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## DID JESUS POSSESS THE BEATIFIC VISION DURING HIS INCARNATION?

### A Comparative Essay on the Perspectives of Thomas Joseph White and Thomas G. Weinandy

William Chami

#### 1. Introduction

Pondering the mysteries of the Catholic faith, and in particular, the Incarnation of the Son of God is one of the most challenging and arduous tasks a theologian can undertake. This is no doubt true in the case of Christ's earthly life, where the Son of God took on flesh and made himself like us in all things except for sin. Accompanying this mystery are several questions which theologians have wrestled with throughout the course of all of Christian history. These questions pertain to the Incarnate Christ, and include, but are not limited to, questions on his divinity, his humanity, his consciousness, his intellects and his wills. Although these questions have been reflected on, defined and answered by the Church's magisterium, further issues within Christology remain. To me, no other question is as fascinating as the issue which has been resurrected in our contemporary times, which seeks to understand whether the Incarnate Christ possessed the beatific vision from the moment of his conception. This paper will examine the traditional understanding of this issue and reflect on the positions of two giants in modern Christology, Fr. Thomas Joseph White O.P. and Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy OFM Cap, who both hold diverging viewpoints and have written against each other time and time again. Further contained in this essay will be their most formidable arguments on the issue, as well as their objections against one another.<sup>1</sup>

The first known author to claim explicitly that Christ possessed the beatific vision was the ninth century author Candide.<sup>2</sup> From this, many other authors, especially those in the scholastic period, endorsed this Christological view. Notable names include Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard and most famously, Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> This idea enjoyed endorsement even from the Magisterium of the Church, being mentioned in Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*.<sup>4</sup> Here Pius embraces the idea that Jesus, at the moment of his conception 'began to enjoy the beatific vision', with all the members of his Mystical Body being present to him at all times.<sup>5</sup> In fact, until the 1950's, the general

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<sup>1</sup> To provide an exhaustive critique of all the arguments proposed within the works of Thomas White and Thomas Weinandy on this issue would exceed the breadth of this paper. Rather, this essay will focus on four main articles written by both men and their responses contained therein

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 240.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 240

<sup>4</sup> Further references from the Church can be seen in the decree of the Holy Office of June 5, 1918, and *Haurietis Aquas* (1956), which both affirm the 'beatific knowledge' of the Incarnate Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican Website, June 29, 1943,

consensus among theologians was that Christ did indeed enjoy the vision of heaven. However, in the time leading up to and following the Second Vatican Council, contemporary theologians began to object to the reality of such a teaching. In a lecture given in 1961 by the prominent theologian Karl Rahner S.J, it was stated that ‘such statements sound almost mythological today when one first hears them; they seem to be contrary to the real humanity and historical nature of Our Lord.’<sup>6</sup> Such a stance was reiterated by yet another giant of contemporary theology, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, who declared that Christ did not see the Father in the beatific vision.<sup>7</sup> The reason for such a dramatic shift in attitude toward this teaching could be attributed to the Church’s movement away from Neo-Scholasticism, which focused heavily on the teachings and influence of the Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas. The Neo-Scholasticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries would eventually be drowned out by its opponents at the Second Vatican Council, with the question of Christ’s beatific vision changing along with it. Today it is not at all uncommon to find theologians who disagree with this idea, while those who seek to defend it are becoming heard less frequently. The division in Catholic thought on this issue is embodied well in the works of Thomas Joseph White and Thomas G. Weinandy, who both, although being distinguished Christologists and friends, differ greatly in their answer to this question.

## 2. Weinandy-White: First Exchange

In the year 2004, Thomas Weinandy wrote an article entitled ‘Jesus’ filial vision of the Father’.<sup>8</sup> Within this work, Weinandy expressed his discomfort with the traditional teaching of Jesus’ beatific vision, believing it to run contrary to the very nature of the Incarnation.<sup>9</sup> Weinandy proceeded to highlight a number of different arguments against the idea of Christ possessing the beatific vision. For the purpose of this paper, only two main arguments will be highlighted. These relate to the inadequacies of the question itself, which Weinandy believes is Nestorian in nature, as well as the way in which he believes that Christ’s self-consciousness as the Son of God should be conceived. Weinandy refers to this as Christ’s human ‘hypostatic vision’.

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[http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_29061943\\_mystici-corporis-christi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html), sec 75

<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, “Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 194-195.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. III: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 200.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” *Pro Ecclesia* 13, no. 2 (2004), 189-201.

<sup>9</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 189.

Weinandy begins by questioning the very nature of the beatific vision, ascribing to it a reality which is ‘post-resurrectional’, and so argues that it cannot be experienced pre-resurrection.<sup>10</sup> He touches upon the Docetic implications of such a view, asking how Jesus could have lived a genuinely human life if he had already experienced what we are waiting to experience in heaven.<sup>11</sup> This, however, is not the main concern of Weinandy. Rather, he predominately takes issue with the very question itself, one that he believes Nestorius would have been happy with and one that Cyril would have altogether rejected, as it stands in its current formulation.<sup>12</sup> Weinandy argues that the beatific vision, as originally understood, is the ‘immediate vision of God *by someone who is not God*’<sup>13</sup> (emphasis added). Therefore, the contemplator or seer of the beatific vision is not ontologically united to that which is contemplated.<sup>14</sup> The contemplated, rather, stands over and above the contemplator. Such a view posits a Nestorian conception of Christ. In the Nestorian understanding of the Incarnation, the two subjects, Christ the Son and Jesus the man, are not ontologically united, but stand ‘over and against one another’.<sup>15</sup> The question of whether Jesus, the man, possessed the beatific vision, could be answered positively in this way, since Jesus, the man, is not ontologically equal to God, and thus could, in fact, contemplate the beatific vision. However, in the orthodox view of the Incarnation, the Son of God made man is not two persons, but one single subject, who is not ontologically subordinate to God, but united to him fully. In addition to this, Weinandy argues that an acceptance of the belief in Christ’s beatific vision poses harm to the three Incarnational principles, which are as follows: It is truly *the Son of God* who is man, It is truly *man* that the Son of God is, and the Son of God truly *is* man.<sup>16</sup> In remaining faithful to the first and third Incarnational principles, Weinandy claims that the subject who experiences the vision cannot be a distinct subject from Christ the Son since it is the Son who is truly man.<sup>17</sup> If the Son, then, contemplates the Father in his essence, then Christ’s shared ontological status with the Father would experience detriment.<sup>18</sup> Christ, in order to possess the beatific vision, must be subordinate or ontologically different from the Father, which, if affirmed, gives rise to an answer which is implicitly Nestorian.

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<sup>10</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 189-190.

<sup>11</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 190

<sup>12</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 190.

<sup>13</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 190.

<sup>14</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 190.

<sup>15</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 190.

<sup>16</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 192.

<sup>17</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 192.

<sup>18</sup> This understanding is highlighted by Weinandy, as he states: ‘Since it is the Son who must be the subject of any such vision of the Father, his vision of the Father cannot be a vision of the divine essence as an object ontologically distinct from and over against himself.’ Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 192.

In order to diverge this question away from its Nestorian undertone, Weinandy rephrases the question, conceiving it in this way:

Did the Son of God as man, within his human consciousness and intellect, possess a vision of the Father such that he (the divine Son) was humanly aware of himself as Son and so knew himself to be the Son, and thus, as a consequence, perceived all that the Father willed for him during his earthly life?<sup>19</sup>

Weinandy believes that the question, arranged in this way, is no longer Nestorian, but rather is one that is in continuity with the Christology of Cyril and the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>20</sup> To this question, Weinandy would answer in the affirmative.<sup>21</sup> In writing on the self-consciousness of Christ, Weinandy recognises that the traditional view sought to preserve Christ's self-knowledge of himself as God by means of the beatific vision.<sup>22</sup> Weinandy believes, however, that such an approach is faulty, and so presents an alternative way to understand this reality.<sup>23</sup> He argues that the way in which the Son comes to know himself as the Son during his Incarnation is through a vision which is subjective rather than objective.<sup>24</sup> Weinandy names this the 'hypostatic vision'. This vision, according to Weinandy, is inherently distinct from that of the beatific vision traditionally promoted, for it does not provide the Son with an objective perception of the divine essence, and thus avoids an ontological separation.<sup>25</sup> Rather, the hypostatic vision allows the Son to become *humanly* conscious of Himself as the Son through his subjective vision of the Father.<sup>26</sup> This is demonstrated by Weinandy, who states:

The person (*hypostasis*) of the Son possessed, as man, a personal human vision of the Father by which he came to know the Father as the Father truly exists. In coming to know the Father as truly Father, the Son equally becomes humanly conscious of himself as Son and so humanly came to know that he is, as is the Father, God.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 190.

<sup>20</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 191.

<sup>21</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 191.

<sup>22</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," footnote 7.

<sup>23</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," footnote 7.

<sup>24</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 193.

<sup>25</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 193.

<sup>26</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 193.

<sup>27</sup> Weinandy, "Jesus' Filial Vision Of The Father," 193.

In other words, the way in which the Son understands himself to be the Son is in relation to his Father. It is through this filial relationship, and not the beatific vision, that the Son comes to humanly know his own identity as the divine Son.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Weinandy argues that the way in which this hypostatic vision of the Father is mediated is through the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup> This view needs to be understood within a Trinitarian context, whereby through the Spirit, the Son possesses a human hypostatic vision of the Father, making him humanly conscious of his identity as the Son.<sup>30</sup> Weinandy relates this to the experience of humans, who, through the Spirit of Sonship, come to know the Father, and in turn, realise their true identity as sons and daughters of God, thus being able to cry out ‘Abba, Father.’<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is argued that Christ did not possess this human hypostatic vision from conception, as was argued in the case of the beatific vision. Rather, this vision advanced as Christ grew in age, wisdom, and grace.<sup>32</sup> It is only through time then, that Christ becomes humanly conscious of his divine Sonship, with this understanding reaching its climax at the resurrection.<sup>33</sup> Such a view is demonstrated in the Letter to the Hebrews, which claims that Christ was ‘made perfect’ through his own death and resurrection.<sup>34</sup> This, according to Weinandy, embodies the eschatological self-realisation of Christians, who will only come to fully comprehend their identity in heaven.<sup>35</sup>

In order to counter this view, Thomas Joseph White presented a number of scholarly and Thomistic arguments in his 2005 article ‘The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision’.<sup>36</sup> Here White argues that it was imperative for Christ as man to possess the beatific vision in order to maintain the unity of his theandric actions.<sup>37</sup> As demonstrated in Scripture and the Patristic Fathers, the two wills of Christ, human and divine, although distinct, must cooperate within the one subject of Christ. This cooperation, according to White, is only possible through Christ’s contemplation of the beatific vision, which reveals to the Son the existence of his own divine intellect and divine will.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Weinandy substantiates his view by referring to the document created in 1985 by the International Theological Commission ‘The Consciousness of Christ concerning Himself and His Mission’, which expressed the idea that the Son’s knowledge of himself was predicated on his knowledge of the Father. Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” footnote 8. The document can be found in the International Theological Commission, Vol I: Texts and Documents, 1969-1985, ed. M. Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 196.

<sup>30</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 196.

<sup>31</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 197.

<sup>32</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 197.

<sup>33</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 198.

<sup>34</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 198.

<sup>35</sup> Weinandy, “Jesus’ Filial Vision Of The Father,” 198.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Joseph White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 69, no. 4 (2005), 497-534.

<sup>37</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 534.

<sup>38</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 505.

This, in turn, allows the human will of Christ to cooperate with the divine will, as well as the human intellect to cooperate with the divine intellect. As White states:

This unity of personal action in Jesus requires a perfect cooperation between the human will of Christ and his divine will. In effect, Christ's will and consciousness must act as the instruments of his divine subject, being directly specified at each instant by his divine will. For this, knowledge of his own filial nature and will is necessary. The virtue of faith, or a uniquely prophetic knowledge (by infused species), is not sufficient. The unity of activity of the Incarnate Word requires, therefore, the beatific vision in the intellect of Christ, so that his human will and his divine will may cooperate within one subject.<sup>39</sup>

The way in which Christ comes to know his own divine identity and divine will is through the mediation of the beatific vision.<sup>40</sup> White argues that if Christ did not experience this immediate vision of God, then he could not have complete assurance that his human action corresponded with his divine will. As White states:

By contrast, in the absence of the vision, the infused science of Christ would lack such immediate evidence, and would have to be accompanied by faith. In this case, the prophetic awareness Christ had of his own divinity and will would have to be continuously accompanied by an autonomous decision of faith in the human heart of Christ and a repeated choice to welcome in trust this revelation from his own divine self.<sup>41</sup>

The unity of Christ's wills, therefore, is rendered dependent upon the beatific vision, for any other knowledge of Christ is insufficient in providing evidential knowledge of his divine will and divine identity.<sup>42</sup> Faith, according to White, is necessary for all other types of knowledge, even prophetic knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Through the immediate knowledge of the vision, Christ not only has certitude in who he is and what he wills, but this vision allows the human

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<sup>39</sup> White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," 507.

<sup>40</sup> White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," 516.

<sup>41</sup> White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," 519.

<sup>42</sup> White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," 520.

<sup>43</sup> White states, 'Instead the man Christ would continually need to make acts of faith in what he believed obscurely to be the divine will he shared (as God) with his Father. He would have to hope (as a man) that he was doing what his own transcendent identity (which he also believed) willed for him. Christ would not know with certitude, therefore, who he was and what was willed (as God) in each instant.' White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," 520.

will of Christ to move in accordance with the divine will, so as to ‘irremediably correspond to its inclinations’.<sup>44</sup> It is in this way that the human will of the Son of God made man is able to cooperate indefectibly with his divine will.<sup>45</sup> For White, the only way in which to remove the act of faith from the Incarnate Son is through his immediate knowledge of the beatific vision. It becomes problematic, then, to assert that he did not experience such a vision, for this renders in Christ the virtues of faith and hope, as well as a lack of assurance in regard to his own divine will, as evident by White’s statement: ‘The actions of Christ as man do not reveal the will of God the Son, but only what Jesus as man hopes is the will he shares eternally with the Father.’<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, White substantiates the Incarnational necessity of the beatific vision by alluding to the examples of Christ’s obedience and prayer. As demonstrated earlier, the only way in which the human will of Christ can act in cooperation with the divine will is through the presence of the beatific vision. In this way, White argues that the beatific vision reveals to the Son his own filial identity as the Son, and so empowers the Son to pray to the Father fully aware of this reality.<sup>47</sup> It is only through Christ’s knowledge of the Father and, evidently, knowledge of his own identity that he prays and obeys the Father in his earthly actions.<sup>48</sup> This knowledge, however, can again only be certain through the beatific vision. Without it, the obedient actions of Christ operate through faith and hope in the divine will, which is known not in certainty, but rather vaguely and obscurely.<sup>49</sup> Only in this way can Jesus know the will of the Father and complete it well.<sup>50</sup> White also argues against the oppositional accusations of Docetism, claiming that such a vision does not make Christ any less human. White believes that what is altered are not the human faculties of Christ, but rather the mode through which they are exercised.<sup>51</sup> This means that the faculties themselves retain the vulnerability associated with human nature, such as suffering and death, but are exercised through a ‘higher spiritual awareness’ of the transcendent realities possessed by Christ, namely, his divine identity, intellect, and will.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the prayer of Christ does not signify his vulnerability

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<sup>44</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 519.

<sup>45</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 520.

<sup>46</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 520.

<sup>47</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 522.

<sup>48</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 522.

<sup>49</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 516.

<sup>50</sup> White argues: ‘Could this form of “instrumental” revelatory prayer be possible uniquely by means of prophetic knowledge in the soul of Christ, lived out in faith? In this case the man Jesus would lack evidential knowledge of the will he receives externally from the Father. His prayer would therefore not be moved immediately by his filial will as the Son of God, but would express instead the desire in his human heart to do the will of God which he only believed that he shared eternally with the Father. Therefore, his prayer would operate on a parallel track with the divine will, without direct contact.’ White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 529.

<sup>51</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 532.

<sup>52</sup> White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” 532.



or vague knowledge of the Father but rather is a human expression of his filial relationship with the Father.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is through the Incarnational life of Christ, namely, his prayer, obedience, and action, that Christ's objective filial knowledge of the Father is demonstrated. This, as White claims, can only be attained in and through Christ's immediate vision of God, with no other form of knowledge, such as faith and prophetic revelation, being sufficient for such an assurance.

### 3. Weinandy-White: Second Exchange

In the following year, Thomas Weinandy issued a response to White's propositions in his own article entitled 'The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion'.<sup>54</sup> Weinandy's response was threefold, summarising the arguments of White and critiquing them accordingly, as well as providing his own take on how the issue should be conceived.<sup>55</sup> Weinandy recognises that the divergence between himself and White on the issue of Christ's beatific vision is centered on one fundamental question: 'What necessarily follows regarding the manner or type of human life that the Son of God lived... That is, what does or does not necessarily ensue from the Incarnation as to the human life of the Son of God?'<sup>56</sup> For White, the answer to this question is the beatific vision, which ensures that the human intellect and the human will of Christ act in complete accordance with both his divine intellect and divine will.<sup>57</sup> Weinandy disagrees with the way in which White perceives the 'mechanics' of the Incarnation, claiming that his arguments run contrary to the very nature of the Incarnation.<sup>58</sup>

In his article, Weinandy accuses White's arguments as bearing 'a whiff of Nestorianism'. By this, Weinandy means that the very Chalcedonian Christology that White seeks to uphold is confounded by his own arguments. For example, White believes that Christ's possession of the beatific vision is key to understanding how the theandric actions of Christ can work in perfect harmony. This view, however, renders asunder the association between the human intellect and human will in relation to the one subject, Christ.<sup>59</sup> According to Weinandy, White's argument implies that Christ's human intellect and human will are totally independent and free-thinking faculties, which must be constantly 'set in order' by the

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<sup>53</sup> White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," 527-528

<sup>54</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 70, no. 4 (2006), 605-615.

<sup>55</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 606.

<sup>56</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 606.

Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 606.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 612.

<sup>59</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 609.

beatific vision.<sup>60</sup> This is because White attempts to necessitate the beatific vision as the means by which Christ's faculties are unified in one action.<sup>61</sup> As Weinandy asserts, the human faculties of Christ cannot be altogether distinct from the one acting person, the Son, for he, as man, personally acts through his human intellect and human will.<sup>62</sup> Such an argument, according to Weinandy, also attributes 'subjectivity' to the faculties of Christ. Rather than treating Christ as the sole subject, White gives the impression that the human intellect and will of Christ are subjects in their own respect. Weinandy elaborates:

White speaks of "Christ's human intellect" being "immediately aware of his divine will" and it is the beatific vision that ensures that "his human will can act in immediate subordination to his divine will." (516) But an "intellect" is not aware, nor does a "will" act; only a person knows and only a person acts and he does so through his will. Later White speaks of the "divine will" moving the "human will" (519) as if these were wills of different subjects. It is the Son of God who wills either with his divine will or with his human will, but the wills themselves do not interact apart from the one who is willing, the divine Son.<sup>63</sup>

Weinandy's message here is that the will itself cannot act apart from the subject who wills.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Christ, he is the subject that chooses to subordinate his human will to his divine will.<sup>65</sup> To say that two wills can cooperate apart from the subject attributes subjectivity to the wills, and renders the divine Son as some kind of third subject.<sup>66</sup> Weinandy makes clear what White really wants to say, but concludes that he cannot simply say it because of the severance he creates between the human intellect and human will in relation to the one acting subject, Christ. As Weinandy states: 'Within [White's] conception of the Incarnation the human intellect and will would be in competition with the divine intellect and will unless the beatific vision is imposed so as to ensure their unity.'<sup>67</sup> Against this claim, Weinandy argues what he had argued previously, namely, that Christ comes to know his divine identity and divine will through what he calls the 'hypostatic vision' of the Father.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 609.

<sup>61</sup> Weinandy claims that White 'employs such strained terminology due to his separation of the human intellect and will from the son of God, attempting to glue it back together with the beatific vision.' Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 610.

<sup>62</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 609.

<sup>63</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 611.

<sup>64</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 611.

<sup>65</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 611.

<sup>66</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 612.

<sup>67</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 612.

<sup>68</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 613.

Weinandy believes that this subjective vision is less problematic than the beatific vision as it does not create ontological separation between the beholder and the beheld. He also argues that this hypostatic vision does not require faith in the earthly Christ, but can provide him with certitude the will of the Father. Weinandy writes:

White holds that if the Son of God does not possess as man the beatific vision, his divine identity and knowledge of what he should will and do would be reduced to an act of faith or prophetic infused knowledge. This is not true. The Son of God, in coming to know who he is in a human manner through his human hypostatic vision of his Father, humanly comes to know the will of the Father and so humanly acts in accordance with it.<sup>69</sup>

Weinandy believes that this subjective vision remains faithful to the Incarnational principles by which Christ's human life is governed, and so can exist in continuity with Chalcedonian Christology. In order to better conceive of Christ's human 'hypostatic vision', Weinandy proposes an argument from Trinitarian theology. He argues that, in the inner life of the Trinity, the way in which the Son became conscious of himself as the Son of God is not in relation to his own divinity, mediated through the beatific vision, but rather through his relationship with the Father.<sup>70</sup> Through this relationship, Christ comes to know not only his own identity as the Son, but also becomes conscious of the will of his Father, and so conforms his own will to this understanding.<sup>71</sup> These very same principles are reflected in the Incarnational life of the Son, whereby Christ as man becomes humanly conscious of himself as the Son on earth, not in relation to his own divinity, but in relation to his association with the Father. In this way, Christ conforms his own human will to his divine will which is made known by this human hypostatic vision.<sup>72</sup>

In light of Weinandy's critique of his arguments, White produced two pieces of work which again focused on answering the issue of Christ's beatific vision. The first was entitled 'Jesus' Cry on the Cross and His Beatific Vision' and provided a defense against the contemporary argument which suggests that Christ could not have experienced the beatific vision since he suffered pain and death, as witnessed during his time on the cross and expressed through his cry of dereliction.<sup>73</sup> This article, however, is not the source of our

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<sup>69</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 613.

<sup>70</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 614.

<sup>71</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 614.

<sup>72</sup> Weinandy, "The Beatific Vision and the Incarnate Son: Furthering the Discussion," 614.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Joseph White, "Jesus' Cry on the Cross and His Beatific Vision," *Nova et Vetera* 5, no. 3 (2007): 557.

focus.<sup>74</sup> The second article produced by White in the following year was entitled ‘Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus’ and is more relevant for the purpose of this paper, as it provides a critique of Weinandy’s previous critique. Here White defends himself against the chief criticism of Weinandy, which is the claim that White treats the human intellect and human will of Christ as different ontological subjects, dividing them from the sole subject – the Son of God made man.<sup>75</sup> It is claimed by Weinandy that White believes that the human intellect and human will of Christ would autonomously ‘run wild’ if they were not bound together by the beatific vision.<sup>76</sup> Weinandy mainly takes issue with the way in which White communicates his points, describing the use of his language as semi-Nestorian. White responds by arguing that Weinandy’s objections are antithetical to the Christology of Chalcedon, and bears witness to the monoenergist accusations of old.<sup>77</sup> According to White, this concern in language is precedent of the contentions that were proposed by the anti-Chalcedonian thinkers of the six century.<sup>78</sup> White argues that the very same language Weinandy takes trouble with is the same form of communication used by defenders of dyothelism.

An example is made of Severus of Antioch, who, by accusing the Tome of Leo of implicitly promoting Nestorianism, influenced monoenergists for decades to come.<sup>79</sup> Severus, like Weinandy, objected to the way in which Leo the Great identified the two natures of Christ as ‘two principles of operation’.<sup>80</sup> The monoenergists of this time claimed that Leo was positing two different ontological subjects in his statement: ‘each “form” acts in communion with the other in accordance with what is proper to it.’<sup>81</sup> White argues that if Christ’s natures are treated as principles of operation or ‘grammatical subjects’ in Leo, then Weinandy should not take issue with the way in which he employs his language.<sup>82</sup> Even the Third Council of Constantinople makes reference to this phrase in Leo’s Tome, proceeding further with it, stating: ‘each nature wills and performs the things that are proper to it in a communion with the other, [and] in accord with this reasoning we hold that two natural wills and principles of

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<sup>74</sup> A brief summary of the article is offered here: White argues that Jesus’ cry on the Cross poses no contradiction to his immediate vision of God. This is because his cry signifies neither despair nor separation from God, but is a prayer of desire, one which relates to Christ’s hope for introducing humanity to its eschatological redemption (557). Accompanying this desire is agony, due to Christ’s knowledge of the evil of the world, heightened and elevated by his immediate vision of the Father (581). In this way, the beatific vision neither mitigates nor reduces the suffering of Christ, but rather intensifies it.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Joseph White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 4 (2008): 397.

<sup>76</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 399.

<sup>77</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 398.

<sup>78</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 400.

<sup>79</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 400.

<sup>80</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 400.

<sup>81</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 400.

<sup>82</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 401.

action meet in correspondence for the salvation of the human race.’<sup>83</sup> Thus, even in the orthodox declarations of the Church are the ‘natures’ of Christ treated as principles of operation, and are not seen as positing different ontological subjects. The only individuals who took issue with the use of such language during this time were the supporters of monothelism.<sup>84</sup> White, in attempting to justify his use of language, refers to the writings of St. John Damascene, who wrote: ‘his [Christ’s] human will was obedient and subordinate to his divine will, not being guided by its own inclination, but willing those things which the divine will willed.’<sup>85</sup> Damascene’s language here associates the natures of Christ as principles of operations. He does not argue for some kind of Nestorianism but rather understands that these are the natural operations in which the sole subject, Christ, acts.<sup>86</sup> White argues that these Christological formulations have enjoyed endorsement from great orthodox thinkers like Leo, Damascene, Aquinas and even Constantinople III. In no way should such formulations and articulations be considered, as Weinandy considers them, ‘semi-Nestorian’.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, the contemporary Christological issue which seeks to understand whether Christ possessed the beatific vision during his Incarnation is no better exemplified through the dialogues and discussions of Thomas Joseph White and Thomas G. Weinandy. To summarise their viewpoints, White believes that Jesus had to necessarily possess the beatific vision in order to know with absolute certitude his own divine identity and divine will. If Jesus did not have the beatific vision, then he could not have known with certainty these realities, an image which runs contrary to the Gospel portrayals of Christ. The beatific vision thus stands as the only means by which the Incarnate Son knows with full certainty his own divine identity and divine will. Without this vision, the earthly Christ would have had to have faith in these realities, a position neither White nor Weinandy want to concede.<sup>88</sup> Weinandy, on the other hand, believes this question to be implicitly Nestorian. This is because the one who possesses the beatific vision stands ontologically distinct from God, and so, one could only affirm that Jesus had the beatific vision if one conceives Christ in a manner that is essentially Nestorian. As a result of this concern, Weinandy proposes a new way in which to conceive of Christ’s self-consciousness and the unity of his theandric actions. This is through what Weinandy calls Jesus’ hypostatic vision of the Father, whereby Christ, through his relationship with the Father,

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<sup>83</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 402.

<sup>84</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 402.

<sup>85</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 403

<sup>86</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 403.

<sup>87</sup> White, “Dyothelism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus,” 408-409.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Joseph White, “Jesus: Essays in Christology by Thomas Weinandy (review),” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 79, no. 4 (2015): 644.

becomes humanly conscious of himself as the divine Son and in turn, comes to know the divine will and conforms to it. This reality is reflected in the inner life of the Trinity, whereby the Son knows himself as the Son only in relation to His Father.

The arguments of Thomas White and Thomas Weinandy on this subject are both formidable in their own respects. In my view, the question of whether Christ possessed the beatific vision from the moment of conception rests on a proper understanding of the nature of the beatific vision. If the beatific vision is understood as the immediate vision of God's essence by one who is ontologically distinct from God, then it would be difficult to affirm that the Incarnate Son, who is consubstantial with the Father, possessed such a vision. This view, as Weinandy explained, runs contrary to the very Incarnational principles, as well as Chalcedonian Christology which affirms the Incarnate Son to be a single divine subject who is both fully God and fully man. Furthermore, If the saints in heaven enjoy the objective contemplation of the essence of God, then is it not fitting that the Incarnate Son should be subject to a different kind of vision, one that is altogether distinct and *relational*. Since Jesus shares a special, intimate relationship with the Father as his only beloved Son, then the vision of the Father in which Jesus experiences is not one which is shared too by the saints in Heaven, that is, an objective vision of God's essence, but rather is one that is uniquely experienced by the divine Son, and so, is subjective.

The hypostatic vision of Weinandy does well to answer the objections of White, who is chiefly concerned with how the earthly Christ can know with full certainty the reality of his divine Sonship and divine will. Rather than coming to know himself in relation to his own divinity, it seems more fitting that the Incarnate Lord would come to know himself in the same way in which he does prior to his Incarnation, that is, in relation to the Father. The hypostatic vision, then, does well to exemplify the relationship shared between the Father and the Son and explains how the Son can know himself as the Son with absolute certitude in a way which is more relational and thus, Trinitarian. Not only does this vision avoid positing faith in the earthly Christ, but it also succeeds in preserving the authentic human experience of the Son. This is because, in the hypostatic vision, the Son comes to *humanly* know himself as Son, thus explaining his self-consciousness in a way that is more akin to common human experience. The hypostatic vision, then, seems a better alternative in preserving the Son's shared ontological status with the Father, as well as his shared nature with us. It not only answers the concerns of White in relation to how the earthly Christ can possess unity in his theandric actions but does well not to pose ontological harm to the earthly Christ, and thus avoids conceiving him in a manner which is 'implicitly Nestorian'.

As both theologians have written extensively on this issue, this paper could only cover a fraction of what has been said by both authors. It is not a simple task to reform our understanding of a teaching that has received noteworthy endorsement from both the tradition and, to some extent, the magisterium of the Church. The arguments of both Thomas Joseph White and Thomas G. Weinandy have no doubt shed light on this contemporary issue, and their work may one day prove to be essential in unraveling the answer to this mystery.

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