

## THE "JESUS" OF ST. THOMAS\*

Recently, Jesus, our divine Saviour, has interested the world press. Initiatives of young people in various countries, and meetings bearing his name, have provided material for journalists. From these premises I have taken the opportunity to review the portrait of Jesus painted by St. Thomas in his *Summa* (III, qq. 1-17). It is obvious that the Jesus of St. Thomas Aquinas is the same as that of St. Thomas the Apostle saying: "My Lord and God". It is the same exclamation meditated and developed with wonderful consistency.

Jesus is the Word incarnated: this is the revelation of Holy Scripture, and it is the teaching of the Church. The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon explained that faith, and it is that faith that the Angelic Doctor contemplates. "The Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1,14): that is, became a man. He is God and man. He united to himself a human nature and thus became Christ. It is from that union of a human nature with the person of the Word that it is necessary to start out. It is the closest union that there can be, since it constitutes in one being the person and the nature united with it. The Word, the body and the soul of Christ are one being, one person. The human nature of Christ is no other than the Word's. It is a question here of reality, of what is, and not just of a combination of words of juridical relations.

Now, granted that union in the person here is a very clear principle that will guide us: the nearer a thing is to a centre of influence, the more intensely it receives its effect. The more a body approaches the sun, the hotter it becomes. The human nature of Christ, being united with the Word in the closest unions, receives its greatest effect, and such that no other nature can receive an effect so great. The hypostatic union (in the person) gratuitously brought about, is a first, fundamental grace, which requires the other graces in their supreme degree.

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\* *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 November 1972.

### OUR GREATEST GIFT

God's greatest gift to an intelligent nature is that of supernatural life, participation in divine life, which is not due to any creature, not even to the most perfect of the angels. It has, in fact, been granted to angels and to men, and it could not but be given to the human nature of Christ, by virtue of his union with the Word. Sanctifying grace, therefore, as we call participation in divine life, was infused in Christ's soul with an intensity greater than in any other nature. This means that Christ, receiving the grace of union in the first instant of his conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, also received divine life or sanctifying grace in the highest degree, and that He did not receive it only as children do in baptism, without his act, but in the exercise of his most perfect act, that is, the vision of divine essence face to face. Right from his conception, his soul was blessed more than any pure creature will ever be.

Thus Christ is constituted of the Word, human nature (body and soul) in one being, in one person. The soul enjoys the vision of God. How shall we now understand the capacities, the qualities, the activities of human nature in that divine person? All the virtues compatible with the constitution of Christ, that is charity and the cardinal and moral virtues, were infused into it with sanctifying grace, and in their highest perfection. But where there is the vision, there is no room for faith, and where there is no sin, there cannot be penitence. There are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus himself declared in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4, 21). And what acts result from the exercise of those sublime virtues and the gifts of the Spirit? Here we are guided by a secure principle. We must attribute to Christ the qualities and activities that stem from his constitution and are not opposed to his mission as Redeemer; and we must exclude the defects incompatible with his constitution or with his mission; while we will admit in him the defects and infirmities that are not incompatible with the dignity of his person and which are necessary or useful for the accomplishment of his mission.

### IMPECCABLE WILL

So we see his intelligence preserved from ignorance, since it is illuminated by the divine essence, contemplated face to face; the infused knowledge of the angels is communicated to

him; its natural activity is exercised in daily experience. Those who speak of a Christ who is hardly able to know who he is, who does not know the duration of his Church or anything else connected with his mission, have not reflected enough on what the grace of the hypostatic union entails.

His will is impeccable, since nothing would contradict his mission as Saviour as much as sin. He himself challenged his adversaries to find sin in him (John 8, 46). His will is very holy because of the perfection of its charity, and it is free to carry out a mission of obedience, atonement, merit.

Christ has also sense faculties and passions in which they have a part. But the defects that passions have in us cannot exist in him. He had no inclination to evil, and the temptations of the devil could not result in such for him. His emotions were perfectly subjected to the rule of reason and did not disturb it in any way.

### ASSUMED OUR NATURE

The God-Man, however, willed to assume those infirmities and defects of our nature that were compatible with his constitution and which served his mission. In fact he was subject to fatigue, as when he slept in Peter's boat (Mt. 8, 24), or when he sat on the edge of Jacob's well (Jn. 4, 6). He was hungry, as when he went to the fig tree (Mt. 21, 18). That follows from human nature, makes it recognizable, brings Jesus nearer to us, allows him to set examples and to merit. Above all he can suffer much in his body and in his soul, and can die. This certainly does not follow from his constitution which would rather call for the glory of Tabor and the Resurrection; but it was necessary for the Lord's mission. He had come to atone, to expiate, to redeem us by his death; it is also in keeping with his generosity and his love. That incredible humility, as St. Augustine calls it, was possible in spite of the presence of the union, because the influence of the latter was providentially suspended, to all of each faculty to be determined only by its object. At the same time there was the joy of the beatific vision, and sadness at the sight of the sins of men and because of the anguish of death, the suffering of the tortured body dying on the cross.

That portrait of Christ satisfies the two Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon: the two natures remain distinct, with-

out confusion, and they are in the same person. In fact, what is said of the human nature of Christ leaves it completely within the limits of humanity. The grace it receives is supreme, in fact in a certain way infinite, but not simply infinite and it is created; the human nature remains outside of the divine, which does not undergo change. Yet the union in one person produces its full effect: by belonging to the Word, the human nature receives "the whole treasury of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2, 3); and nevertheless that is in harmony with the sufferings, the humiliations and the death freely accepted for us.

This doctrine which satisfies because of its harmony and intelligibility is nothing but the expression of the reality contained in the sacred texts. St. Thomas was an exegete. He taught Holy Scripture; he commented on the New Testament; he collected the best texts scattered among the commentaries of the Holy Fathers. It cannot but be desired that those admirable articles of the *Summa* should be meditated more and more by theologians and exegetes.

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The *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas* extends prayerful greetings and congratulations.