

QUESTION 12

The Acquired or Experiential Knowledge that Belongs to Christ's Soul

Next we have to consider the acquired or experiential knowledge (*scientia acquisita vel experimentalis*) that belongs to Christ's soul. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Did Christ have cognition of all things by this sort of knowledge? (2) Did He make progress in this sort of knowledge? (3) Did He learn anything from any man? (4) Did He receive anything from angels?

Article 1

Did Christ have cognition of all things by His acquired or experiential knowledge?

It seems that Christ did not have cognition of all things by His acquired or experiential knowledge (*secundum hanc scientiam Christus non omnia cognovit*):

Objection 1: Knowledge of the sort in question is acquired through experience. But Christ did not experience all things. Therefore, He did not know all things by this sort of knowledge.

Objection 2: A man acquires knowledge through his senses. But not all things that can be sensed fell under Christ's bodily senses (*non omnia sensibilia sensibus corporalibus Christ fuerunt subiecta*). Therefore, He did not have cognition of all things by His acquired knowledge.

Objection 3: The quantity of one's knowledge has to do with what is knowable. Therefore, if Christ had known all things by His acquired knowledge, then the acquired knowledge in Him would have been equal to His infused knowledge and to His beatific knowledge—which is absurd. Therefore, Christ did not know all things by His acquired knowledge.

But contrary to this: There was nothing imperfect or incomplete (*imperfectum*) in Christ as regards His soul. But His acquired knowledge (*haec eius scientia*) would have been incomplete if He had not known all things through it, since what is incomplete is such that an addition can be made to it. Therefore, Christ knew all things by His acquired knowledge.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 9, a. 4), acquired knowledge is posited in Christ's soul because of its fittingness for the *active intellect*, lest the action by which the active intellect makes things intelligible in actuality should go unused—just as infixed or infused knowledge is likewise posited in Christ's soul in order to perfect or complete the *passive intellect*. Now as *De Anima* 3 puts it, just as the passive intellect is “that in which all things come to be (*quo est omnia est fieri*),” so the active intellect is “that which makes all things to be (*quo est omnia facere*).” And so, just as through its infused knowledge Christ's soul knew all the things with respect to which the passive intellect is in any way in potentiality, so through its acquired knowledge it knew all the things which are able to be known through the action of the active intellect.

Reply to objection 1: Knowledge of things can be acquired not only by experiencing those very things, but also by experiencing certain other things, since by the power of the active intellect's light a man can proceed to understand effects through causes and causes through effects, and to understand similar things through similar things and contrary things through contrary things. So, then, even though Christ did not experience all things, He nonetheless arrived at knowledge of all things from those things that He did experience.

Reply to objection 2: Even though not all things that can be sensed fell under Christ's bodily senses, there were some sensible things which fell under His senses and from which, because of the excellence of His power of reasoning, He was able to derive knowledge of other things in the way described above. For instance, when He saw the celestial bodies, He could comprehend their powers and the effects that they have on lower things that did not fall under His senses. And, for the same reason, He was able to derive knowledge of some things from any number of other things.

Reply to objection 3: By the sort of knowledge in question Christ's soul did not have cognition of

all things absolutely speaking, but He did have cognition of all the things that are knowable by the light of a man's active intellect. Hence, He did not through this sort of knowledge have cognition of the essences of separated substances or, again, of past singular things or future singular things—though, as was explained above (q. 11, a. 1), He did have cognition of such things through His infused knowledge.

Article 2

Did Christ make progress in His acquired knowledge?

It seems that Christ did not make progress in His acquired knowledge (*secundum hanc scientiam Christus non profecerit*):

Objection 1: It is clear from what has been said (a. 1) that just as by His beatific knowledge and by His infused knowledge Christ knew all things, so, too, by His acquired knowledge. But He did not make progress in the former sorts of knowledge. Therefore, He did not make progress in the latter sort of knowledge, either.

Objection 2: To make progress belongs to what is imperfect, since what is perfect or complete does not admit of an addition. But one should not posit any imperfect or incomplete knowledge in Christ. Therefore, Christ did not make progress in the sort of knowledge under discussion.

Objection 3: Damascene says, “Those who claim that Christ advanced in wisdom and grace, in the sense of taking on additions, do not venerate the [hypostatic] union.” But it is impious not to venerate this union. Therefore, it is impious to claim that His knowledge took on additions.

But contrary to this: Luke 2:52 says that Jesus “advanced in wisdom and age and grace before both God and men.” And Ambrose says, “He advanced in human wisdom.” But human wisdom is acquired in a human way, viz., through the light of the active intellect. Therefore, Christ made progress in the sort of knowledge under discussion.

I respond: There are two sorts of progress in knowledge. One is progress with respect to the *essence of knowledge*, insofar as the very habit of knowledge grows; the second is progress with respect to the *effect of knowledge*—as when an individual, by the same and equal habit of knowledge, first manifests fewer things to others and afterwards manifests more things and things that are more subtle.

Now in this second way it is clear that Christ “advanced in knowledge and grace,” as well as in age, since as He grew older, He did greater things, and these things manifested His greater wisdom and grace.

On the other hand, as regards the habit itself of knowledge, it is clear that the habit of *infused knowledge* did not grow in Him, since all of His infused knowledge was fully present in Him from the beginning. And, *a fortiori*, His beatific knowledge was not able to increase in Him. Moreover, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 14, a. 15), there could be no increase in the knowledge that He has as God.

Therefore, if, as it has seemed to some thinkers—and at certain times to me as well—there was no habit of *acquired* knowledge in Christ's soul in addition to its *infused* habit of knowledge, then no sort of knowledge in Christ progressed *with respect to its essence*; instead, His knowledge progressed only *through experience*, i.e., by turning His infused intelligible species toward phantasms. Accordingly, these thinkers claim that Christ's knowledge ‘grew with experience’ in the sense that He turned His infused intelligible species toward those things that He received *de novo* through His senses.

However, since it seems unfitting for any natural intellective action (*naturalis actio intelligibilis*) to be lacking in Christ, and given that extracting intelligible species from phantasms is a natural action that belongs to a man by means of his active intellect, it would seem fitting to posit this action in Christ as well. And from this it follows that in Christ's soul there was a habit that was able to grow through this sort of abstraction of species—more specifically, from the fact that His active intellect, after having

abstracted its first intelligible species from phantasms, was likewise able to abstract others.

Reply to objection 1: Both the infused knowledge and the beatific knowledge that belonged to Christ's soul were the effect of an agent with infinite power, who can bring about the whole all at once; and so Christ did not make progress in either of these sorts of knowledge, but instead possessed them as a whole from the beginning.

By contrast, acquired knowledge comes only from the active intellect, which operates successively and not all at once. And so as regards this sort of knowledge, Christ did not know all things from the beginning, but instead came to know them little by little and after some time, i.e., in the fullness of His age. This is clear from the fact that the evangelist says that He grew in knowledge and age together.

Reply to objection 2: This sort of knowledge in Christ was likewise always perfect *with respect to the relevant time*, even though it was not perfect absolutely speaking and with respect to its nature. And this is why it was able to increase.

Reply to objection 3: This passage from Damascene applies to those who claim that additions have been made to Christ's knowledge absolutely speaking, i.e., with respect to every sort of knowledge that belongs to Him, and especially with respect to His infused knowledge, which is caused in Christ's soul by the soul's union to the Word. However, the passage does not apply to growth in a sort of knowledge that is caused by a natural agent.

Article 3

Did Christ learn anything from men?

It seems that Christ learned something from men (*Christus aliquid ab hominibus didicerit*):

Objection 1: Luke 2:46-47 says, "They found Him in the temple in the midst of the doctors, asking them questions and responding to them." But asking questions and responding belongs to someone who is learning. Therefore, Christ learned something from men.

Objection 2: Acquiring knowledge from a man who is teaching seems to be more noble than acquiring knowledge from the sensory powers, since in the soul of a man who is teaching there are actual intelligible species, whereas in things that can be sensed intelligible species exist only in potentiality. But as has been explained (a. 2 and q. 9, a. 4), Christ received experiential knowledge from things that can be sensed. Therefore, *a fortiori*, He was able to receive knowledge by learning from men.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 2), it is not the case that Christ knew all things from the beginning through His experiential knowledge; instead, He made progress in this sort of knowledge. But anyone who listens to speech that signifies something is able to learn what he does not know. Therefore, Christ was able to learn from men some things that He did not already know by the sort of knowledge under discussion.

But contrary to this: Isaiah 55:4 says, "Behold, I have given Him as a witness to the people, as a leader and instructor to the nations." But the role of an instructor (*praeceptor*) is to teach and not to be taught. Therefore, Christ did not receive any knowledge from the teaching of any man.

I respond: In every genus, that which is the first mover is not moved according to the same species of movement; for instance, the first cause of alteration is not itself subject to alteration. Now as has been explained (q. 8, a. 3), Christ has been established as the Head of the Church, at least of all the human beings [in the Church], with the result that not only do all the human beings receive grace through Him, but all of them also receive the teaching of truth from Him. Hence, in John 18:37 He Himself says, "For this was I born, and for this I came into the world, that I might give testimony to the truth." And so it was not fitting, given His dignity, for Him to be taught by any man.

Reply to objection 1: As Origen puts it in *Super Lucam*, "Our Lord was asking questions, not in

order to learn anything, but in order to give instruction by asking the questions. Indeed, from a single font there emanated both the questions and the wise replies.” Hence, in the same place (v. 48) the Gospel continues, “Everyone listening was amazed by His understanding and by His replies.”

Reply to objection 2: An individual who learns from a man does not receive knowledge *immediately* from the intelligible species that exist in the man’s mind; instead, he receives knowledge *by the mediation of* sounds that can be sensed and are signs of intellectual conceptions. Now just as sounds formed by a man are intellectual signs of his knowledge, so, too, creatures formed by God are signs of His wisdom; hence, Ecclesiasticus 1:10 says that God “poured wisdom out upon all His works.” Therefore, just as it is more dignified to be taught by God than by man, so it is more dignified to receive knowledge through creatures that can be sensed than through the teaching of a man.

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained, Jesus grew in experiential knowledge as He was also growing in age. But just as an opportune age is required for a man’s receiving knowledge through discovery, so, too, an opportune age is required for his receiving knowledge through teaching. Now our Lord did nothing that was not congruent with His age. And so He accommodated His hearing to listening to words of teaching only at a time when He had also been able to attain that same level of knowledge by way of experience. Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “At twelve years of age He was worthy to question men on earth, since, in keeping with His use of reason, the word of teaching was present only with the fullness of age.”

Article 4

Did Christ receive knowledge from angels?

It seems that Christ received knowledge from angels (*Christus ab angelis scientiam acceperit*):

Objection 1: Luke 22:43 says, “There appeared to Christ an angel from heaven who strengthened Him.” But strengthening is accomplished with the exhortatory words of a teacher—this according to Job 4:3-4 (“Behold, You have taught many and have strengthened the weary hand; Your words have confirmed those who were staggering”). Therefore, Christ was taught by angels.

Objection 2: In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 4 Dionysius says, “I see that even Jesus Himself, the supersubstantial substance of supercelestial substances, when taking on our substance without changing, is obediently subject to the instructions given by His Father and God through the angels (*obedienter subiicitur patris et Dei per angelos formationibus*).” Therefore, it seems that Christ Himself willed to be subject to the order of God’s law, according to which men are instructed by the mediation of angels.

Objection 3: Just as the human body is by a natural ordering subject to celestial bodies, so, too, the human mind is subject to angelic minds. But Christ’s body was subject to impressions made by the celestial bodies, since it was subject to heat in the summer and cold in the winter, just as it was subject to other human feelings (*sicut et alias humanas passiones*). Therefore, His mind was likewise subject to illuminations from supercelestial spirits.

But contrary to this: In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 7 Dionysius says, “The highest angels put questions to Jesus Himself and come to knowledge of His divine work on our behalf, and Jesus Himself teaches them without mediation.” But teaching and being taught do not belong to the same individual. Therefore, Christ did not receive knowledge from angels.

I respond: Just as the human soul lies in the middle between spiritual substances and corporeal entities, so there are two ways in which it is apt to be brought to perfection: (a) through knowledge received from things that can be sensed, and (b) through knowledge infused or impressed by illumination from spiritual substances.

Now Christ's soul was perfected in both of these ways: (a) by things that can be sensed, in accord with its *experiential knowledge*, for which the light of the active intellect is sufficient and angelic light is not required; and (b) by a higher impression, in accord with its *infused knowledge*, which is acquired *immediately from God*. For just as Christ's soul was united to the Word in a oneness of person beyond the common mode of a creature, so, too, beyond the common mode of men, His soul was filled with knowledge and grace immediately by the Word of God Himself—and not by the mediation of angels, who, as Augustine explains in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 2, received their own knowledge of things from the influence of the Word at the beginning of their existence.

Reply to objection 1: This instance of strengthening by an angel was not in the manner of an instruction, but occurred in order to demonstrate [Christ's] possession of a human nature (*fuit ad demonstrandum proprietatem humanae naturae*). Hence, in *Super Lucam* Bede says, "In testimony to both of the natures, the angels are said to have ministered to Him and also to have strengthened Him. For the Creator did not need any help from His creature, and yet just as it is for our sake that He, having become man, is saddened, so it is for our sake that He is strengthened"—that is, in order that faith in His Incarnation might be strengthened in us.

Reply to objection 2: Dionysius says that Christ was subject to 'angelic instruction' (*Christum angelicis formationibus fuisse subiectum*) not for Himself, but in light of those things that were done regarding His incarnation and regarding care for Him while He was an infant. Hence, in the same place Dionysius adds, "The withdrawal to Egypt that had been planned for Jesus by the Father was announced to Joseph by the mediation of the angels, as was the return to Judea from Egypt."

Reply to objection 3: As will be explained below (q. 14, a. 1 and 4), the Son of God assumed a passible body but a soul that was perfect in knowledge and grace. And so it was fitting for His body to be subject to impressions by celestial bodies, even while His soul was not subject to impressions by celestial spirits.