John’s 153 Fish

John 21:3-14
“So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a 153 of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.”

The detail of 153 fish seems too specific to be insignificant. Did John have a special meaning by the reference of a 153 fish?

Math : Beauty of 153

153 = 3 x 51 (symmetry)
1³ + 5³ + 3³ = 153
12² + 3² = 153
(10 + 7) x 3² = 153

Archimedes : Measurement of a Circle : Proposition 3

Then

$OA : AC = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$
and

$OE : OA = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$

hence

$OD : OA = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$

Therefore

$OA : AC = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$

Now

$OD : OA = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$

so that

$OD : DA = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}$

Therefore, by (1) and (2)

$OA : AD > 571 : 153$ (3)

Hence

$OD : DA > 571 : 153$ (4)

St. Augustine cites the formula

$1 + 2 + 3 \ldots + 17 = 153$

17 represents the combination of divine grace (the 7 gifts of the Spirit) and the Law (the 10 Commandments.) 153, according to St. Augustine, represent all those who will be saved.

An evangelist seeks to convey a message. Therefore, his meaning had to be apparent to those whom he was writing. It seems very difficult if not impossible to defend the idea that John would have known that his readers would have seen these mathematical formulas as part of his message. Therefore, the Church Fathers’ Answers Could Not Be John’s

Jesus calls the Apostles “children.” What are children? Father Bob Stine, if memory serves me correctly, told me about 40 years ago that the key to understanding this verse, and what children are, is to look from a Christian Biblical context. Children are those who lack the wisdom that comes with age. Therefore, the fish, the Divine gift, that filled their empty net represents wisdom.

We must look at this passage not from today’s standards but from John’s. Understanding the Greek culture opens the key to understanding this Biblical passage.

A few hundred years before Christ, the Greek Pythagoreans made a ground breaking discovery and proved what is now called the Pythagorean Theorem.

“One of the most important characteristics of the Pythagorean order was that it maintained that the pursuit of philosophical and mathematical studies was a moral basis for the conduct of life. Indeed, the words philosophy (love of wisdom) and mathematics (that which is learned) are said to have been coined by Pythagoras.” : Wikip.
John lived and wrote his Greek Gospel in the Greek city of Ephesus. He knew they falsely believed the Gospel of Jesus was foolishness and in contradiction to their wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. So, John included the detail of 153 fish in John 21:11. Further, the use of the word fish, its repetition, its measurement, and the number 3 would be seen as a secondary allusion to all Greek wisdom. The Greeks would have understood that John was claiming that Jesus, who is God, is the source of all the fish, and by extension He is the source of all wisdom. The net which contains all the fish, all the wisdom, both Greek and Christian, does not tear because there is no inconsistency or contradiction between the two.

Fr. Bob’s answer is like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle that makes all the other pieces fit together. It answers all the questions without leaving any loose ends, unlike all the other proposed answers that really do not fit and could not be John’s primary message.

John’s message that true natural wisdom is consistent with Jesus’ revelation is very relevant today. Today’s culture proposes a “new wisdom” and new concepts that redefine the words love, freedom, happiness, as well as the purpose of life and self-worth. And these new ideas are incompatible with Jesus’ wisdom. The same net cannot hold both without tearing.

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