It may be my own limitation as a teacher, but it comes also from the necessity of explaining the Scriptures. Distinctions are important: for example, if I do not distinguish three persons in the Blessed Trinity I will be accused of being a heretic. God is simple, it is true, but we do not see him as he is. Jesus is a complex of two natures and four sciences. If you want to know him as he is, you need to take into account these elements. Distinctions and theological explanations have always been used by holy doctors to defend the faith and explain it to the faithful. The Church praises the holy doctors. We need to study them. The way to holiness requires effort in every virtue, including the virtue of studiosity. May God reward our efforts with the contemplation of Truth itself.

The explanations of St. Thomas are still useful, but nowadays I think that the way to Thomas needs to be cleared of three obstacles. First, the lack of a solid understanding of his philosophy, or

⁵² Fr. Arturo Ruiz, IVE suggested this point to me.

even the secret conviction that his philosophy is no longer relevant in our times. Second, the lack of trust in him: this obstacle could be overcome perhaps by greater confidence in the Magisterium, which has repeatedly and constantly proposed St. Thomas as *the* Doctor of the Church. The third obstacle is the lack of confidence in the Magisterium of the Church.

I think that a convinced Thomism can come only from a rediscovery of St. Thomas's philosophy—as Fr. Cornelio Fabro proposed it. The Church proposes St. Thomas as a model in putting together faith and reason.⁵³ His philosophy is not afraid of faith, but at the same time, it is respectful of it. Other theologies succumb to the adaptation of our faith to the German philosophy of the Absolute omniscient. . . this is going too far. When the Church says St. Thomas is a model in this area, that means for me: “My friends, it is not necessary to change your faith in order to be rational. There is a way to be rational and a believer at the same time, and this way is the doctrine of St. Thomas.” But, the Church says “St. Thomas”—not the Scholastics in general. And this is also to be taken seriously.

We need to return to Theology the status of “science” it used to have. Theology cannot be a science for weak spirits who are unable to enter the depths of philosophy. Theology is not a superficial science about feelings, but the highest expression of the human spirit. And the problem is that some theologians read texts of Theology in a superficial way without realizing what is there, below the surface. “If it helps to pray, that’s fine.”, they say. But “from words improperly expressed, the heresies come out,” St. Jerome used to say. To whom are we praying? If union with God comes through knowledge of him by faith, what union will we have if we know the wrong God? What kind of prayer? What are we loving if we pray to a God who changes and is not yet perfect? Can such a God save me?

A new commitment to reason and philosophy is necessary. Theology is not sacred because it is separated from reason, but because reason is separated from profane affairs. Theology is done by reason and faith. Theology is our reason applied to the sacred; reason applied to the principles of faith. But reason that is true and mature, reason that is respectful of its own logical rules, reason open to something else. Not just any reason. And maybe not my reason either. . .

53 Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, 43.

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