

The Growth of the Lord

A sermon by the Rev. Michael Gladish
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Following up on the Advent season we read in Luke about what happened after the presentation of the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem,

“So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, [Mary and Joseph] returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him...” (Luke 2:39-40).

And then later, on another visit to Jerusalem, they left Him behind on their journey home, and He was found teaching the scholars in the Temple. And we read, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature [or perhaps age], and in favor with God and men” (Ibid, v. 52).

As you all know, the doctrines for the New Church reveal a great deal about the dual nature of the Lord, including extensive discussion of the Divine and the “merely human” states of His life. Yet questions remain. What was He like as a baby or a boy? Did He cry like other infants? Was He ever disobedient? Did He ever do anything that could be considered thoughtless or inconsiderate? What was the real nature of His doubts and temptations as a grown Man? And why does it matter, anyway?

Well, to take the last question first, it matters a great deal, since the idea we have about God, or the Lord, qualifies everything else about our spiritual life (DLW 13, TCR 113, etc.), and so to a large extent determines how or whether we can be conjoined with Him. It’s pretty important.

We begin, then, with a fundamental principle explained in the True Christian Religion, no. 89, namely, that “God assumed the Human according to His own Divine order.” Here we read,

“In the section concerning the Divine omnipotence and omniscience it was shown that God at the creation introduced order into the universe and all its parts; and accordingly that the omnipotence of God proceeds and operates in the universe and all its parts according to the laws of His order.... Now since God came down, and since He is Order itself, as is there shown, it was necessary, in order for Him actually to become Human, that He should be conceived, carried in the womb, and be born; and that He should be educated, *acquiring in due course* the knowledge by which He might attain to intelligence and wisdom. Therefore as to His Humanity *He was an infant like any other infant, a boy like any other boy, and so on*; but with this sole difference, that He passed through those progressive states sooner, more fully and more perfectly than others.”

The passages we just read from Luke are then cited as proof of these teachings. But again, questions emerge even from this. Did He whine? Did He make mistakes? Was His judgment ever off? Did He take delight in anything mischievous? In short, did He ever do anything wrong? If He “grew in wisdom” doesn’t that imply that He *lacked* wisdom early on? What can we make of all this?

Again, the doctrines answer, but more in principle or general teachings than in detail. We read, in the explanation of the internal sense of Abraham's journey into the land of Canaan, that...

"In the Lord there was not any evil that was actual, or His own, as there is in all men, but there was hereditary evil from the mother, which is here called 'the Canaanite then in the land.' ... There are two hereditary natures connate in a person, one from the father, the other from the mother; that which is from the father remains to eternity, but that which is from the mother is dispersed by the Lord while the person is being regenerated. The Lord's hereditary nature from His Father, however, was the Divine. His heredity from the mother was evil, and this is treated of here, and is that through which He underwent temptations (see Mark 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1-2). But, as already said, He had no evil that was actual, or His own, nor had He any hereditary evil from the mother after He had overcome hell by means of temptations; on which account it is here said that there was such evil at that time, that is, that the 'Canaanite was then in the land'" (AC 1444:2).

This important passage goes on to note that the Canaanites lived by the sea, that is, the Mediterranean, and as such represented the evils in the outskirts of the land, or the external aspects of human life that relate to the world. But what does this really *mean*? Are we talking about a natural predisposition to selfishness and worldly disorders? Surely *we* know all about that sort of thing, as we act on these impulses constantly (and suffer the consequences) as we ourselves grow up. But of the Lord it is said about the Canaanite, "That this signifies the evil heredity from the mother, in His external man, is evident from what has been already said... for He was born as are other men, and inherited evils from the mother, *against which He fought, and which He overcame.*" In other words, He felt these as tendencies or inclinations in His outward life *but He never gave in to them. Rather, He overcame them. All of them. Presumably without hesitation.*

So as a baby did He cry? Why not? Before a baby learns to speak he makes his needs known to inattentive parents by crying to get attention. But as a toddler did He whine? It seems clear that He did not. As a boy did He misbehave or do anything that was in any way inconsiderate of others? The teaching seems clear that He did not. The Divine love moved Him from within to respond to every evil inclination with a NO, so that He could say, "No, I will not do that."

Now some have supposed that the incident in Jerusalem when, as it says, "the boy, Jesus, lingered behind" as Mary and Joseph set off for Nazareth, suggests some misbehavior on His part. We get this impression partly from the word, *lingered*, and partly from the reaction of the two parents who were clearly distressed about it and eventually confronted Him saying, "Son, why have you done this to us?" as if it were all His fault. But remember, this couple had other children; Jesus was just the firstborn. And the word, *lingered*, suggests intent, whereas the original Greek word simply means "remained." He had *remained* behind. Clearly this was a case of busy, pre-occupied parents neglecting one of their children, *assuming* He was with them but *not checking*. And the Lord, for His part, made the best of the situation by going to the Temple and *teaching* the scholars there.

OK, some of this admittedly is speculation, but given the teachings surely it makes more sense than the idea that the Lord was in any way inconsiderate. Indeed the message in Luke is that "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, *and was subject to them*" (2:51). This could not have been a change of heart, for we know that the Lord was motivated from conception by Di-

vine love, and never wavered from that love at any time. But He did grow and mature “sooner, more fully and more perfectly than (all) others” so that He was thinking and doing things as a child that most of us cannot begin to comprehend until old age. As He said, “WHY have you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

There are two critical implications here. The first is in the question, “Why?” Of course the Lord knew why they had sought Him! Typical of all the Lord’s questions throughout His ministry He was asking them to make them think: were they concerned for HIM or for themselves? Remember, Mary represents a merely natural will, and Joseph a limited, finite understanding. As for “My Father’s business,” the word, business” is not in the original language, it simply says, “in what is My Father’s.” The Lord from birth was “in what is His Father’s” and never stepped outside of that... which takes us to the main point of this sermon.

When the Lord “assumed the Human” in this world it was not just a material body; more importantly it was a Human mind formed from the interaction of the natural and spiritual worlds. It was a consciousness derived from the combination of fallible, finite human genes and an infallible, Infinite, Divine soul. But like every ordinary human being, the soul governed the development of the body and the will inspired by that soul governed the understanding. So when things came to His awareness, as they do incrementally with every child, He “processed” them all from the perspective of His love – a profound love for the salvation of the entire human race.

Was He fully conscious of this love from birth? No, He couldn’t be, because the awareness of love is according to the vessels prepared to receive it, which are things we LEARN from experience in the world. But it seems very clear from what the doctrines show us that whenever some new information came to His awareness He interpreted and acted on it from His infinite love. This produced a kind of learning that is not possible for any other person. We read,

“As regards the Lord’s instruction in general, the nature of it is very clear in the internal sense of this chapter (Gen. 20); namely, that it was by continual revelations, and thus by Divine perceptions and thoughts *from Himself, that is, from His Divine*; which perceptions and thoughts He implanted in Divine intelligence and wisdom, and this even to the perfect union of His Human with His Divine. *This way of growing wise is not possible with any man; for it flowed in from the Divine itself, which was His inmost, being of the Father, of whom He was conceived; thus from the Divine love itself, which the Lord alone had, and which consisted in His desire to save the universal human race*” (AC 2500:2).

To be as clear as possible, this passage goes on to explain that the Lord’s learning was still progressive, just as it is with any other person. It points out that wisdom and intelligence actually are contained within love itself, and so in the Lord’s case provided a most perfect insight into everything He experienced. Still, as we just noted, He could only get this insight in a focused, conscious, way to the extent that He acquired knowledge through the senses, and the senses were of course perfected gradually through life in the world, just as they are with any child, only in His case much more quickly and more perfectly.

But here’s the critical qualifier: because it is knowledge (or concepts) *from the Word* that most fully and completely contain the inflowing celestial and spiritual life, we are taught specifically “that in His childhood the Lord did not will to imbue Himself with any other concepts than those

of the Word...” (AC 1461). These are the things He both needed and wanted, and we know that He began learning them in His earliest infancy, soon after His birth (AC 1414). For example, it is said that the truths the Lord learned first of all involved “seeing all earthly and worldly things as created by God, seeing every single thing as having a purpose, and seeing in every single thing a certain likeness of God’s kingdom.” Further, “Such truth is implanted in none but the celestial man, *and since the Lord alone was a celestial man, these and similar truths were implanted in Him in (His) earliest childhood*” (AC 1434:e).

Such insight would be hard for us to comprehend in any child, but then, the Lord was no ordinary man. Yes, He learned as we learn; He grew as we grow; He developed as we develop, “but sooner, more fully and more perfectly than others” *because He was moved and directed from birth by nothing less than the Divine love*. And He was not regenerated; He was glorified. There’s a big difference (AC 1438).

All this leads us finally to a most important conclusion about the temptations that the Lord faced and how we should think of them. It’s a popular idea among many Christians, drawn largely from the New Testament Epistles, that Jesus was tempted just as we are, that is to say, by the lusts of the flesh and so on. We read, for example, in Hebrews 4:15, that “we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Really? It’s true, of course, that He was tempted by all the evils and falsities inherent in His maternal heredity, but to think of Him as having any real *interest* in such things seems completely inconsistent with the teachings about His inner life. Rather what concerned Him from earliest childhood was the salvation of the human race, the urgent, compelling need to re-order the heavens and the hells so that WE could be raised up out of such things, and what *bothered* Him, if we can use that word for temptations, is that people in rejecting Him would reject the possibility of their own salvation. In fact (and it’s a whole new subject for another day) *this* is what caused the Lord His most grievous and painful temptations, *not* the relatively crude fallacies and allurements of the flesh, which He clearly overcame as soon as they came to His conscious awareness – very early on.

Of course, if we think of the Lord as having what we might call an “easy” time with the things that seem to cause US the most grief, we may wonder whether He can really understand us and help us in our struggles and pain. But this is the critical point: these things *are easy* for the Lord. They were the simplest things He had to deal with in the world and He dealt with them at a very early age so that He could go on in His wisdom and strength to subjugate all of the hells and liberate us all from all the compelling evils of the loves of self and the world – if we will only turn to Him.

Yes, the Lord’s life was similar to ours. “He assumed the Human according to His own Divine order,” being “conceived, carried in the womb, born, and educated... acquiring in due course the knowledge by which He might attain to intelligence and wisdom” (TCR 89). But He was also very different, being motivated from conception by an infinite, Divine love for the salvation of the entire human race. And it is precisely that difference that makes it possible for us to call on Him in every circumstance, no matter how crude or overwhelming it may be to us. **He loves us**, no matter what, and He can help us, no matter how difficult or compelling our problems may seem. He is not, in His perfection, a God far removed from us, but a Divinely Human God much more intimately concerned for us and much more deeply aware of our needs than we can possibly know. Let us be careful not to think of Him as limited or even in His childhood as subject at

any time to the evils and falsities of the world which He confronted one by one, more and more profoundly as He grew in the knowledge of the Word. He knew He would overcome all these challenges (AC 1812); what was in question was whether *we* would accept and benefit from His work. In short, let's remember that His whole life right from birth was all about just one thing, helping *us* find *our* way to *our* "place" in heaven (John 14:3).

Amen.

Lessons: *Luke 2:39-52;*
 Children's talk on growing up – with the Lord's help
 Psalms 139;
 TCR #89 and/or AC #1461

AC 1461:

“‘And Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn’ means instruction in cognitions from the Word. This is clear from the meaning of ‘Egypt’ and from the meaning of ‘sojourning’. That ‘Egypt’ means knowledge comprised of cognitions, and ‘sojourning’ receiving instruction, will be seen in what follows shortly. That the Lord received instruction in childhood as anybody else does is clear from those places in Luke 2 quoted previously... and also from what has been stated just above concerning the external man, who cannot possibly be made to correspond and accord with the internal man except by means of cognitions. The external man is seated in the body and the senses, and does not receive anything celestial or spiritual unless cognitions are implanted in it as in the soil. Celestial things are able to utilize these as their own recipient vessels, *but those cognitions must be from the Word*. Cognitions from the Word are such as lie open from the Lord Himself, for the Word itself comes from the Lord by way of heaven, and the Lord's life is present in every single detail of it, though this is not to be seen in the external form. From this it may become clear that *in childhood the Lord wished to take in no other cognitions than those of the Word*, which, as stated, was laid open to Him from Jehovah Himself, His Father, with whom He was to be united and become one. And that wish was even stronger for the reason that no statement occurs in the Word that does not inmost have regard to Him and does not in the first place come from Him. For His Human Essence was purely an addition to His Divine Essence which existed from eternity.”