



The Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture
Series 2021-2022

The Messiah of Israel

**Talk 15. The Messiah's
Fullness of Knowledge, Part 2**

Three Kinds of Human Knowledge

The human intellect can gain knowledge in three ways:

- 1) Abstraction and Reasoning from Experience**
- 2) Infused or Prophetic Illumination**
- 3) The Vision of God**

Jesus had all three kinds of human knowledge through His earthly life in complementarity.

Complementarity of the Three Kinds of Knowledge in Jesus' Human Intellect

- Endowed with these three kinds of knowledge, Christ's human intellect thus is a true "microcosm" which mirrors the whole of creation with regard to nature, grace, and glory. The higher levels of knowledge do not detract from the properly human level, but rather ennoble the lower faculties. Supernatural gifts ennoble the natural order. Here we can apply the Thomistic axiom that grace elevates nature without destroying it.

Complementarity of the Three Kinds of Knowledge in Jesus' Human Intellect

- The fact that Christ already knew something by the vision of God or prophetic knowledge does not mean that He could not also learn it through experience in a properly human way, which would add something unique. For example, it is one thing to know a truth abstractly, and quite another to know by a vivid personal experience. Christ's teaching constantly presents truth both with the flavor of life experienced at first hand, but also as something that comes from above.

Complementarity of the Three Kinds of Knowledge in Jesus' Human Intellect

- The two kinds of supernatural knowledge are very different from one another and served different purposes. Vision was necessary to know the divine plan Christ came to reveal in a complete, clear, holistic, and transcendent way. Prophetic knowledge was necessary to enable Jesus to teach and express with created concepts and words what He knew through the vision.

Reasons of Fittingness for Jesus Receiving the Vision of God

- The principal reason for holding that Christ had the vision of God throughout His earthly life is the witness of Scripture given above. In supernatural mysteries that transcend the power of reason, the authority of Revelation is the primary motive of belief.

Reasons of Fittingness for Jesus Receiving the Vision of God

- First, Christ needed the vision of God in order to grasp His divine identity. We have seen above that Christ communicated His divine identity in manifold ways throughout the four Gospels. How did He know that He was the divine Son of the Father, the Bridegroom of Israel?

Reasons of Fittingness for Jesus Receiving the Vision of God

- 2. Christ needed the vision of God in order to fully reveal the Father and the divine mysteries in His deeds and in His words. His knowledge of vision is what enabled Him to say that He knows the Father, and thus can reveal Him to mankind.

Reasons of Fittingness for Jesus Receiving the Vision of God

- 3. Christ needed the beatific vision to know all the members of His Mystical Body, past, present, and future, so as to be able to suffer and die for each one *personally*. Christ “loved *me* and gave Himself *for me*,” as St. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, and which all are invited to say.
- But how could He love billions of people yet to be born? This could not be the case through acquired or infused knowledge, which requires different concepts for each thing known. It was possible, however, through the vision of God, which sees all in the one Word.

Reasons of Fittingness for Jesus Receiving the Vision of God

- Fourth, the vision is a fitting consequence of the hypostatic union, which is the maximum union in distinction of the human and divine in Christ. From this maximum union, the lesser unions between His divine and human intellects and wills should follow. The vision of God is the maximum union of the two intellects.

Reasons of Fittingness for Jesus Receiving the Vision of God

- Finally, the vision of God during Christ's earthly life made it possible for Christ's human will to be perfectly in harmony with His divine will, making sin impossible as it is for the blessed in heaven.

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

Patristic Contribution

- The **Patristic period and early Middle Ages** focused on whether Jesus was humanly ignorant of the day of Judgment, as in Mark 13:32 and Luke 2:52. Theologians did not yet distinguish different kinds of human knowledge in Christ.
- In the early Fathers we find conflicting statements even in the same author.
- From the time of St. Augustine most Fathers hold that no ignorance could be affirmed in Christ's human intellect, which was the recipient of the fullness of gifts of grace and wisdom, given without measure.

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

St. Augustine held that Christ was free of ignorance. He illustrates this by comparing Christ's Resurrection with that of Lazarus. He sees the bindings still on the risen body of Lazarus outside the tomb as representing the life of faith and the lack of the beatific vision that still needed to be given, while Christ's emergence from the tomb without any bindings indicates that He had already possessed the fullness of Vision.

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

Augustine says:

“How great the difference is between the human being whom the wisdom of God bore, by whom we have been set free, and other people is clear from the fact that Lazarus is not unbound until he leaves the tomb. This means that, even when the soul has been reborn, as long as it sees through a mirror in obscurity it cannot be completely free from sin and ignorance until the body has been released. But the wrapping and facecloth of the Lord, who committed no sin and was *ignorant of nothing*, were found in the tomb. . . . He was not wrapped in cloths, as if something were concealing him or hindering his movement.”

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

St. Fulgentius of Ruspa said that Christ's soul had a fullness without measure of the knowledge of God (John 3:34–35). From this he infers that Christ's soul had a complete knowledge of the divinity.

“But where the Spirit is not according to measure, it is necessary that there be full knowledge of the infinite divinity. Complete fullness is given where the Spirit is not given according to measure. . . . Therefore, I do not think that full knowledge of divinity is lacking in anything to that soul, who is one in person with the Word. . . . Therefore, how is that soul said to have less knowledge of truth in itself which is in a unique way the soul of Truth itself? . . . Therefore, just as Christ the human being has it in a unique way that he is true God, so in a unique way he knows his full divinity.”

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

- This fullness of knowledge of His divinity is the source for all other participations in knowledge of God, as **John 1:16** says: “from his fullness we have all received.”
- **Fulgentius** therefore rejects all ignorance in the human soul of Christ: “The whole fullness of truth is not possessed when something is not known of the truth itself. May it be far from us that we think about Christ in that way.”

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

St. Maximus the Confessor:

“For just as iron having been heated in the fire has all the properties of fire—for it shines and burns—although, to be sure, it is not fire by nature but iron, so also the humanity of the Lord, inasmuch as it was united to the *Logos*, knew everything, and in it, clearly, everything worthy of God was revealed. But insofar as the nature united with human things, he is said not to know.”

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

- The analogy of iron in the furnace is very apt in rendering the idea of the vision of God in Christ's human intellect. His human intellect remains human and finite, but receives a participation of the divine act of knowing, and thus takes on by participation the properties of the higher nature, knowing God as He knows Himself, and seeing creatures in the Word. His human intellect could thus be said to "know all things" through its union with the Word. It is not surprising that St.

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

Maximus, the great theological defender of Christ's human will, addressed the question of Jesus' human knowledge with a greater clarity than his predecessors, for the question of Christ's human intellect is parallel to that of His human will. St. Maximus defends the existence of a natural intellect and will in Christ but also shows how Christ's use of these faculties had unique properties stemming from the intimate union with the divine intellect and will.

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

- In the thirteenth century, theologians began to speak of two kinds of human knowledge in Christ: the beatific vision and infused knowledge.
- From that time until the twentieth century all the great theologians affirmed these two forms of supernatural knowledge.
- This solution is developed by **St. Thomas Aquinas**, who affirmed a **threefold knowledge** in Christ's human intellect: **acquired knowledge, infused knowledge, and the vision of God.**

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

St. Thomas:

“For every created intellect knows in the Word, not all simply, but so many more things the more perfectly it sees the Word. Yet *no beatified intellect fails to know in the Word whatever pertains to itself*. Now to Christ and to His dignity all things to some extent belong, inasmuch as all things are subject to Him. Moreover, He has been appointed Judge of all by God . . . and therefore the soul of Christ knows in the Word all things existing in whatever time, and the thoughts of men, of which He is the Judge, so that what is said of Him (John 2:25), ‘For He knew what was in man,’ can be understood not merely of the Divine knowledge, but also of His soul’s knowledge, which it had in the Word.”

Brief History of the Development of This Thesis

- Christ's human intellect in the vision knows **all that pertains to His mission as Redeemer**, such as the **divine plan of redemption** and **the hearts of all men**.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

- That Christ had the vision of God throughout His earthly life was challenged for the first time at the outbreak of Modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century.
- *Lamentabili*, published under St. Pius X, condemned Modernist propositions asserting ignorance in Christ about the time of the Second Coming and His identity and mission.
- The Holy Office under Benedict XV ruled that professors of Catholic theology could not put in doubt that Christ had the beatific vision during His earthly life.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

- **Pius XI:** “Now if, because of our sins also which were as yet in the future, but were foreseen, the soul of Christ became sorrowful unto death, it cannot be doubted that then, too, already He derived somewhat of solace from our reparation, which was likewise foreseen.”
- Although the term, beatific vision, is not mentioned, it is implied as the source of Christ's foreknowledge of all the sins and merits of mankind.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*:

“He is gifted with those supernatural powers that accompany the hypostatic union, since the Holy Spirit dwells in Him with a fullness of grace than which no greater can be imagined.... ‘All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him’ (Col 2:3) abundantly. The knowledge which is called ‘**vision**’ **He possesses with such clarity and comprehensiveness** that it surpasses similar celestial knowledge found in all the saints of heaven. So full of grace and truth is He that of His inexhaustible fullness we have all received.”

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*: “Hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God when He began to enjoy the **beatific vision**, and in that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love. . . . In the crib, on the Cross, in the unending glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church present before Him and united to Him in a much clearer and more loving manner than that of a mother who clasps her child to her breast, or than that with which a man knows and loves himself.”

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

Pius XII is teaching two fundamental truths:

(1) the beatific vision is a supernatural power that accompanied the hypostatic union and Christ's unique fullness of grace without measure from the moment of His conception;

(2) the beatific vision contributed in a crucial way to Christ's redemptive mission by enabling Him to see all the members of His mystical Body and to unite Himself to them in love during the mysteries of His earthly life.

- The beatific vision was present in Christ from the moment of His conception to unite Him, the Head of the Mystical Body, in a personal way to all His members, past, present, and future.

- Christ, the Head of the Church and its Bridegroom, lived His earthly life for the sake of each individual member, or potential member, of His Church.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

- Christ's mysteries touch our lives today through the sacraments. This sacramental contact presupposes our contact with Christ in His mind and heart throughout His earthly life.
- **Pius XII, *Haurietis aquas*:** "...the human will of Christ, enlightened and governed by the *most perfect knowledge* derived both from the *beatific vision* and that which is directly infused."
- The human love of the Sacred Heart depends on His having knowledge of the beloved in His human mind. The vision was an essential precondition for the burning charity directed to every human being.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

The Catechism of the Catholic Church :

“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.’ [St. Maximus the Confessor] 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.”

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

- St. Maximus affirms the beatific vision in Christ without using that term, for he says that Christ's human intellect knew "by its union with the Word, . . . everything that pertains to God." Only in the vision of God can a created mind know *everything that pertains to God*.
- The *Catechism* says Christ's knowledge of the Father is **"intimate and immediate."** **Acquired and infused knowledge** of God is mediated by created concepts and images. "Immediate" knowledge of God is possible only through the vision of God known through the Word. "Immediate and intimate knowledge of the Father" is a non-technical way of referring to the beatific vision.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 478:

“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] He has loved us all with a human heart.”

Ratzinger comments on this text in his work, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*:

“Each one of us can and may apply to himself the dramatic personalization that Paul accomplishes in these words. Every man may say: The Son of God loved me and gave himself up for me.

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

“Only with this statement does christological catechesis become gospel in the full sense of the word. We are not an indistinct mass before God. Christ does not and did not treat us as such. In all truth, Christ walked his path for me. This certainty is a grace given to accompany me in all the stages of my life, in my successes and failures, in my hopes and my suffering. He did all that he did for me and for every man who crosses my path in life. . . . When we have learned to believe this again, when we are able to announce it to others as the message of truth, evangelization takes place. Then we know that the kingdom of God is near. And this knowledge gives us the strength to live and act out of this nearness.”³²

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

- **John Paul II** in his Apostolic Letter of 2000, *Novo millennio ineunte*, also teaches that Christ had the vision of God in His earthly life.
- **The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Notification** on the works of Father Jon Sobrino, S.J.:

“Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, enjoys an intimate and immediate knowledge of his Father, a ‘vision’ that certainly goes beyond the vision of faith. The hypostatic union and Jesus’ mission of revelation and redemption require the vision of the Father and the knowledge of his plan of salvation. This is what is indicated in the Gospel texts cited above. . . . The relationship between Jesus and God is not correctly expressed by saying Jesus was a believer like us. On the contrary, it is precisely the intimacy and the direct and immediate knowledge which he has of the Father that allows Jesus to reveal to men the mystery of divine love. Only in this way can Jesus bring us into divine love.”

Magisterial Teaching on the Vision of God in Christ's Human Soul

- **Pius XII** was exercising the **ordinary Magisterium** of the Church, to which is due our “*religious submission of mind and will.*”
- **Some theologians** say that we should be *respectful* of these views concerning Christ's vision of God, but that we have no obligation to *endorse* them, because they are incidental to the theme of the encyclical (an *obiter dicta*).
- Pius XII clearly regarded the vision of God in Christ to have fundamental importance for a key question of ecclesiology, which is the nature of the knowledge and love of Christ that binds Him to His Mystical Body.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

- **Karl Rahner** affirmed Christ's vision of the Father but reinterpreted it as "non-thematic" and not pertaining to "objective knowledge" but constituting the horizon of Christ's filial self-awareness.
- This interpretation challenged the traditional view of the presence both of infused knowledge and beatific vision in Christ.
- In the wake of Rahner, many important Catholic theologians have argued against the traditional thesis.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Objections:

- Christ with the vision of God could not have led a life like ours. The vision would divinize His humanity and destroy the self-emptying described in Phil 2:6–11.
- Contemporary man can only believe in Christ in terms of what He “has in common with our human way of life” (Jean Galot).

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Response:

- The humanity of Christ received additional gifts proper to Him on account of His mission and divine identity.
- The fullness of the gifts of knowledge did not destroy Christ's humanity but perfected it.
- It is fitting that Christ would have a unique awareness of His identity through the vision. His awareness of identity would be the foundation of the divine claims that He made in the Gospels.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Objection: The vision of God is **incompatible with Christ's redemptive mission**. Medieval theologians had a desire to endow Christ with all possible perfections even if they might not be fitting as a model for the life of Christians.

Response:

- The vision of God was **crucial for Christ's mission**.
 - 1) So that He could love each one of us in a personal, concrete, and human way.
 - 2) So that He could humanly grasp the true malice of all human sins as an offense to the Father, so as to expiate for it.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

3) So that He could accomplish His mission of revealing the Father in all that He said and did.

4) So that He could humanly grasp His identity as Son of God and reveal Himself as such.

Any one of these reasons would be sufficient to show that it was Christ's redemptive and revelatory mission that demanded the vision of God.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Objections by Karl Rahner:

- The vision of God would make it impossible for Christ to exercise true freedom.
- Ignorance has value for maintaining a sense of transcendence and the freedom of abandoning oneself to an unknown destiny.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Response:

- Fullness of knowledge makes possible fullness of freedom. Freedom of choice does not depend on ignorance but on knowledge of alternatives.
- Christ knew the price He was to pay. This increased the freedom of His consent as seen in Gethsemane.
- Christ's knowledge of each human being increased the freedom of His redemptive act. Only if He knew me personally, could He freely and deliberately die *for me*.
- Christ's reverence for His Father is not diminished by seeing the Father but infinitely perfected by the vision.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Objections:

- The vision would make the Logos present to Christ as an “object” rather than as subjective self-consciousness, which seems Nestorian (**Thomas Weinandy**).
- The vision would excessively compartmentalize the consciousness of Christ.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Response:

• Christ's vision of the Word is distinct from that of the other blessed in heaven. For the other blessed, the vision of God is a vision of another—the Trinity—who is distinct from themselves. **The humanity of Christ, on the other hand, knowing and seeing the Word, knows and sees *Himself* in His divinity, in His filial relation to the Father. Christ's vision of God is self-consciousness—**consciousness of His own Trinitarian life. The vision of God thus makes His divine self-consciousness present in the limits of His human mind. This, of course, is an unfathomable mystery.

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Objection:

- The traditional thesis **confuses the self-emptying of the state of Christ's earthly life with the glory of His condition as the Risen Lord**, attributing the fullness of the vision of God to the earthly life, when it should be ascribed only to the time of glory after His resurrection.
- I would respond that if that were the case, Paul could not truthfully say that Christ "loved me and gave Himself for me." Christ suffered for *me* during all the mysteries of His earthly life, as He "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Heb 5:7).

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Most important objection: the vision would have made it impossible for Christ to suffer, especially in Gethsemane.

Galot:

“How could a Jesus filled with the delights of the beatific vision have experienced profound suffering? Together with the truth of the Incarnation itself, the truth of His redemptive sacrifice is put at risk. How can we attribute to a Savior filled with celestial beatitude these words: ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’ . . . The cry of Jesus on the cross manifests all the depths of a suffering that is incompatible with the beatitude of the vision.”

Objections to the Doctrine that Christ Had the Vision of God

Responses:

John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*:

“Jesus’ cry on the Cross, dear Brothers and Sisters, is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all. At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, “abandoned” by the Father, he “abandons” himself into the hands of the Father. His eyes remain fixed on the Father. Precisely because of the *knowledge and experience of the Father which he alone has*, even at this moment of darkness he *sees* clearly the gravity of sin and suffers because of it.

John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*:

He alone, who sees the Father and rejoices fully in him, can understand completely what it means to resist the Father's love by sin. More than an experience of physical pain, his Passion is an agonizing suffering of the soul. Theological tradition has not failed to ask how Jesus could possibly experience at one and the same time his profound unity with the Father, by its very nature a source of joy and happiness, and an agony that goes all the way to his final cry of abandonment. The simultaneous presence of these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects is rooted in the fathomless depths of the hypostatic union.”

Could Christ See the Father and Have Agony in His Passion?

- The vision made possible Christ's agony over human sin.
- Normally the contemplation of God in the intellect enflames the will and overflows into the emotions and produces an experience of consolation.
- There was a miraculous suspension in Christ of the overflow of His spiritual consolation to His bodily emotions.
- Interior suffering is caused by intimate *knowledge* of evil. The greater the knowledge of evil, the greater one can suffer from it.

We Can Console Christ in His Agony

In His agony Christ also saw our good acts in the vision, which consoled Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Pius XI:

“Now if, because of our sins also which were as yet in the future, but were foreseen, the soul of Christ became sorrowful unto death, it cannot be doubted that then, too, already He derived somewhat of solace from our reparation, which was likewise foreseen, when “there appeared to Him an angel from heaven” (Lk 22:43), in order that His Heart, oppressed with weariness and anguish, might find consolation. And so even now, in a wondrous yet true manner, we can and ought to console that Most Sacred Heart which is continually wounded by the sins of thankless men.”

We Can Console Christ in His Agony

St. Teresa of Avila:

“My method of prayer was this... I would try to make pictures of Christ inwardly; and ... I felt better when I dwelt on those parts of His life when He was most often alone. It seemed to me that His being alone and afflicted, like a person in need, made it possible for me to approach Him. ... I was particularly attached to the prayer in the Garden, where I would go to keep Him company.”

We can keep Christ company if He could see us there. Through His vision we today can give Christ some relief as He suffered for us.

We Can Console Christ in His Agony

St. Padre Pio:

“O Jesus, how many generous souls wounded by this complaint have kept Thee company in the Garden, sharing Thy bitterness and Thy mortal anguish ... How many hearts in the course of the centuries have responded generously to Thy invitation ... May this multitude of souls, then, in this supreme hour be a comfort to Thee, who, better than the disciples, share with Thee the distress of Thy heart, and cooperate with Thee for their own salvation and that of others. And grant that I also may be of their number, that I also may offer Thee some relief.”

Conclusion

- Christ's vision of God during His earthly life is a tenet of Catholic doctrine that has vital importance for the life of the Church.
- This teaching is not a relic from scholasticism that can be consigned to the dust heaps of history.
- This truth is necessarily linked to the fact that Christ died for each human being *personally*, to atone for every concrete human sin which He knew concretely in His humanity and grieved over.