

“An Encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola”? Rethinking Aquinas on Christ’s Infused Knowledge

JOSHUA H. LIM
Thomas Aquinas College
Northfield, MA

Introduction

In what has come to be known as Thomas’s account of the triple knowledge of Christ, the infused knowledge holds a tenuous place. It stands awkwardly between two kinds of knowledge, beatific and acquired, which are explicitly linked to the fulfillment of Christ’s redemptive mission.¹ Christ’s earthly

¹ For an excellent review of the complexities involved in the debate over Christ’s infused knowledge, see Simon Gaine, “Is There Still a Place for Christ’s Infused Knowledge in Catholic Theology and Exegesis?,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 16, no. 2 (2018): 601–15. Gaine nods at the sort of interpretation of Aquinas that I provide below and is clear that contemporary arguments for Christ’s infused knowledge are not, in fact, the same as Saint Thomas’s argument. In his article, Gaine adopts a view that shares some commonality with the views I criticize below, but with the crucial difference that he offers his position as a constructive account that goes *beyond* Aquinas’s text. Specifically, he aims to understand the interplay between the beatific and infused knowledge, and more specifically, the role that the infused knowledge plays in Christ’s earthly teaching. In this regard, his work aims at a more distinct end than the present article, which leaves to the side the vital question of how the infused knowledge functions in Christ’s earthly ministry. Further, Gaine gestures at a solution to the question of the role of the infused knowledge which is consonant with this article’s argument: “This solution lies in the fact that infused knowledge, unformed in our minds by ourselves and obviously not derived from a beatific vision that we do not yet possess, would seem to be part of the charismatic life of God’s people. . . . Just as the beatific vision of the members of the Body depends on the beatific vision of Christ, the Head and Savior, just as the sanctifying grace of the members depends on the sanctifying grace of the Head, so we may suppose that the infused knowledge in the minds of some members depends somehow on the

beatific knowledge, controverted though it may be, nevertheless has for Thomas a definite soteriological end.² As the author of salvation, Christ, from the moment of conception, had to possess *in actu* the very knowledge to which he was to lead the rest of humanity, namely, the supernatural and beatific knowledge of the divine essence and of all things in it. Christ's acquired knowledge is also ordered to our salvation; it is necessary on account of exigencies arising from the integrity of human nature. In the assumption of a complete human nature, it was necessary for Christ to possess acquired knowledge, for without an agent intellect having its proper operation (i.e., abstracting intelligible species from phantasms arising from the senses), Christ's humanity would have been incomplete, imperfect.³ Thus, according to the patristic dictum that what is not assumed is not redeemed, Christ's redemption of human nature would have been imperfect. In contrast to these two types of knowledge, it is not clear whether and how the infused knowledge contributes to human salvation. Unlike the beatific knowledge, the infused knowledge does not belong intrinsically to the state of the *comprehensor*, for beatitude does not consist in a knowledge of created things in themselves, but in God;⁴ and unlike the acquired knowledge, the infused knowledge is not necessary for the assumption of an integral human nature.⁵ Add to this Thomas's passing description of Christ's infused knowledge as "proportioned to the angelic nature," encompassing all intelligible species of things knowable through nature and through the light of grace. In this vein, the infused knowledge threatens to transform Christ into a caricature of a man—turning Christ into what É. H. Wéber has disparagingly called an "encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola."⁶

fact of infused knowledge in the mind of the Head" (613–14).

- ² For more on Christ's beatific knowledge, see my article "The Necessity of Beatific Knowledge in Christ's Humanity: A Re-Reading of *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 9," *The Thomist* 86, no. 4 (2022): in production.
- ³ On the acquired knowledge, see Kevin Madigan, "Did Jesus 'Progress in Wisdom'? Thomas Aquinas on Luke 2:52 in Ancient and High-Medieval Christology," *Traditio* 52 (1997): 179–200.
- ⁴ See Augustine, *Confessions* 5.4.7: "Lord God of truth, surely the person with a scientific knowledge of nature is not pleasing to you on that ground alone. The person who knows all those matters but is ignorant of you is unhappy. The person who knows you, even if ignorant of natural science, is happy. Indeed the one who knows both you and nature is not on that account happier" (trans. Henry Chadwick [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998]).
- ⁵ Philippe-Marie Margelidon, "La science infuse du Christ selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 114 (2014), 379–416, at 379. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own (both the modern French and the Scholastic and other Latin).
- ⁶ É.-H. Wéber, *Le Christ selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Desclée, 1988), 224: "When

Herein lies the problem. Given the acquired and beatific knowledge, what use is there for the infused knowledge? The knowledge of all that can be known by nature is already attributed to Christ through his acquired knowledge; further, the knowledge of all the mysteries of grace is accessible to Christ through his beatific knowledge of God and all things *in Verbo*. While humans, as *viatores*, gain knowledge through the senses, and, as *comprehensores*, behold God through an elevation of the soul through glory, it is unclear whether a third kind of knowledge, the infused knowledge, is necessary and, if so, to what end. If, according to the Scholastic dictum, God and nature do nothing in vain, what sense can be made of Christ's infused knowledge?

At least since the seventeenth century, Thomists have typically sought to resolve this tension by appealing to the unique role of infused knowledge in Christ's *earthly transmission* of knowledge. Thus, the infused knowledge fills a gap between the beatific and acquired modes of knowing, providing Christ's soul with a mode of knowledge which enables him to communicate supernatural truths, the *mysteria gratiae*,⁷ otherwise known in the blessed vision of the Word, through created and, therefore, humanly *communicable* intelligible species. Christ's acquired knowledge, restricted to what is naturally knowable, is insufficient to lead "many brothers to glory," while the beatific knowledge, though saving, nevertheless remains unconceptualizable and therefore incommunicable in mode.⁸ According to this view, therefore, the necessity of the infused knowledge arises as a bridge of continuity between the beatific and acquired knowledge, enabling Christ to communicate the truth of the kingdom of God in a way that is proportioned to the human nature *in via*.

Such an account has two clear points in its favor. First, by highlighting the gulf between the beatific and acquired modes of knowledge, it makes room for a distinct, third mode of knowledge. Second, and related to the first point, by accounting for the infused knowledge based on its function in Christ's earthly ministry, this account clarifies the scope and purpose of

he designates the object of this knowledge in the entirety of truth discernable by the agent intellect proper to man, our theologian thinks nothing, contrary to the scholastics of the Renaissance and of the rationalist epoch, of an encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola. As the immediate context indicates, it is a question above all, for Christ the Revealer of God, Judge of all men, and Head of the Mystical Body (integrating even the angelic spirits), of the knowledge of 'hearts,' that is, of created persons in their choice concerning salvation."

⁷ See Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* [CT] I, ch. 216.

⁸ Margelidon speaks of this continuity ("La infuse science," 409).

the infused knowledge, enabling an amendment to Thomas's insufficiently human portrait of Christ: through the infused knowledge Christ is given only that knowledge necessary for his earthly ministry. The infused knowledge thus has an immediate analogue in the gratuitous gift of prophecy, with the key difference that it is an abiding form, a permanent and stable *habitus*, not merely a *habilitas*.⁹ In this way, the disciple of Thomas avoids turning Christ into an encyclopedic Pico.

This interpretation (hereafter referred to as the "earthly utility account") provides a clear *ratio* for Christ's infused knowledge: the infused knowledge translates the unconceptualizable knowledge of things in the Word for the sake of the communication of supernatural truth in Christ's earthly life. While providing an appealing reason for the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge, however, the earthly utility account encounters two significant difficulties. First, there is little in the text of Saint Thomas to support such a reading. This is made clear by the various arguments Saint Thomas posits in favor of the infused knowledge. In the absence of texts, proponents of the earthly utility account are forced to rely on the subtlest "hints" and "clues" in the development of Thomas's thought to render their reading plausible.¹⁰ Second, and more seriously, the earthly utility account contradicts Saint Thomas's explicit argument for Christ's infused knowledge. Relying on Aristotle,¹¹ Saint Thomas argues for Christ's infused knowledge based on the natural potency of the human intellect to become all things. Any unactualized potency of the possible intellect (with respect to the possession of all intelligible species *in habitu*) would represent an imperfection in Christ's human nature.¹² To be clear, this is an argument from perfection. According to Saint Thomas, it was necessary that Christ, "in order not to be imperfect," possess this knowledge in its fullness, possessing the intelligible species of *all* things. Theologians are justified in their concern that such an argument relies on extra-biblical notions of perfection rather than the text of Scripture

⁹ See *ST* II-II, q. 171, a. 2. See also Margelidon, "La science infuse," 395–97.

¹⁰ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin et la science du Christ: une relecture des questions 9–12 de la *tertia pars* de la *Somme de théologie*," in *Publié avec le concours du Centre National des Lettres: colloque du centenaire de la Revue thomiste, Toulouse, 25–28 mars 1993*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino (Paris: Édition Saint-Paul, 1994): 349–409, at 404–9.

¹¹ See Aristotle, *De anima* 3.4–5.

¹² It is important to note that the possession of all intelligible species *in actu* through the infused knowledge is distinct from Christ's soul knowing all the infused species according to second act, i.e., in operation. Thus, *in actu* in the context of Christ's infused knowledge refers to the actualization of the possible intellect with respect to the possession of intelligible species *in habitu*.

itself.¹³ Yet, by so quickly retreating to an account that lacks any real textual basis in Aquinas's work, it is possible and indeed likely that we risk missing an important insight in the Angelic Doctor's thought.

In this paper I argue that the earthly utility account obscures a more fundamental Christological basis for Thomas's teaching on the infused knowledge of Christ. By grounding the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge most proximately in his earthly ministry (i.e., the knowledge implied in his proclamation of the kingdom, his supernatural knowledge of things occurring at a distance, of the secret of men's hearts, etc.), interpreters of Saint Thomas have overlooked the central role of Christ's humanity as the source of grace, as the head of the Church. The perfection of Christ's knowledge is not only necessary for what Christ says and does in his earthly life (i.e., in his earthly communication of truth through human words); more fundamentally, it is necessary for the role that the humanity of Christ plays, from the first instant of conception, as the instrument of the divinity, communicating grace to all the members of his body according to every time and place. This is a function of Christ's headship as the universal source of all grace. "From his fullness we have all received, grace for grace" (John 1:16). According to Saint Thomas, it is by possessing the fullness of grace and truth that Christ in his humanity can be the cause of grace and all its effects in those who are *in via*.

After summarizing the contemporary approach, I show how Aquinas's broader account of Christ's grace as head, his capital grace, provides the framework for understanding why it was necessary for Christ to possess the infused knowledge of all things.¹⁴ As the universal cause of grace, Christ must possess *in actu* that which he brings about in others. In this context, the argument from perfection provides an explanatory basis for the role of Christ's humanity as the cause and source of all graces bestowed on humanity. If Christ must possess the beatific vision *in actu* in order to reduce it from potency to act in *comprehensores*, he must similarly possess the fullness of grace and graced knowledge (i.e., the infused knowledge) by which he

¹³ For an explanation of Saint Thomas's appeals to perfection, see Joshua H. Lim, "The Principle of Perfection in Thirteenth-Century Accounts of Christ's Human Knowledge," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 3 (2022): 352–79.

¹⁴ As has been noted by Theophil Thschipke, the instrumentality of Christ's humanity is one of Saint Thomas's major Christological developments (*L'humanité du Christ comme instrument de salut de la divinité*, trans. Philibert Secrétan [Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003]). Thomas's account of Christ's fullness of grace and truth can be understood as providing the conditions for Christ's humanity as instrument such that, through his *acta et passa*, treated later in the *tertia pars*, he is capable of bringing about salvation; see *ST* III, 48, a. 6, corp.

leads *viatores* to this end. Since the effects of grace through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the gratuitous graces encompass the natural knowledge of all things, such knowledge must also already be present in Christ the head, for Christ's humanity, as the instrument of the divinity, is the source of all the graces received by the members of Christ's body in every time, place, and state.

Two Variations of an Account for Christ's Infused Knowledge from Earthly Utility: Jean-Pierre Torrell and Philippe-Marie Margelidon

As Simon Gainé notes, the earthly utility account likely finds its origin in John of Saint Thomas (Jean Poincot).¹⁵ This reading appears to have arisen initially as a complement to Saint Thomas's argument from perfection. Unlike the argument from perfection, Poincot's argument from earthly utility had the advantage of more clearly highlighting one obvious function of Christ's infused knowledge in his earthly life. Yet, as Gainé states, even Poincot seems to have considered Saint Thomas's argument from perfection to be the superior argument. At some point, the distinction among accounts was lost, such that the two arguments appeared to be variations of one and the same account.¹⁶ Eventually, Poincot's complementary account would eclipse Saint Thomas's own argument, such that the argument from perfection would come to be seen as a variation of the earthly utility argument based upon fittingness, ultimately dependent upon medieval notions of

¹⁵ This approach to the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge (though it is also applied with respect to Christ's beatific and acquired knowledge by many Thomists), is often treated as Aquinas's own. In fact, this way of reading Aquinas appears probably in the seventeenth century with John of St. Thomas (Jean Poincot). See Gainé, "Is There Still a Place?," 605: "Hence, in the seventeenth century, the commentator John of St. Thomas (Jean Poincot) added his own explanation of Christ's infused knowledge by way of his teaching needs to Aquinas's argument for infused knowledge from the mind's required perfection, together with another argument of his (Poincot's) own from Christ's meritorious acts, which were said to be largely of a kind to require regulation by a supernatural knowledge beyond the beatific vision. Though Poincot counted Aquinas's argument from perfection as the 'best' one of the three, perhaps regarding it as straightforwardly best in terms of proof, he seems nevertheless to have regarded his own argument as at least having the advantage of being clearer in regard to the actual workings of knowledge and meritorious activity in Christ's earthly life."

¹⁶ Gainé explains how Poincot's three arguments becomes one argument in Reginald-Garrigou Lagrange: "While he agreed that infused knowledge answered to Christ's teaching needs, Garrigou-Lagrange presented this not as a distinct argument for this knowledge, *but merely as a clarification of Aquinas's own argument from perfection*" ("Is There Still a Place?" 606).

perfection judged alien to Scripture. Among modern Thomists, undoubtedly influenced by concerns surrounding the historical Jesus, Poinson's complementary account would displace Saint Thomas's argument from perfection, its main advantage being to significantly limit the scope of Christ's infused knowledge, rendering him more obviously "like unto us in all things except sin." It is the more recent version of the earthly utility account that is the focus of my critique.

The "Christic" Knowledge: Torrell

The most concise version of the earthly utility account is found in the work of Jean-Pierre Torrell. According to Torrell, the infused knowledge is distinct from the ineffable and unconceptualizable knowledge of vision and functions within Christ's triple knowledge to enable Christ to know and communicate divine truths in a way that is proportioned to his human mind.¹⁷ Without the infused knowledge "the soul of Christ would have had no use of any humanly transmissible knowledge."¹⁸ It is only through the immediate gift of divinely infused species that "the humanity of Christ was able to accomplish his mission and express in human language the message of which he is the bearer."¹⁹

Against the backdrop of modern concerns to highlight the full authenticity of Christ's humanity, the earthly utility account has come to be contrasted explicitly with Thomas's own argument from perfection. Thus, Édouard-Henri Wéber depicts the Salamanticensian account of Christ's perfection in infused knowledge as portraying the Savior as "an encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola."²⁰ According to the Renaissance Scholastics, who took the argument from perfection to its logical conclusion, Christ is the greatest philosopher, musician, scientist, doctor, and so on. As Torrell notes, this could hardly have been Saint Thomas's intention. Against such a view, modern interpreters see in the earthly utility approach a path that leads us towards not only a more realistic, more recognizably human portrait of Christ, but one that is, in fact, more faithful to Saint Thomas's true intention.

¹⁷ ST III, q. 9, a. 3, corp., quoted in Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 396.

¹⁸ Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397.

¹⁹ Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397.

²⁰ See Wéber, *Le Christ*, 224 This is repeated by Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397; Margelidon, "La science," 396; and Charles Rochas, *La science bienheureuse du Christ simul viator et comprehensor: selon les commentaires bibliques et la Summa theologiae de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 121. Torrell's description of the Salamanticensian view is illuminating: "Christ must be considered not only as the great dialectician, philosopher, mathematician, doctor, moralist, or politician, but even as the great orator, musician, painter, farmer, sailor, etc." ("S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397n2).

Notably, Torrell and others attempt to preserve the intention of the Angelic Doctor by moving away from his stated argument from perfection, thereby limiting Christ's infused knowledge only to those truths (i.e., the *mysteria gratiae*) which are strictly necessary for the accomplishment of his earthly mission. For all intents and purposes, this has become the standard account among recent Thomists, even the most ardent defenders of Saint Thomas's doctrine of Christ's earthly beatific knowledge.²¹ Christ did not need to know all that can be known through his infused knowledge, as the Salamanticenses mistakenly thought; rather, in Torrell's words, he required only that knowledge which belongs to the "religious domain."

In order to bypass Saint Thomas's explicit argument, proponents of the earthly utility account are forced to look to clues arising from the development of Saint Thomas's doctrine. For his part, Torrell finds indications of this

²¹ See Jacques Maritain, *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 89–125. Maritain writes: "In order that Christ as viator might express to Himself, say to Himself, in His consciousness of man like unto us, His infused science (caused in His soul *ex unione ad Verbum*, III, 12, 2, ad 3), it was necessary that this infused science not find itself only in the supraconscious paradise of the soul of Christ; it was necessary also that, in proportion as the sphere of the consciousness or of the here-below of the soul of Christ forms itself, His infused science hold sway in this other sphere, where it is subject to the regime connatural to the human soul and where, in order to translate into a properly human lexicon its infused ideative forms, more angelic than human, it could use instrumentally concepts formed under the light of the agent intellect, and without which we cannot speak to ourselves" (94–95). See also Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 257: "As Aquinas and many Thomists after him have rightly insisted, then, the knowledge of Christ's vision is 'communicated' to his ordinary human consciousness through the medium of a so-called infused prophetic science." Commenting on Aquinas's argument that Christ knew all things through his acquired knowledge, White suggests it best to restrict the infused and acquired knowledge to what was necessary for his earthly mission (355n41). Other Thomists follow suit: Rochas, *La science bienheureuse*; Jeremy D. Wilkins, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 316–51; Romanus Cessario, "Incarnate Wisdom and the Immediacy of Christ's Salvific Knowledge," in *Problemi teologici alla luce dell' Aquinate (Atti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale)*, Studi Tomistici 44 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), 334–40; Guy Mansini, "Understanding St. Thomas on Christ's Immediate Knowledge of God," *The Thomist* 59, no. 1 (1995): 91–124; Marie-Joseph Nicolas, "Voir Dieu dans la 'condition charnelle,'" *Doctor Communis* 36 (1983): 384–394, at 392; Bernard Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, vol. 7, ed. Michael Shields, Frederick Crowe, S. J., and Robert Doran S. J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Wéber, *Le Christ*, 224–25; Paweł Klimczak, *Christus Magister: le Christ Maître dans les commentaires évangéliques de saint Thomas d' Aquin*, 117 (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2013), 91–111.

in perceived "hesitations" in the trajectory of the development of Thomas's teaching.²² Torrell points to the change from Thomas's earlier account in the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* (the *Scriptum*) and *De veritate* (*DV*) to the later account found in the *Compendium theologiae* (*CT*) and the *Summa theologiae* (*ST*). In the earlier works, Thomas clearly limits the scope of Christ's infused knowledge to what is naturally knowable. Later, however, he expands the scope of the infused knowledge to encompass even supernatural knowledge, what he calls, in the *CT*, the knowledge of the mysteries of grace. Accordingly, Torrell views the mature emphasis on the supernatural content of Christ's infused knowledge as revealing Saint Thomas's true intention. Specifically, Torrell sees the purpose of the infused knowledge as pertaining not to the perfection of Christ's possible intellect as such (Thomas's primary argument), but to the knowledge of supernatural truth for the sake of its earthly communication. Torrell finds confirmation of this most of all in the *tertia pars* of the *ST*, where Saint Thomas spells out the scope of the infused knowledge specifically in terms of the *mysteria gratiae*. Christ knew "all that men know by divine revelation, that which arises from the gift of wisdom, or from the gift of prophecy, or from any other gift of the Holy Spirit."²³

The argument from the perfection of the possible intellect, consistently present throughout Thomas's intellectual career, is not to be understood as his primary argument, but as a *post facto* argument from fittingness. Based on Torrell's interpretation, the disciple of Saint Thomas is more faithful to the master's intention by bracketing the maximalist argument from perfection, thereby precluding the embarrassing consequence of Christ as an astrophysicist, or expert climate scientist. "We are on the wrong track," Torrell writes, "if we imagine that this is a matter of allowing Christ's human soul to know all that can be known. It is rather a question of providing him with a knowledge of God and of divine things *in a human mode*."²⁴ Having identified the true reason for Christ's infused knowledge, Torrell and others think it possible and indeed salutary to dispense with the argument from perfection as an uncritically accepted assumption from an extra-biblical, philosophical *a priori*.²⁵

²² See Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 404 (esp. the section "Les hésitations de S. Thomas").

²³ *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1, quoted in Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397.

²⁴ Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 403. Torrell states that without the infused knowledge Christ would have been "completely helpless in the religious domain."

²⁵ It is precisely on this basis that Jean Galot criticizes Aquinas's teaching of the triple knowledge of Christ. See Jean Galot, "La Christ terrestre et la vision," *Gregorianum* 67 no. 3 (1986): 429–50. See also Maritain, *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, 47–48.

Margelidon on the Adamic Parallel for Christ's Infused Knowledge

While many have followed in Torrell's footsteps, some have sought to do so while nevertheless acknowledging some theological basis for Thomas's argument from perfection. One such attempt can be found in Philippe-Marie Margelidon's article "La science infuse du Christ selon saint Thomas d'Aquin."²⁶ Margelidon rightly sees that the doctrine of Saint Thomas is not one simply inherited from the Scholastic tradition, but that, "as with everything he receives, [Thomas] seeks to ground and justify it (by reasons of fittingness) as much as possible in the light of the mystery of Christ, the revealer, doctor, and master."²⁷ In contrast to Torrell, Margelidon recognizes that Saint Thomas never argues for the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge from the ineffability of the knowledge of vision.²⁸ Its existence must be justified by recourse to a distinct *ratio*. While Margelidon ultimately concludes to a position similar to that of Torrell, the way that he arrives there provides an insight which enables us to understand Saint Thomas more accurately. For our purposes, Margelidon's key insight is to see the basis for Aquinas's argument from perfection in a comparison to the first man, Adam.²⁹

As the New Adam, Christ possesses a greater perfection than the first Adam, whose infused knowledge had as its express purpose the fulfillment of his earthly role as principle and governor of the human race. Margelidon writes: "The idea, shared by Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others, is that Christ the new Adam must possess the perfection of the knowledge of Adam before sin, a mode of knowledge superior to the common, experimental mode, namely, the infused mode [*indita*]."³⁰ Notably, Margelidon sees Aquinas as intentionally restricting the full scope of Adam's infused knowledge with a view to Christ's relatively greater perfection. Margelidon thus sees the perfection argument as proximately grounded in the comparison to Adam.

The primary text for Margelidon's comparison of Christ's infused knowledge to that of Adam is found in question 20 of the *DV*, on the knowledge of Christ, where Saint Thomas states in passing that Christ had this knowledge more fully (*plenius*) than Adam.³¹ This is the only place in any of Thomas's

²⁶ Philippe-Marie Margelidon, "La science infuse du Christ selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 114, no. 3 (2014): 379–416.

²⁷ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 379–80.

²⁸ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 396, 398, 408.

²⁹ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 398.

³⁰ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 381.

³¹ See *De veritate* [DV], q. 20, a. 6, resp. The comparison appears at the very end of the

various treatments of Christ's knowledge where a direct comparison is made to Adam. From this single instance, however, Margelidon draws a broader conclusion: "The Thomasian and medieval conception of the science of Adam in the prelapsarian state *very closely conditions and overdetermines* the scope that St. Thomas grants to the science of Christ the New Adam."³² In support of this reading, Margelidon looks ahead to the treatment of Adam's infused knowledge in the much later account of the *prima Pars* of the *ST*, where Thomas has recourse to an argument from perfection that clearly parallels the argument for Christ's infused knowledge:

Those things which are in potency are reduced to act only through something in act. . . . Thus, just as the first man was instituted in the perfect state as to his body, in order that he might immediately be capable of generating offspring; thus, he was also instituted in the perfect state as to his soul, *in order that he would be capable of instructing and governing others*.³³

Not only is the argument posed in terms of potency and act, but Adam's perfection in infused knowledge is justified explicitly in terms of its role in his instruction and governance of the human race, that is, in terms of earthly utility. As the first man, it was necessary that Adam possess the knowledge, both natural and supernatural, to govern the human race. That the earthly function of Adam's knowledge determines his perfection in infused knowledge is made clearer by Saint Thomas's exclusion of various objects of knowledge which are unnecessary for Adam's fulfillment of his role: "But those things . . . that are not necessary for the governance of human life, the first man did not know; as, for instance, the thoughts of man, future contingents, and certain singulars, as for example the number of stones in a river, and other such things."³⁴ Here, perfection is directly and explicitly conditioned by earthly utility. This same principle, suggests Margelidon, is at work in the perfection of Christ's infused knowledge. The argument of perfection is therefore relative to the first Adam. "If Christ recapitulates Adam, he must possess the gnoseological perfection more perfectly."³⁵ For Christ, as the second Adam, must be greater (i.e., more perfect) than the first.

Yet, if the Pauline comparison between Christ and Adam grounds

response and without adding anything substantial to Thomas's account.

³² Margelidon, "La science infuse," 399 (emphasis mine).

³³ *ST I*, 94, a. 3, resp. (emphasis mine). See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 399–400.

³⁴ *ST I*, 94, a. 3, resp.

³⁵ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 403.

Thomas's argument for Christ's relatively greater perfection in knowledge, it nevertheless does not provide a reason for the Savior to have a *maximally* perfect infused knowledge. Here Margelidon sees the restriction of Adamic infused knowledge as an ad hoc way to highlight Christ's perfection in infused knowledge. Yet, there is no need for Christ's possible intellect to be fully reduced to act such that his soul possesses *in habitu* the intelligible species of all that is knowable. According to Margelidon's account, Christ's knowledge need be only *relatively* greater than Adam's. The desire to emphasize the superiority of Christ vis-à-vis Adam leads Aquinas to an over-determined account of maximal perfection.

Having understood the purpose of the infused knowledge solely in terms of its earthly utility, Margelidon finally rejects Thomas's argument from the possible intellect: "Certainly, the perfection of [Christ's] supernatural knowledge of the revealed mysteries corresponds to the end of the redemptive Incarnation, but the extent and infused mode of Christ's knowledge appears as the daring result of a complex construction far too distant from the Gospels."³⁶ If the scope of Christ's infused knowledge is, as Margelidon claims, conditioned by the Adamic knowledge of innocence, there is no compelling reason to believe that Christ knew all things. Rather, the argument from perfection, which ostensibly aimed at highlighting the relative superiority of Christ as the New Adam, nevertheless concludes too much. In brief, the argument from perfection, as presented by Margelidon, still requires a rejection of Saint Thomas's main argument from perfection.³⁷

While Margelidon's reading enjoys greater textual support than Torrell's, his assumption of the earthly utility account, justified through the comparison to Adam's infused knowledge, paints Saint Thomas's argument from perfection as ultimately "theoretical, hellenic, and founded in the general idea of omniperfection"—in sum, it is too philosophical and insufficiently biblical.³⁸

For Margelidon, too, the infused knowledge is to be understood as a stable habit of knowledge that finds a rough analogue in prophetic knowledge:

Saint Thomas seems to appeal not directly to the infused knowledge, but the infused gifts of the Holy Spirit, to explain through them the extent of his range of knowledge, "everything knowable" (*sed contra*): (1) to the gift of wisdom for the knowledge of all divine realities; (2)

³⁶ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 404.

³⁷ See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 412.

³⁸ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 398.

to the gift of understanding for all the immaterial realities, namely separated substances; (3) and to the gift of counsel for everything that is required for moral action. . . . In reality, for Saint Thomas, what specifies these gifts is contained in the proper object of the infused knowledge. It is therefore not false to affirm that, by this knowledge, Christ is prophet. The infused knowledge is certainly not, by nature and by reason of its object, a prophetic knowledge, but it has its perfection of it because, through it, Christ possesses the knowledge of future singulars and of the mysteries of grace to be transmitted. The infused knowledge of Christ *in quantum erat viator* extends to everything that is transmitted by divine revelation, whether it is a question of the gift of wisdom and of other gifts of the Holy Spirit, and of the gift of prophecy.³⁹

In attempting to understand the theological basis for Saint Thomas's teaching, Margelidon finally comes to a view similar to Torrell's. If the exigency of Christ's infused knowledge does not arise from its role in translating the beatific knowledge, it nevertheless exists purely for the sake of its earthly utility. "The infused knowledge," he writes, "empowers Christ for his mission as the perfect revealer of God and as prophet."⁴⁰ Thus, for Margelidon, as for Torrell, "the religious and supernatural end of this mode of knowledge determines its scope."⁴¹ Like Torrell, Margelidon judges Aquinas's account to be based on a principle of perfection that is finally alien to Scripture.⁴²

Margelidon's intuition that Thomas's account of Christ's perfection in infused knowledge is linked to the Adamic knowledge is helpful insofar as through this comparison we see, contrary to Margelidon's reading, that Christ's perfection is grounded in a *ratio* distinct from that of Adam's. This is evident from the account of the *DV* quoted above. There, Aquinas poses the objection that Christ did not need to know the number of stones in a river:

Christ assumed with our nature those defects that do not impede the purpose of the assumption, namely, our redemption. But ignorance [*nescientia*] of many things would not have impeded our redemption, for instance, if Christ had not known how many stones were at the

³⁹ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 391.

⁴⁰ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 395.

⁴¹ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 395.

⁴² See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 398.

bottom of a river. Therefore, it should not be said that Christ knew all things.⁴³

Recall that this is precisely the knowledge that is denied of Adam in the *ST*.⁴⁴ According to the objection in the *DV*, just as such a knowledge was not required for the fulfillment of Adam's earthly function, neither was it necessary for Christ.

Yet, the very knowledge that Aquinas explicitly excludes from Adam on account of its excessive nature is considered to be necessary in Christ:

The Son of God did not assume every defect that could be in him without impediment to the redemption of man. For it is true that he assumed only those [defects] whose assumption would be fitting to the redemption of the human race. Nevertheless, any ignorance [*quaecumque nescientia*] would be a defect impeding the redemption of the human race, since in the Redeemer, through whom grace and truth was to be poured out upon the entire human race, there was required the fullness of grace and truth, to which any defect of knowledge would have been injurious.⁴⁵

Aquinas ties the knowledge of something as inconsequential to his earthly mission such as the number of stones in a river, to his redemptive task. We will return to this argument below. For now, it is sufficient to note that the Adamic parallel highlights not so much the similarity between Adam and Christ, but a key difference. Unlike Adam, Christ is the universal cause of grace. As Aquinas states earlier in the *DV*, "Christ is for us the principle of grace just as Adam was the principle of nature."⁴⁶ Adam's knowledge served an earthly function, of governing and instructing; in contrast, Aquinas sees Christ's knowledge as necessary on account of the fact that his humanity is the very source of all grace and graced truth for all of humanity.

⁴³ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, obj. 11.

⁴⁴ See *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, obj. and ad 11, for the objection regarding the knowledge of the number of stones in a river. See *ST I*, q. 94, a. 3, corp., for the explicit denial of such a knowledge in Adam.

⁴⁵ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 11.

⁴⁶ *DV*, q. 18, a. 4, ad sc 3.

Rethinking Saint Thomas's Argument for Christ's Infused Science

What is most striking about the Adamic parallel is not its determinative role in Thomas's account of Christ's knowledge, but its relative absence. Beginning with Hugh of St. Victor, it was commonplace for twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scholastics to frame Christ's human knowledge in terms of the various states of Adam's existence in innocence, sin, and glory.⁴⁷ A similar comparison appears in the accounts of Albert and Bonaventure. In these two thinkers, the Adamic parallel is indeed the determining factor for understanding Christ's infused knowledge.⁴⁸ Christ had to assume the knowledge corresponding to each of Adam's various states. For these thinkers, it is in the Adamic state of innocence (also called the state of integral and perfect human nature) that one finds the reason for Christ's infused knowledge. The *Summa fratris Alexandri*, which is followed by Albert and Bonaventure on this point, states that, besides the knowledge of beatitude and the knowledge of the experience of punishment, it was necessary for Christ to possess the Adamic knowledge of innocence, according to which he knew all that is naturally knowable. In contrast, the Adamic parallel arises only once and in passing in Thomas's treatments of Christ's knowledge, notably in the early *DV* text referenced by Margelidon. Far from conditioning and "over-determining" Aquinas's understanding of Christ's perfection, the Adamic parallel appears more as an exception in Aquinas's various treatments of Christ's knowledge. Given its frequent occurrence in Thomas's contemporaries, it is safe to assume that its relative absence in Thomas's works is not accidental.

But why would Thomas avoid the Adam–Christ parallel in his treatment of Christ's knowledge? Besides the fact that the historical parallel by itself does not get to the fundamental reason for Christ's perfection in knowledge (as Margelidon's article makes clear), I suggest that it is because Thomas sees Christ's humanity as playing a fundamentally different role from Adam's. The first man, the principle of the human race according to nature, possessed the knowledge necessary for his role as the governor and instructor of his progeny; in contrast, Christ is not only the external governor and teacher of the human race (i.e., according to his earthly teaching), more fundamentally he

⁴⁷ The three states of humanity are taken from Boethius. Reference to Adamic knowledge is found in Alexander of Hales, *Glossa III sent.*, d. 13, nos. 10 and 26, and *Summa fratris III*, inq. un., tract. 3, q. 1, tit. 2.

⁴⁸ Albert the Great, *De incarnatione*, tract. 4, q. 1, a. 3; Albert the Great, *In III sent.*, d. 13, a. 10, sol.; Bonaventure, *In III sent.*, d. 14, a. 3, q. 1.

is, in his very humanity, the principle and cause of the interior influx of grace for the entire human race, according to his role as the head of the Church.

In fact, Aquinas explicitly distinguishes Christ's headship from that of every other "head" on this basis.⁴⁹ Others are called "head" on account of external governance (*quantum ad exteriorem gubernationem*), but "the interior influx of grace is from no one except Christ."⁵⁰ Since Christ communicates grace and truth interiorly, in a manner that exceeds any single time and place, his grace and knowledge must also extend beyond the time and place of his earthly teaching and preaching.⁵¹

Returning to the text from the *DV*, we can now consider why Thomas thought it necessary for Christ to know the number of stones in a river.⁵²

⁴⁹ There is a parallel to Christ's mediating work, specifically with respect to the particular participation in this mediating work by others. See Gilles Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," in *"Christus—Gottes schöpferisches Wort": Festschrift für Christoph Kardinal Schönborn zum 65. Geburtstag* (Freiberg: Herder GmbH, 2010), 344: "Even though one might participate in mediation, Jesus Christ alone is the true (*verus*), perfect (*perfectus, perfective*) and principal (*principaliter*) mediator of God and men. . . . While Christ acts as the principal, 'sufficient,' and 'perfective' mediator, other mediators who contribute to the union of men with God exercise their mediating activity as 'dispositive or ministerial' in reference to Christ."

⁵⁰ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6.

⁵¹ See *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6. As Emery notes, this influx is from the very humanity of Christ. This is the basis for a careful distinction and order between the fullness of grace and the hypostatic union: "For Thomas Aquinas, as we have seen, Christ is mediator properly as man. Thomas adds: Christ is the 'Head of the Church' (*Caput Ecclesiae*) according as he is the mediator between God and men. Specifically, however, Christ is the Head of the Church in virtue of his fullness of grace ('capital grace'). By this fullness of grace, Christ is the head of *all men*. 'Christ is the mediator of God and men according to his human nature, as he shares passibility with men, and justice with God, which is found in him through grace. This is why, in order to be the Mediator and Head [*mediator et caput*], it is necessary that, besides the [hypostatic] union, he possess in himself habitual grace.' We find here the relation between the hypostatic union and the fullness of Christ's grace. It is through his fullness of grace that Christ's humanity is formally mediative. This fullness of grace is distinct from the hypostatic union from which it flows" ("Le Christ mediateur," 346). Emery explores the universality of Christ's human action *via* the trinitarian missions (347–49).

⁵² See *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, obj. and ad 11. The question and reply pertain to what Christ knows *in Verbo*. Nevertheless, the objection and reply apply equally to the *ratio* for the infused knowledge. That he speaks in terms of the knowledge *in Verbo* in the *DV* highlights one of the significant developments in Thomas's teaching on Christ's knowledge. Following Bonaventure, Thomas turned from the knowledge of everything *in Verbo* to focus gradually on the beatific aspect of Christ's knowledge of the Word. This is certainly not the case in Alexander of Hales's *Glossa*, nor in the *Summa fratris*, nor Albert's commentary on the *Sentences* or his *De Incarnatione*. What Aquinas applies to the knowledge of things

Here, Margelidon suggests that Thomas considered any nescience whatsoever to be a mark of sin.⁵³ Yet, Thomas nowhere suggests this, and his stated argument explicitly excludes even a morally neutral nescience. To quote the text again: "Any nescience whatsoever [*quaecumque nescientia*] would be a defect impeding the redemption of the human race."⁵⁴ The nescience of which Saint Thomas speaks does not refer to a moral, gnoseological defect arising from sin, as Margelidon argues, but specifically regards Christ's redemptive mission. Thomas's further explanation makes this clear: "For the Redeemer, through whom grace and truth was to be poured out upon all humanity, required the fullness of grace and truth. And *any defect in knowledge* would have been injurious to this."⁵⁵ The key to understanding Saint Thomas's account of the infused knowledge requires us to look not to Christ's earthly teaching, but to the all-encompassing nature of Christ's headship.

*Christ's Humanity as the Universal Principle of Grace
for the Human Race*

Thomas teaches that Christ, in his humanity, is the universal source of grace. This teaching, which appears unremarkable to us now, was a radical claim in the context of thirteenth-century Scholasticism.⁵⁶ Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventure following him, considered Christ's divinity alone to be the source and cause of grace. For the two Franciscans, the humanity of Christ can be only an external and dispositive cause of grace. While Christ's human prayer, obedience, and merit extrinsically (i.e., dispositively) prepare others to receive grace, nevertheless, the interior gift of grace can be given by God alone. The basis for this claim rests in an important Scholastic dictum that God alone is able to give grace.⁵⁷

in Verbo in the *DV* he later attributes to the infused knowledge in the *CT* and finally in the *ST*. The reasons for these shifts internal to Thomas's thought have to do with the underlying *ratio* for beatific knowledge, on the one hand, and the infused knowledge, on the other. The latter is related to the thesis of this paper, namely, the gradual solidification of the close tie between the infused knowledge and the various graces (the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the gratuitous graces).

⁵³ See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 403. Margelidon suggests here that Thomas unwittingly collapsed nescience (a morally inculpable lack of knowledge) with ignorance (culpable not knowing): "If nescience is not in itself an evil, ignorance always has, since Adam, a culpable cause; this is why [Christ] could not assume it without contradiction."

⁵⁴ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 11.

⁵⁵ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 11 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁶ See my recent "Principle of Perfection" article.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Hales, *Glossa III sent.*, d. 13, no. 7. For parallel developments in sacramental causality, which is an extension of Christology, see Bernhard Blankenhorn, "The

One notes a gradual shift away from this teaching in Albert's commentary on the *Sentences*. For Albert, Christ's graced humanity does more than extrinsically dispose others for the reception of grace. As the soul informs the body and is everywhere present within it, so the grace of Christ's humanity informs the Body that is the Church.⁵⁸ While Albert's account is riddled with ambiguities and inconsistencies, the trajectory of the development is clear. Albert is attempting to do justice to the role of Christ's humanity as an efficient cause of grace. Aquinas will spell this out with greater force by speaking of the instrumental causality of Christ's *humanity* with respect to grace. When we arrive at Thomas's own *Scriptum*, we find a more developed account of the role of Christ's humanity in communicating grace; the development of this teaching continues and is finally solidified by the time of the *ST*.⁵⁹

Let us look at this development. Thomas's treatment of Christ's fullness of grace in the *Scriptum* highlights just how radically his early view departs from that of his contemporaries. The account takes its structure from the *Summa fratris*. The parallels between the two accounts serve to highlight their differences. For our purpose, we focus on the most significant aspect of this parallel: the comparison of Christ's grace to various luminary bodies. In the *Summa fratris*, the Halensist examines the fullness of Christ's grace by a comparison to two luminary bodies: to coal and then to the flame. Coal is like the grace of ordinary men: it glows but does not illuminate other bodies. The grace of Christ, however, is like the flame, which not only glows but also illuminates surrounding bodies. Aquinas transforms this analogy by introducing a third luminary body, which is entirely absent in the Halensian account. Christ's grace is not like the flame or candlelight; rather, it is like the sun. Unlike candlelight, which illuminates only particular objects surrounding it, the sun is the very source of all light. "Thus," writes Aquinas, "the matter is similar for Christ's grace: for he has grace through which he is perfect in himself, and from himself he communicates [grace] to others."⁶⁰ In modifying the Halensian account, Thomas intentionally

Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments: Thomas Aquinas and Louis-Marie Chauvet," *Nova et Vetera* (English), 4, no. 2 (2006): 255–94.

⁵⁸ Albert's account is ambivalent but can be seen as opening the door (through the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius) to Aquinas's more robust account of the instrumentality of Christ's humanity.

⁵⁹ On dispositive causality, see H.-F. Dondaine, "A propos d'Avicenne et de Saint Thomas: de la causalité dispositive à la causalité instrumentale," *Revue Thomiste* 51 (1951): 441–53.

⁶⁰ See *In III sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 1, corp.

expands the role of Christ's grace. It is universal in scope—Christ's grace is the source of grace for all others. This analogy appears again in the *ST*, where Thomas contrasts the grace of Christ with that of other men as universal to particular: "Wherefore, just as the power of fire, however much it increases, is not able to equal the power of the sun, so the grace of other men, however much it increases, cannot equal the grace of Christ."⁶¹

In teaching that Christ's humanity is the source of all grace, Thomas does not begin from an *a priori* philosophical principle, but begins from the scripturally revealed datum that God has predestined all the elect *in Christo*. We see this clearly in Thomas's argument for Christ's grace of headship in the *ST*. The metaphysical priority and preeminence of Christ's grace is apparent from the fact that "all others receive grace with respect to his grace."⁶² For support, Thomas quotes Saint Paul: "Those whom he foreknew, these he also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he might be the Firstborn among many brothers."⁶³ Our predestination and the ordering of our grace is to the image of the Son.

Here we find a profoundly theological and biblical argument for Christ's perfection pertaining to the role of Christ's humanity as the universal cause of all grace.⁶⁴ On account of the union to the divinity, as a conjoined and animated instrument, Christ's humanity is the universal source of grace.⁶⁵ From revelation we learn both that the Word became flesh and that it is from Christ's consequent fullness of grace that all receive grace (see John 1:14, 16). The argument's premises are received from the revealed data. "If Christ had not been incarnate," writes Aquinas, "God would have preordained men to be saved through another cause. But since he preordained the

⁶¹ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 11, ad 3.

⁶² *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1, resp.

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1, resp. (emphasis mine).

⁶⁴ See *ST* III, q. 24, a. 4, corp.

⁶⁵ On the universality of Christ's human action as the instrument of the divinity, see Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," 350: "Jesus's human action, by its own power ('according to its proper form'), possesses a determinate, circumscribed, and limited character as with any creaturely action. But insofar as this human action participates in his divine action as its proper, conjoined, and animated organ, it receives the power to obtain these gifts *as extensive and universal as that of his divine action*." Emery later adds: "The procured effect keeps the mark of the instrument which has brought its collaboration to the work thus accomplished: the grace spread by Christ bears the mark of Christ. All sanctifying grace, all communion with God is Christic, whoever the beneficiaries may be; and all sanctifying grace incorporates its beneficiaries to Christ, i.e., to the Church which is the Body of Christ. . . . The scope of this 'instrumental' action is universal: it procures the salvation by participating in the virtue of the divinity 'which attains by its presence every place and every time' (351).

Incarnation of Christ, he simultaneously preordained that [Christ] would be the cause of our salvation.”⁶⁶ Again, it is necessary to see that this is not a conclusion deduced a priori from an abstract notion of perfection or even from the bare fact of the hypostatic union. Thomas fundamentally grounds his argument in the priority of Christ’s election and the consequent role of Christ’s humanity in diffusing grace to others.

Propinquity and the Causality of the Maximum

It is from this vantage point that we can make sense of the various arguments from perfection to which Thomas frequently appeals in his accounts of Christ’s fullness of grace and knowledge. One that is often targeted as being alien to Scripture is commonly called the “principle of propinquity.” Stated succinctly, the principle of propinquity holds that the nearer a thing is to the principal cause, the more it partakes of its influence.⁶⁷ Thomas often appeals to the propinquity of Christ’s soul to the overflowing cause of grace (i.e., the Word) in order to account for his fullness of grace and knowledge. Some, such as Torrell and Jean Galot, have considered this to be a variation of the much-abhorred medieval principle of perfection. The argument is frequently understood as a deduction from an abstract consideration of the hypostatic union to the necessary fullness of grace and knowledge in Christ’s human soul. “The nearer a thing is to God, the more perfect it is; this man is united to God to the highest degree (i.e., hypostatically); therefore, this man is maximally perfect.” Naturally, theologians have been uncomfortable with such a mode of reasoning, since the notion that maximal ontological and moral perfection must belong to any creature assumed to a hypostasis of the divine Trinity appears to consider the Incarnation in abstraction from the economy of salvation. Further, the conclusion contradicts the revealed fact that Christ also possessed defects in soul and body for the sake of his mission. It is such an understanding of Aquinas’s argument that Galot rightly accuses of beginning from an a priori, extra-biblical notion of perfection.

Yet, this is not Saint Thomas’s argument. In arguing from the propinquity of Christ’s soul to the Word, Thomas is not concerned about Christ’s perfection for its own sake, but precisely as it has been revealed as ordered to redemption. It is important to notice that the grace given to Christ by virtue of his soul’s proximity to the Word is the same grace that Christ’s humanity

⁶⁶ *ST* III, q. 24, a. 4, ad 3. See also *In III sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 1, corp., *DV*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 6; a. 4, corp. and ad 6.

⁶⁷ See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 1, corp.; see also *DV*, q. 20, a. 5, resp. The principle of propinquity arises from the natural order of things instituted by God himself. See also *ST* III, q. 8, a. 5, corp.

communicates to others as the instrument of the divinity. For it is only what is nearest to the overflowing cause that can exercise a causal influence on others. Thomas writes: "Every first cause operates in what is nearer to itself, and through it operates in things further removed, as fire first heats the air around it, through which it heats distant bodies."⁶⁸ In order to operate on things "further removed," it is necessary that the medium possess *in actu* that which it causes in others. Applied to our present case, if Christ is to be the cause of grace in others, he must himself possess the maximum of grace in the genus of intellectual creatures.

The propinquity argument is situated in a broader argument pertaining to the causal role of Christ's humanity with respect to other men.⁶⁹ Here, philosophy is at the service of revelation. To explain how Christ's humanity can communicate grace and truth to others (received as a datum of faith; see John 1:16), it is necessary that Christ's soul itself possess the maximum of grace and truth.⁷⁰ This maximum or fullness is, in turn, accounted for by his soul's propinquity to God through the hypostatic union (see John 1:14). Thomas ties the hypostatic union to the perfection of Christ's grace through his role as head of the Church.

While the principle of propinquity explains how it is that Christ is perfect in grace, a second principle, the causality of the maximum, explains *why* Christ must possess the perfection of grace. The causality of the maximum states that a cause in any genus must possess maximally that of which it is the cause. For it is only by possessing the greatest grace (*maximam influentiam gratiae*) among rational creatures that Christ can act as its universal principle and cause.⁷¹ Thomas alludes once again to the analogy of the sun:

For the power of a universal principle of a genus universally extends itself to all the effects of that genus, as the sun, which is the universal cause of generation, . . . extends its power to everything that falls

⁶⁸ See *ST* III, q. 56, a. 1, resp.

⁶⁹ In fact, the argument from propinquity presupposes that God bestows grace to intellectual creatures (which is itself not necessary). If God did not give grace to intellectual creatures, then there would be no reason for an assumed human nature to possess the fullness of grace. For the causality of the maximum, see V. de Couesnongle, "La causalité du maximum: l'utilisation par saint Thomas d'un passage d'Aristote," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 38, no. 3 (1954), 433–44; de Couesnongle, "La causalité du maximum: pourquoi Saint Thomas a-t-il mal cité Aristote?" *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 38, no. 4 (1954): 658–80.

⁷⁰ From this, one can state, as Thomas does, that to take away the divine nature from Christ would result in the removal of his unique fullness of grace (*ST* III, q. 26, a. 2, ad 1).

⁷¹ See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 9, resp.

under generation. And thus, [this] fullness of grace was found in Christ inasmuch as his grace extends to all the effects of grace, that is, the virtues, gifts, and other similar things.⁷²

Insofar as Christ is the cause of grace, his own fullness of grace must encompass more than what belongs to his earthly teaching and ministry; in order to be a universal cause of grace, the grace of Christ must extend to *every* effect of grace.

It is important to notice that the arguments proposed by Thomas make use of philosophical premises solely to explicate what is received through revelation. Philosophy here serves only to clarify, not to determine, what is revealed.⁷³ Not only does Thomas argue from the hypostatic union to Christ's fullness of grace (through the propinquity argument); he also argues from Christ's role as the cause of grace back to his fullness (through the causality of the maximum). Note the ambivalence: "Since Christ somehow [*quodammodo*] communicates the effects of the graces to every rational creature, he is indeed, in some manner [*quodammodo*], the principle of every grace according to the humanity."⁷⁴ In this we see Thomas as squarely situated in the office of the theologian, *fides quaerens intellectum*.⁷⁵

In sum, Aquinas's fundamental inspiration is found in the Johannine prologue, which he frequently cites: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."⁷⁶ As the universal principle of grace, Christ is less like the

⁷² See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 9, resp.

⁷³ On the structure and procedure of *sacra doctrina*, see John F. Boyle, "The Structural Setting of Thomas Aquinas's Theology of the Grace of Christ as He is Head of the Church in the *Summa theologiae*" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1989), 9–87. See also John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ See *DV*, q. 20, a. 5, resp. He speaks in a similar way in the *ST* III, q. 7, a. 9, resp.

⁷⁵ See *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8; *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 8.

⁷⁶ The causality of the maximum gives us the final cause (namely, that Christ's humanity be the saving source of grace for all men): The cause in a genus is the maximum in that genus; Christ is the cause of grace in the genus of grace ("from his fullness we have all received"); therefore, Christ must be at the maximum in the genus of grace ("full of grace and truth"). The principle of propinquity gives us the efficient cause (namely, that Christ's humanity derives this power from its union to the Word): The nearer a thing is to its source, the more perfect it is; Christ's soul is nearest to the source of grace ("the Word was made flesh"); therefore, Christ's soul is most perfect in grace ("full of grace and truth"). In both cases, the minor premise and conclusion are taken directly from revelation. Notably, the second syllogism does not give the final cause for Christ's

first man, Adam, and more like the First Cause. "Just as every perfection of *esse* is united in God, so in Christ is found every fullness of grace and power."⁷⁷ It is through his grace and power that Christ not only performs works of grace in his earthly life but also is constituted the cause of grace for others.⁷⁸ This is true not only for those who have attained the state of the *comprehensor* according to which Christ must possess the beatific vision, but also for those who are *in via* according to which Christ must possess every grace that is necessary in order for *viatores* to attain their supernatural end.

The Argument for Christ's Infused Knowledge

We can now see how Thomas's broader Christology and use of metaphysical principles clarify his doctrine of Christ's infused knowledge. In order to be the universal principle of grace, the potency of Christ's possible intellect must be perfect. Christ's humanity is the instrument of the divinity, the source of grace by which the rest of mankind receives grace; to this end, therefore, it must itself be perfected in every graced knowledge. With respect to the possible intellect, this means that it must be reduced to act via intelligible species which are perfective of it.⁷⁹ Yet it is not clear whether or how such

perfection in grace. Taken alone, it might suggest an absolute perfection that contradicts Christ's assumption of defects. It is only when the two are taken together, with a view to Christ's role as head, that one understands the significance of Aquinas's argument. As with his treatment of Christ's mediation, Thomas does not always spell this out, but sometimes speaks in shorthand. See Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," 342: "The approach that looks to the humanity of Christ depends on that which refers to the hypostatic union. The man that Saint Thomas contemplates in Christ the mediator is the man divinized as a result of the union according to hypostasis. This is likely why, in certain shorter texts, Thomas is content to refer the mediation of Christ to his consubstantiality with the Father and with men."

⁷⁷ *DV* q. 29, a. 5, resp. To lead others to beatitude is precisely what it means for Christ to be the author of salvation. See *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2, ad 2.

⁷⁸ Emery speaks of this fullness of grace in terms of the mission of the Holy Spirit: "Founded on the union of the humanity to the divinity in the person of the Word, but formally distinct from this hypostatic union, the anointing of the Holy Spirit flows to the humanity of Jesus in an abundance of divine life such that it makes him not only the most eminent beneficiary of grace but also its giver. Christ received grace, i.e., the principle of life with God, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit (the gifts of knowledge and the love of God), not only as an individual [but] also as the First Born of a multitude of brothers, that is, as *archegos* (*auctor, princeps*) who leads to his Father all who are associated with him" ("Le Christ mediateur," 347–48). Additionally, Dominic Legge provides an account of Christ's fullness of grace in terms of the mission of the Holy Spirit in *The Trinitarian Christology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 182–86.

⁷⁹ Aquinas thinks that the possible intellect is perfected through created intelligible species.

an argument applies to all of Christ's infused knowledge. If Christ has the fullness of grace in order to communicate it to others, does this require that he possess the infused knowledge of all things absolutely (e.g., the number of stones in a river)? The solution to this problem is found by approaching Saint Thomas's account of Christ's infused knowledge against the backdrop of his treatment of Christ's grace.⁸⁰ Since Christ's grace corresponds to every effect of grace, it is necessary that it not only encompass, but surpass the entire scope of natural human knowledge. For the knowledge of all natural things is contained in the effects of grace.

Let us turn to Saint Thomas's argument from the potency of the possible intellect. The argument of the *ST* is worth quoting in full:

It was fitting that the human nature assumed by the Word of God not be imperfect. For everything that is in potency is imperfect unless it is reduced to act. But the human possible intellect is in potency to all intelligibles and is reduced to act through intelligible species, which are forms perfective of it, as is clear from what is said in *De anima* III. And therefore, it is necessary to admit an infused science [*scientiam inditam*] in Christ, inasmuch as the Word of God imprinted on the soul of Christ, personally united to him, intelligible species of all that to which the possible intellect is in potency.⁸¹

Thomas begins with the necessary perfection that is fittingly accorded to the assumed human nature. As we saw above, this perfection can be understood only in light of the Incarnation's ordering to redemption. That is, the human nature of Christ as the universal cause of grace requires the fullness of grace so that it can be the source of grace for others. Without the requisite intelligible species, the human soul of Christ would remain in a state of imperfection—that is, his soul would not be maximally perfect, as is required for a universal cause. Thus, Aquinas concludes, it is necessary that Christ's soul be filled by the Word with the infused knowledge of all things; otherwise, the humanity of Christ would be ontologically defective as a cause, which would further prevent it from acting as the universal source of grace. In theological terms, the presence of any defect in knowledge (again,

Notably, he nowhere states that the possible intellect as such is fully reduced to act by the blessed vision. This makes sense insofar as the possible intellect is naturally proportioned to intelligible species which are necessarily determinate and finite.

⁸⁰ In other words, we must read qq. 9–12 of *ST* III against the backdrop of qq. 7–8.

⁸¹ *ST* III, q. 9, a. 3, resp.: For a parallel account, see *CT* I, ch. 216.

this includes the category of non-morally culpable nescience) would act as an impediment to his role as cause of grace.

Yet, I have so far been making a claim about Christ's humanity as the universal source of *grace*. In this case, the requirement is simply that Christ be perfect in the genus of graced knowledge alone, or in Torrell's words, knowledge belonging to the "religious domain." Otherwise, would we not be forced to claim that Christ is also the universal cause of natural knowledge? The argument for infused knowledge frames the perfection of Christ's infused science not in terms of grace, but explicitly and exclusively in terms of the human intellect. Has Saint Thomas illicitly switched the terms of the argument? Based on the premise that Christ must be perfect in grace, how does he now conclude to Christ's perfection according to what appears to be the natural potency of the possible intellect?

To this a twofold response is sufficient. First, all of the infused knowledge is grounded in Christ's grace. This is clear from Aquinas's explication of the various objects known through the infused knowledge in *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1., where the *sed contra* is most explicit: "It is written in Isaiah 11 that the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of knowledge, and counsel, shall fill him, under which are comprehended all that can be known [*omnia cognoscibilia*]."⁸² Second, "all that can be known" through grace includes the knowledge of all that can be known through nature. This becomes even more apparent in Thomas's further explanation: "For the knowledge of all divine things [*divinorum omnium*] pertains to wisdom; the knowledge of all immaterial things [*omnium immaterialium*] to understanding; the knowledge of all conclusions [*omnium conclusionium*] to science; the knowledge of all practical matters [*omnium agibilium*] to counsel."⁸³ The full possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, therefore, encompasses all the knowledge that man can have, both natural and supernatural. In the body of his response, Thomas tells us that by this knowledge Christ knew "everything which is made known to man through divine revelation, whether they pertain to the gift of wisdom or to the gift of prophecy or to any other gift of the Holy Spirit." As noted above, Torrell cites this text to argue for an alternate approach to the perfection argument—restricting Christ's infused knowledge to the "religious domain." In fact, the text suggests that all natural and supernatural knowledge is necessarily tied to the various graces of which Christ is the source. Far from restricting the scope of Christ's knowledge, Saint Thomas argues that all knowledge is linked to Christ's role as head. Thus, it is insofar

⁸² *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1, sc. Thomas appeals to the gifts of the Spirit again in ad 3.

⁸³ *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1, sc.

as he is the universal source of grace that Christ possesses, through the full actualization of his possible intellect, all the knowledge corresponding to the graces, theological virtues, and gifts of the Spirit. In other words, it is because grace perfects and elevates nature that the fullness of grace includes the perfection of natural knowledge. The “religious domain” encompasses the universe of knowledge that Christ must possess in his infused knowledge.

A comparison with Christ’s beatific knowledge helps us to see how the infused knowledge plays a necessary part in his role as the source of grace. Just as Christ must have *in actu* the blessed knowledge to which man is ordered as created *ad imaginem Dei*, so too it is necessary that Christ, as the way to God, also possess the graced knowledge that leads to this end. In other words, since Christ is the cause not only of the *comprehensor*’s beatitude, but also of the various graces and effects of grace (i.e., the theological virtues, the gratuitous graces, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) that lead the *viator* to his supernatural end, it is necessary that Christ possess all of this in his human soul. Since grace not only elevates but perfects nature, this graced knowledge necessarily includes the entire scope of natural human knowledge.

The argument from the possible intellect also highlights the fact that, even if the infused knowledge is said to be proportioned to the angelic nature, in Christ it is posited as a distinctly human perfection.⁸⁴ Thomas intends to show not only that Christ’s intellect is perfect, but that the perfection of Christ’s intellect is a definitively *human* perfection. While the source of this perfection is found in Christ’s grace, his grace is delimited by the created nature that receives it. In other words, Christ’s perfection in knowledge does not do violence to the human nature, but perfects it. Aquinas shows this based on the fact that the actualized potencies (whether natural or obediential) are potencies which are grounded in the created human nature itself.⁸⁵ Thus, just as the *visio Dei* (knowledge, which Aquinas tells us, is “proportioned to God alone”) does not destroy the integrity of the created human nature, neither does the infused knowledge transform the human soul into an angelic nature, much less an “encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola.”

⁸⁴ See my “Principle of Perfection” for a fuller treatment of the human character of Christ’s perfection in knowledge.

⁸⁵ At no point does Aquinas suggest that Christ’s human nature takes on divine or angelic proportions simply because of its union to the Word. Rather, the natural constitution of human nature as such (which exists between material and intelligible beings) is the basis for this parallel. In other words, it is because of potencies existing in human nature that Christ’s human knowledge can be compared to that of the angels and even of God.

Conclusion

The earthly utility approach is incomplete insofar as it considers Christ's infused knowledge only in terms of the role that it plays in his earthly teaching. As a result, proponents of the earthly utility account have had difficulty making sense not only of the existence of the infused knowledge as distinct from the blessed and acquired knowledge, but also of the extensive scope that Aquinas accords to it. This is true not only of Torrell, but even of more careful attempts such as that of Margelidon. Both the role and extent of Christ's infused knowledge must be understood in light of the role of Christ's humanity as the universal source of grace. The argument from perfection should be understood as an argument pertaining to Christ's role as the mediator of grace. Christ's humanity can communicate only what it itself possesses; according to Scripture, Christ's humanity is the universal principle of all grace (irrespective of time, place, or state); therefore, the humanity of Christ must be full of grace and truth.⁸⁶

This causal power of Christ's human nature is accounted for through its union to the Word. Thomas argues for the necessary fullness of grace and knowledge based on the propinquity of Christ's soul to the absolute source of grace. For the nearer a thing is to the agent cause, the more fully it participates in its effect. These are not *a priori* philosophical arguments. The minor premises are received from revelation and explicated with the aid of philosophical principles. In this regard, Aquinas is simply highlighting the causal relation between the various revealed data concerning the Incarnation. In order to be a universal cause, Christ, in his human nature, must not only possess the infused knowledge that is the source of all the knowledge possessed by the members of his body, but he must also possess it perfectly, such that there is no unactualized potency in his human intellect. When understood correctly, the exigency of the infused knowledge is firmly grounded in the biblical and patristic conviction that Christ's humanity is the

⁸⁶ See Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," 348–49: "For Thomas Aquinas, the grace by which *all men* today live in communion with God, participates in this fullness of grace that was given to the humanity of Christ in order that he communicate it to all men: 'The fullness of grace that is in Christ is the cause of all the graces that are in all intellectual creatures.' The mediative singularity of Jesus Christ appears here in a clear way, at the center of the entire economy. The abundance of salvation is procured for men by one man, Jesus Christ, who, in virtue of the exceptional holiness of his humanity united personally to the divinity, has received the fullness of the divine life in order to communicate this life to all. The communication of this divine life is accomplished by the entire existence of Jesus and, at its summit, by his Passion."

instrument of the divinity and the universal source of all grace—not only for the *comprehensor* but also for the *viator*, independent of time, place, or state.

Torrell and others are certainly right in seeing that Saint Thomas in no way sought to transform Christ into an “encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola.” Yet, by couching the purpose of the infused knowledge purely in terms of its earthly utility, it is difficult if not impossible to avoid such a portrait of Christ without simultaneously necessitating a rejection of Thomas’s own account. By seeking to avoid such a caricature, however, one risks missing the central insight of the Angelic Doctor: the humanity of Christ, as the universal cause of grace for the human race, must possess fully that of which it is the cause. It is crucial not only to see Christ’s perfection not simply in terms of his earthly communication of truth (in which case, the argument from perfection results in a portrait of Christ the expert climate scientist, medical doctor, philosopher), but to see the role of Christ’s perfection in infused knowledge as conditioning the broader and more fundamental role his humanity plays as the universal cause of all grace. To be sure, the infused knowledge plays a role in Christ’s earthly ministry; nevertheless, its *ratio* cannot be reduced to this alone. Christ’s perfection in knowledge is not necessary merely because he must be posited as more perfect than Adam, but because of his role as the author of salvation and the redeemer of the entire human race.⁸⁷

N·V

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Fr. Reginald Lynch, O.P., who read an early draft of this article at the “Crisis of Christology Conference” at Ave Maria University and to Fr. John Emery, O.P., and Fr. Simon Gainé, O.P., who each raised critical questions regarding my thesis. I am especially thankful to the anonymous peer reviewer who offered extremely helpful criticisms that have enabled me to clarify the main argument. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.