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## Incredible Christianity: Toward a Post-Liberal Apologetic for the Historical Christ

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MY PURPOSE with this essay is modest. I want to apply the central insight which gave birth to the ecumenical movement over one hundred years ago to the present moment in history and to argue that ecumenism is just as vital a project today as one hundred years ago. My thesis will be that the present moment represents an opportunity to engage again the original task of the ecumenical movement, articulated at its beginnings in 1910.

The original task of ecumenism was ending the scandal of Christian division. The first ecumenists were drawn together around a single insight, that the evangelizing mission was being frustrated by the division of Christians. That's right: the motive for ecumenism was evangelism. It had become impossible to convert the world because of our sad divisions. Those preaching the Gospel were not credible witnesses. The full import of this insight was captured best, in my opinion, in the Collect for the Unity of the Church in the 1976 *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), which reads:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace *seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions*.<sup>1</sup>

This spiritual insight is a unique gift of the Anglican Communion. There is no equivalent prayer in the *Roman Missal*, either in beauty of prose or

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<sup>1</sup> "Collect for Christian Unity," in *Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church USA* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979).

theological depth. The *BCP* rightly names division as a spiritual danger, an occasion of peril. To be clear, this is not a personal problem, solved by our warm feelings towards each other. No, it is a global problem, for the world refuses to believe, and they refuse *because of us*. Christianity, to most people today, is incredible—in the most negative sense of that word—not believable! If I might be allowed to paraphrase the famous communication between Apollo 13 astronaut Jack Swigert and Mission Control in Houston—“Church, we’ve had a problem.”<sup>2</sup>

We have had a problem for the two thousand years of Christianity’s existence, and although the ecumenical movement for the past one hundred years (or fifty for Catholics, who were late to the effort) has worked tirelessly to overcome divisions, the movement itself is divided. It is divided over the place of traditional doctrine in the work of unity and over several contemporary controversies.

Each of the several predecessor bodies of the World Council of Churches (WCC) represents a different idea about the purpose and method of ecumenism.<sup>3</sup> Among them, the Faith and Order movement, supported strongly from the beginnings by the Anglican Communion, has been the segment of the WCC most attractive to the Catholic Church. This is because we realize that Christian division is, fundamentally, about doctrine. The way forward to unity requires the resolution of doctrinal divisions. Indeed, this is the only way, given the nature of a revealed religion. At the same time, we cannot wait for doctrinal agreement. The agreement we have in the traditional doctrines found in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds provide a sufficient basis for an apologetic to a skeptical world for the Christian faith. Dr. John Armstrong has helpfully called this approach “missional ecumenism.”<sup>4</sup>

Since 1910 we have seen a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Swigert and James Lovell, *Apollo 13 Technical Air to Ground Voice Transcription* (Houston, TX: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1970), 160, available at [www.hq.nasa.gov/alsj/a13/AS13\\_TEC.PDF](http://www.hq.nasa.gov/alsj/a13/AS13_TEC.PDF). See also James Lovell, *Apollo Expedition to the Moon*, ed. Edward M. Cortright (Hampton, VA: NASA Langley Research Center, 1975); available at [history.nasa.gov/SP-350/editor.html](http://history.nasa.gov/SP-350/editor.html).

<sup>3</sup> The predecessor bodies included: the World Conference on Faith and Order; the World Conference on Life and Works; the International Missionary Council; the World Alliance of Churches for Global Peace; and the nineteenth-century Sunday School Movement (see [oikoumene.org/en/about-us/wcc-history](http://oikoumene.org/en/about-us/wcc-history)).

<sup>4</sup> John H. Armstrong, *Your Church Is Too Small: Why Unity in Christ’s Mission Is Vital to the Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> See Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Joint Declaration on the*



We have also seen the dialogues with the Oriental Orthodox and the Assyrian Church of the East resolve serious doctrinal divisions between the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, new errors have developed which open new divisions between us. These new divisions are as deep as what separated Nestorius and Cyril or Luther and Zwingli—accompanied by the same amount of tension as in the fourth or sixteenth centuries.

Fortunately, the skills we have developed working out agreements concerning the ancient heresies could offer us a path to resolve the new errors, if we have the fortitude for the task.

I mention fortitude as an ecumenical virtue because the new errors at the root of the contemporary divisions are of a different sort from those previously confronted by ecumenical theologians. The new divisions come from the doctrines related to the human person, from theological anthropology and moral theology, not typically ecumenical subjects. And the new divisions exert great attractive power. You might say they are “sexier,” which is literally true. And it is important to understand the sources of the new divisions.

### Sources of the New Divisions

Some years ago (2004), Dr. Martin Marty, professor emeritus of church history at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, shocked and alarmed the assembly of the National Workshop on Christian Unity (NWCU) in Omaha. Marty said something to the effect that:

Our problem right now is the Church is in crisis. By “crisis” I mean like the Arian crisis—a church-dividing problem that has grown beyond the capacity of a local or regional council to solve. At the root of the crisis is an error that has spread to encompass the whole inhabited world, and therefore, can be resolved only by an ecumenical council.<sup>7</sup>

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*Doctrine of Justification* ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html)).

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, *Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East* (<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-orientale/dichiarazioni-comuni/1994-dichiarazione-cristologica-comune-tra-giovan-paolo-ii-e-k/testo-in-inglese.html>).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Marty, “Special Presentation,” unpublished keynote delivered at the National Workshop on Christian Unity, Omaha, NE, May 10–13, 2004. The

When pressed by the audience about the nature of the crisis, Marty said that he actually believed we are suffering from two at the same time. First, there is a crisis of authority and, secondly, a crisis over human sexuality. He went on to say that the Church has not awakened to their import. Most people seem to think these crises were caused by something the Church did or did not do. Marty asserted, to the surprise of the NWCUC, that the “causes come from outside the Church. Nothing we did caused them. Nothing we might have done would have stopped them.” He knocked everyone out of their seats with his next statement: “The crises were caused by advances in technology.”<sup>8</sup>

Professor Marty went on to explain that the crisis of authority was caused by the democratization of knowledge (which eliminates a role for the expert), and that of human sexuality by the development of contraception—which for the first time in human history gave control over fertility.<sup>9</sup> I would note that both conspire to create an anthropology based on the idea of the autonomous self.

Both crises are present in all of today’s churches and ecclesial communities and in society at large, even if they present themselves in different ways. Twenty-first-century ecumenism will need to engage both crises, for they are sources of the church-dividing errors of our time. Professor Marty was also clear about his limits as a church historian. He reminded us that he can tell us what happened, but not what will happen next. He noted that church historians know that it takes about 250 years for the church to move through a crisis. Since we do not really know when these crises began, it is hard to say where we are in the timeline.

As I have reflected on Martin Marty’s claim, I am more of the opinion that the two crises are fellow travelers across the same timeline. Both represent a trajectory in the history of ideas, from when the real was understood as having its basis outside of human consciousness to the nineteenth century, where our ideas about what is real took a subjective turn. This turn severed the moorings of Western civilization. The evangelists of this subjective turn are not Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Each in his own way located truth and meaning in ideas they held to be more foundational than the Bible. It did not help that, in reaction to this philosophical trajectory in the history of ideas, theologians, both liberal and conservative, made the same move.

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quotations are from my notes at the event and should be treated as paraphrases. For information about the NWCUC, see [nwcu.org/2004-nwcu-highlights/](http://nwcu.org/2004-nwcu-highlights/).

<sup>8</sup> Marty, “Special Presentation.”

<sup>9</sup> Marty, “Special Presentation.”

According to Hans Frei, both the Enlightenment thinkers and the Christian theologians replaced the authority of the biblical narrative with “their own (supposedly universal) reality.”<sup>10</sup> Episcopal church historian Gary Dorrien observed that:

Before the Enlightenment . . . most Christians read the Bible primarily as a kind of realistic narrative that told the overarching story of the world. . . . Jews and Christians made sense of their lives by viewing themselves as related to and participating within the story told in scripture.<sup>11</sup>

Instead, Dorrien tells us, liberal theologians “reinterpreted the text according to culture-affirming eternal truths,” and conservative theologians “looked for real meaning in the Bible’s factual references.”<sup>12</sup> Along the way, the historical materialists read the biblical narrative as “applied cultural phobia.”<sup>13</sup> Notice, please, that all sides are fighting the authority question, not engaging the apologetic.

To say that controversy over human sexuality is tearing at the fabric of the churches is an understatement. Part of the frustration lies in the crisis of authority, for there is no clear agreement on the basis for resolving the matter. All churches and ecclesial communities face these issues. The manner of presentation may be different, but the root issues are the same. It will not be my goal in this essay to offer a solution to the problem of authority or the problem of human sexuality. What I will offer is a path forward which might inform both an apologetic suitable for the present moment and, through it, the basis for approaching a solution.

### **A Post-Liberal Apologetic for the Historical Christ**

If we are going to find a path toward the resolution of the crisis of authority (and through it the crisis of human sexuality) it will need to address epistemology and ecclesiology.

My former colleague at Mundelein, Robert Barron, said all this quite well when he asked a rhetorical question:

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<sup>10</sup> Gary Dorrien, “A Third Way in Theology?: The Origins of Post Liberalism,” *The Christian Century*, July 4, 2001, [christiancentury.org/article/third-way-theology](http://christiancentury.org/article/third-way-theology).

<sup>11</sup> Dorrien, “Third Way.”

<sup>12</sup> Dorrien, “Third Way.”

<sup>13</sup> R. C. Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into the Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, 2012).

Do Christians become aware of the centrality of Jesus after a long and epistemologically neutral inquiry, or does that awareness condition all modes of their intellection from the beginning? The questions fix us on the horns of a dilemma. To answer them affirmatively seems to place Christians in an irresponsibly fideistic and sectarian position, compromising their capacity to enter into conversation with those outside their community of discourse [this is the apologetic piece] but to answer them negatively seems to force Christians to abandon their claim that Christ has primacy in all things, including, presumably, what and how we know.<sup>14</sup>

The post-liberal move is to locate authority in the person and event of Jesus, accessible to us through the greatest meta-narrative ever told, and within a community which reads that narrative contextualized by their doxology. This method allows us to offer an apologetic for the historical Christ.

### Apologetic for the Historical Christ

The Reverend Doctor Stephen Holmgren, an Episcopal priest and former professor of moral theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary, observed that the central problem for philosophical ethics is “whether or not human subjectivity apprehends the foundations for morality in our experience of reality, in the structure of the objective world.”<sup>15</sup> Holmgren’s argument indirectly links the crisis of human sexuality to the crisis of authority in what I see as a helpful advance. He describes the problem in ethics as a “separation of fact and value.”<sup>16</sup> Ideas that belong together are torn apart. The famous separation of Jesus of Nazareth from the “Christ of faith” results in, to use Holmgren’s words, [separation] of spirituality from ethics and salvation history from natural history.<sup>17</sup>

From a doctrinal standpoint, every Christian heresy is rooted in a Trinitarian/Christological error. Holmgren prescribes a recovery of the creedal affirmations about Jesus as the path toward a recovery of the natural-law tradition which, he argues, has the capacity to break the separation of

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007), 133.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen C. Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” in *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age*, ed. Ephraim Radner and George Sumner (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1998), 36–50, at 39.

<sup>16</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 39.

<sup>17</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 42.

science and theology and restore a both-and approach to their relationship. I have long seen our natural-law tradition as a unique contribution which Catholic Christianity could offer as guidance to an intellectually struggling world.<sup>18</sup>

Holmgren argues that a starting point for such a recovery of natural-law thought is found in the article of the Nicene Creed which names Jesus Christ as “maker of heaven and earth.”<sup>19</sup> Holmgren holds that such an emphasis can offer us an “embodied faith in a disembodied world.”<sup>20</sup> Both the special revelation transmitted in the Scriptures and the general revelation observable in nature through an open use of reason offer us a renewed teleology for our philosophical ethics and moral theology.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, “acts and choices, in their basic pattern or structure, are also shaped by [Jesus] and therefore given moral value by him.”<sup>22</sup>

The historical Jesus—the incarnate Logos born of Mary—when approached with epistemic priority, provides both the scriptural warrant and a confidence in reason’s capacity to know things as they are, and as they should be. The priority of Christ prevents what Holmgren has called the “convergence of separations” which have impoverished philosophical ethics.<sup>23</sup>

### Participatory Knowledge

The apologetic, however, requires something more. As Barron notes, people do not come to Jesus through an epistemologically neutral inquiry. They come to Jesus through disciples, whose lives transparently show the shaping and ordering effect of unity in Christ. This is where ecclesiology enters the picture. It is the Christ, whose Incarnation is prolonged by his body, the Church, who worships the triune God. I am going to dwell on this point. While Barron is right that people do not come to Jesus through rational epistemology, I would agree with David Fagerberg that they can and do come to know the Lord through a liturgical epistemology. If we take the theme of Irenaeus that the Church is the prolongation of the Incarnation, we can shift the believing subject from

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<sup>18</sup> See Thomas A. Baima, “The Logic of Why: What the Declaration on Religious Freedom Contributes to the Idea of Religion in the Public Square,” *Chicago Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 49–89.

<sup>19</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 36.

<sup>20</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 43.

<sup>21</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 43.

<sup>22</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 43.

<sup>23</sup> Holmgren, “Jesus Christ and the Moral Life,” 42.

the individual to the mystical body.<sup>24</sup>

Douglas Martis and Christopher Carstens titled their book on the Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal *Mystical Body, Mystical Voice*. In doing so, they are asserting that the *theologia prima* voiced in the sacred rite is corporate speech. More than that, since the head is never separated from the members, the *theologia prima* is Christ's prayer to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In a previous essay, I argued on the basis of Eastern Christian thought, that there is a distinctive liturgical epistemology which could guide the West through the travail of the modern and contemporary periods and back to a future characterized by a synthesis similar to what we had in the Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup> In summary, such knowledge comes through participation in the *theologia prima*. It yields the *lex orandi lex credenda suplicandi* (the law of prayer [that] establishes the law of faith). Those who worship in this way (*lex orandi*) have their minds (corporate not individual alone) shaped by that worship, and a *lex credendi* is formed in them, which really means the *sensus fidelium*, the beliefs held in the "mind of the Church." Such praying and believing, in turn, results in living disciples, which is the *lex vivendi*. Doctrine is born from doxology. Hence, doctrine is inseparable from ecumenism.

Such discipleship—Church living—has the potential to reverse the convergence of separations, the "separation of fact and value," but only if it witnesses to the person of Christ, "through whom all things were made." The historical Christ is revealed through the beauty of the shaping and ordering effect of unity, when one faith and one baptism removes hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord. And godly union and concord are based on God's word, come to us through the special revelation of Jesus and the general revelation available to all. This means that "whoever wills to do the will of God shall know concerning the doctrine" (John 7:17). Living within the biblical

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<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus does not use the phrase as we have it today, but the phrase summarizes his Christocentric ecclesiology, which he articulates in *Adversus haereses*. The best theological description I found is by Kevin Mongrain: "Alexandrian *corpus triforme* Christology taught that the Body of Christ is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes Scripture, Eucharist and Church. . . . [Balthasar's] overarching goal is to preserve Irenaeus's emphasis on the organic 'unfolding' of the one Body of Christ in a 'multiplicity' of incarnational forms throughout history" (*The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* [New York: Crossroad, 2002], 37).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas A. Baima, "Liturgical Epistemology: Knowing the Truth through Participation," unpublished manuscript, University of Saint Mary of the Lake, April 8, 2015 ([usml.edu/wp-content/uploads/Liturgical-Epistemology.pdf](http://usml.edu/wp-content/uploads/Liturgical-Epistemology.pdf)).

narrative restores doctrine to its place in the ecumenical movement, not as an obstacle to be overcome or a proof text to be repeated, but as a path to knowledge of Christ, through participation with the source of our unity. All of this adds up to credible Christianity. N.V





## Why Revelation Gives Shelter to Metaphysics<sup>1</sup>

GUY MANSINI, O.S.B.

*Ave Maria University*

*Ave Maria, FL*

METAPHYSICS in the traditional style is not much cultivated today in the lands in which it originated and once flourished. In 1998, Pope John Paul II noted this fact in *Fides et Ratio*. Speaking even of Catholic institutions, he says that Scholasticism and philosophy itself are held in “less respect,” but connects this to a broader contemporary fact, to wit: “There is a lack of trust in reason displayed to a large extent by modern philosophy itself,” he says, “so that it abandons the metaphysical search for man’s ultimate questions in order to concentrate on particular and local issues, sometimes merely formal ones.”<sup>2</sup>

John Paul also noted the fact that philosophy in the ancient high sense must remain, must survive for the sake of theology itself, as a discipline praeambulatory to theology. This is how he puts it, speaking of fundamental theology:

With its specific character as a discipline charged with giving an account of faith (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), the concern of *fundamental theology* will be to justify and expound the relationship between faith and philosophical thought. Recalling the teaching of Saint Paul (cf. Rom 1:19–20), the First Vatican Council pointed to the existence of truths which are naturally, and thus philosophically, knowable; and *an acceptance of God’s Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths*. . . . Consider, for example, the natural knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier and altered version of the first part of this essay appears in my *Fundamental Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §61 (translation mine); see also §81.

of God, the possibility of distinguishing divine Revelation from other phenomena or the recognition of its credibility, the capacity of human language to speak in a true and meaningful way even of things which transcend all human experience. From all these truths, the mind is led to acknowledge the existence of a truly propaedeutic path to faith.<sup>3</sup>

“An acceptance of God’s Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths,” truths about God known by the natural light. Why is it necessary? That is a first question. Showing this necessity has become more important since the Enlightenment, moreover, not only because of the role natural theology plays in apologetics, but also because it distinguishes Catholic theology from Protestant thought where it is under the influence of Emmanuel Kant and Karl Barth.

But there is also John Paul’s observation that metaphysics in the traditional style no longer flourishes as once it did. If the Church is the only place where metaphysics is cultivated in the old way, why is that so? It is not that human nature has changed. It is not that we are less capable of the wonder Aristotle evokes at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*. Showing why metaphysics survives only in the Church serves to highlight not just the different ways Catholics and moderns think about being, but the different ways they think about man, too. And this is important for understanding how we fit—or rather how we do not fit—into the modern world.

So, philosophy must survive for the sake of theology—that is a first thesis; we must see why it is so. But then, if it must survive for theology, and so in that sense is “in” theology or is its forecourt as a preliminary discipline, why is that the *only* place it survives today? That is a second thing that needs an explanation.

And these are the answers this essay aims at establishing: metaphysics, and the highest part of it, a robust (i.e., successful) natural theology, must be possible if we are reasonably and so responsibly to assert the fact of revelation, the fact that God speaks to us. If God speaks, we must be able to show he *exists*. We must be able to show he exists if we are reasonably and responsibly to say that he has *spoken*. But then second, only if God *does* speak are we called on—not simply logically but also morally or “existentially”—to show he exists. Only if he speaks must we be able *rationally* to

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §67 (Vatican website translation; italics mine). See also *Restoring Faith in Reason: A New Translation of the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming, with commentary by James McEvoy (London: SCM, 2002).

show by the natural light that he exists—that is the first issue. But also, if he does *not* speak, or if we believe he does not speak, there will be no moral pressure on us, no practical *urgency* for us, to bother about his existence.

**Question 1: Why Faith Requires the Philosophical  
Demonstration of God:**

**“Intra ecclesiam colenda est metaphysica”  
 (“Metaphysics must be cultivated within the Church”).**

There are two ways to get at this necessity. You can approach it from the *content* of faith. Or you can approach it from the *act* of faith. Father Thomas Joseph White has tried to show the necessity of metaphysics in its highest part, natural theology, from the content of what we confess about the Incarnation. The Christological content of faith argues that we must be capable of a robust natural theology. This he does in his recent *The Incarnate Lord*. There is also an argument from the act of faith itself.<sup>4</sup> Its point of departure is the observation that the credibility of revelation depends on its reasonability. And that faith be reasonable is necessary if faith be not something that destroys but that rather perfects the intellect, as grace in all its modalities does human nature as a whole. If our nature is rational, it must be possible rationally to believe. And this means that revelation must be able to be recognized prior to faith, just as the First Vatican Council’s *Dei Filius* teaches. I offer two forms of the argument: first from Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and second from Walker Percy.

Garrigou-Lagrange sets forth in careful detail how the divine origin of Christianity, the fact of revelation, can be certainly known.<sup>5</sup> Moral certitude is sufficient for the individual believer,<sup>6</sup> but there is a need for scientific demonstration for the collective faith of the Church as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Now, nothing is rationally credible for divine faith except it be evidently and not merely probably credible.<sup>8</sup> And nothing is evidently rationally credible for divine faith unless it appears to reason from certain signs to be supernaturally revealed by God.<sup>9</sup> For this minor, three things are required: first, that something be known as in fact revealed by God; second, that God be

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement 5 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), chapter 4 (203–35; see esp. 224–32).

<sup>5</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *De Revelatione per Ecclesiam Catholicam Proposita*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (Rome: Desclée, 1950), 1:491–97.

<sup>6</sup> *De Revelatione*, 1:494–97.

<sup>7</sup> *De Revelatione*, 1:515.

<sup>8</sup> *De Revelatione*, 1:491.

<sup>9</sup> *De Revelatione*, 1:491.

known to be truthful; and third that God be known to be infallible.<sup>10</sup> That something be known as revealed, moreover, follows as Vatican I taught from the knowledge of miracle and other signs. Therefore, prior to faith, there must in principle be possible the knowledge of God's existence, of his nature as veracious and all-knowing, and of the possibility of miracles. As to the last, Garrigou-Lagrange says: "God is the free and omnipotent cause from which depends the application of all the hypothetically necessary laws, nor is he bound to them."<sup>11</sup> So we are heavily involved in a natural theology that will know God's existence, his knowledge and truthfulness, his power and freedom.

It is a good argument Garrigou-Lagrange offers, and many people have admired his *De Revelatione* as a whole. Pope Benedict XV wrote an endorsement for it in 1919; it stayed in print for half a century, and its fourth edition appeared in 1945. In 1959, and so within shouting distance of Garrigou-Lagrange, the American Catholic philosopher and novelist Walker Percy wrote an essay entitled "The Message in the Bottle." It suggests another way to get at the necessity of natural theology from considering the act of faith. "The Message in the Bottle" has us imagine a castaway who receives messages in bottles washed up on the shore.<sup>12</sup> Some of the messages count as knowledge, knowledge that is in principle verifiable by the canons of the modern empirical sciences. Some of the messages count as news: matters of fact, but all of them contingent truths, not scientifically necessary truths, but some of them crucial for the prospect of getting off the island and finding one's way back home. However important the message may be for homecoming, Percy expects us to see that the bare presentation of the message by itself as found in the bottle is not sufficient for us to assent to it; rather, a piece of news "requires that there be a newsbearer."<sup>13</sup> However detachable the bearer of scientific knowledge from the knowledge he brings—the empirical test has nothing to do, in the end, with who first enunciates or repeats the knowledge in question—the piece of news is not in that way detachable from its bearer. At least we must have the apostle, the one sent, personally present to us. An apostle is not a genius, and "we believe him because he has the authority to deliver the

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<sup>10</sup> *De Revelatione*, 1:492.

<sup>11</sup> *De Revelatione*, 2:49; for three orders of miracles, see 2:65–72.

<sup>12</sup> Walker Percy, "The Message in the Bottle," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is; How Queer Language Is; and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982), 119–58. The essay first appeared in *Thought* 34 (1959–1960): 405–33.

<sup>13</sup> Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 136.

message,” and only so.<sup>14</sup> Percy declares he means to gainsay nothing of the traditional apologetic discourses on the historical evidences for the authenticity of Christ and the Church, and recognizes they must be accompanied by philosophical approaches to God and his nature.<sup>15</sup> But he suggests an interesting line of reflection for us.

Suppose we alter Percy’s story just a little, and say that, rather than a message in a bottle, we have a message in a book—or let us say the book, the whole book, arrives in a bottle—a rather large bottle, to be sure, since the book is the Bible. But the supposition is basically the same: we are supposing that all we have is the message itself: a word that presents itself to us as God’s word. Will an evangelist—not an original apostle but a contemporary evangelist—have any success presenting it to us so? Think of the epistemic situation we would find ourselves in.

“Here’s a message for you from God about your eternal destiny.”

“God? Eternal destiny?”

“Yes; pay attention—it’s in this Book.”

“But who is ‘God’?”

“The maker of heaven and earth, who can give you eternal life, just as the Book explains.”

“Oh. How do you know the message is from him?”

“Because he spoke it through prophets and apostles, as recorded in the Book, and there were great signs and wonders to prove it was him speaking.”

“Like what?”

“Well . . . There was the exodus of Israel from Egypt, and there was Jesus of Nazareth and his mighty works and his resurrection from the dead.”

“Wow. And how do we know about these warrants for the message?”

“They’re written down, in the Book, in the same Book as tells us the message.”

“But how do I know the message is likely to have come from a creator of heaven and earth?”

“Because it’s congruent with what he says about himself in the Book as merciful and good.”

“And I know he can work miracles because . . . ?”

“Because like the message, such works are congruent with the way he speaks about himself in the Book as creator and redeemer of men.”

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<sup>14</sup> Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 146–47.

<sup>15</sup> Percy, *Message in the Bottle*, 140.

“Is there any access to the words and deeds of God apart from the Book?”

“No, not really.”

“So we are stuck with the message in the Book, and the signs that validate the message as coming from ‘God’ are reported only in the Book?”

“Right.”

“And there is really no other way of access to him except the Book?”

“No; that’s explained in the Book, too. To think we had independent access to God would be to mistake our own capacity to know him, and to forget that, if God is known, he can be known only from himself, given his own decision to speak. God is such that the only way to know him is on his own terms, which is to say, just as he presents himself in the Book.”

“Maybe some other day . . .”

The just-imagined dialogue goes on with our rather Barthian evangelist presenting no credentials except the message itself. This, Percy says, will not work. Will things change if the evangelist presents himself as an agent of the Church founded by Christ, himself the keystone of the arch of the historical pattern of salvation? This is to add Tradition to what must otherwise be a very lonely Scripture.

“Perhaps I should emphasize that the Book has never been, as it were, unaccompanied. It has always and uninterruptedly been in the custody of a community of faith, the People of Israel and the New Israel, the Church.”

“So you are confident of the continuity of Israel and the Church and the messages they bear from the time they were first fully enunciated?”

“Yes, I am.”

“How does this strengthen your epistemic position?”

“Like this: it’s not only that we have a record of the over-all message and its miraculous warrants, we have as well a record of the reception of the message and its warrants in a historically continuous community of faith.”

“That’s very impressive in its own way, of course. But you yourself are in the same position relative to the historically continuous, custodial community of faith as you are to the Book, right?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that, in the same way that you trust the Book, so also you trust

the keepers of the Book who themselves trust the Book.”

“Well, yes; but doesn’t the very existence of this continuously existing custodial community provide a sort of perpetual and extraordinary, not to say miraculous, witness to the truth of the message of the Book and the warrants contained therein?”

“But you can’t say that unless you are outside the Book and its keepers, looking on both as just one fact. Before, every access to God was supposed to be inside the Book. But now you want me to recognize something here and now, something present, something beyond the record of the Book.”

Thus, even the ecclesially accredited custodian of the Book will not be enough to make a reasonable case for assent to the message. He has to appeal to something beyond the message and beyond the custodians in their purely custodial capacity. That is, he has to appeal to some access to God beyond the Book and the Church.

The priority of speaker to what he speaks has to be able to be dealt with on its own terms—we cannot have this Speaker merely and exclusively in his speech, where that is the only thing we have of and from him. Thus, “that God has spoken” cannot be recognized unless God can be known to exist and unless it can be known that he might have something to say.

We could put the point as follows. God cannot simply announce himself to us in his self-revelation if it is impossible for us to have any other cognitive access to him. How would we relate such an epistemic meteorite to what we know of reality? If it fits happily into the periodic table we have already constructed, then of course nothing new has been introduced into consciousness. On the other hand, if it is so completely unlike what we know of the real that we cannot relate it to what we already know, then once again, nothing new has been introduced into consciousness, nothing has been said *in such a way we can hear it*. It must rather be that, if the atomic weight and number are hitherto unexperienced by us, we can at least relate them to the periodic table we know. Something new will have been said, and something newly heard will be registered. But this requires being able to imagine something beyond the periodic table we know.

Because God has spoken to us, we must be able to know him independently of his address to us. This is a necessity of manifestation. Even as with a purely human speaker, it is not the speech alone that shows the other speaker exists. Otherwise, we would not be able to distinguish him from ourselves, or from some voice in our heads that, for all we know, is just another form of us. To say that we have a written word that, in the absence

of a living voice, shows us his existence is no good. If all that human beings had from him was a scrap of paper with words said to be God's, that would not tell us God exists. Positive revelation demands a natural revelation, natural theology. And this is precisely why the Scriptures come to us with affirmations of its possibility. While God identifies himself in the words and deeds recorded in the book, He shows us *in the book* how we can also identify him *outside the Book*—that is to say, in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans. He shows us this, just so that we may recognize his identification of himself in the words and deeds recorded in the book.

**Question 2: Why Metaphysics Survives Only in Theology:  
“Extra ecclesiam nulla metaphysica”  
 (“No metaphysics outside the Church”)**

Metaphysics in the high sense survives mostly only in theology; that is, natural theology survives only in supernatural theology. Why is this? There are three considerations.

*A Silent God*

First, if God does not speak, it becomes more difficult to think he exists. Karl Rahner had us entertain the possibility last century that the silence of God, once he were known by the natural light as first cause and last end, might also be sufficient “speech” to us.<sup>16</sup> Silence is its own enigmatic communication; if the silence of some person is known just as a chosen, intended silence, not a casual oversight or forgetfulness of the other, then it commands a sort of respect, a sort of wondrous regard. Mankind would rightly, Rahner thought and with reason, maintain itself at attention, waiting for any possible word from God, or waiting for no word, which would itself be word of his mysterious and enigmatic reality. This is in itself a noble scenario, but, I think, only for nobles—that is, for men better than the average run of human beings goes.

For think how the calculation would more probably turn out. It would be much the same as that for our calculation of the existence of extra-terrestrial life. The best argument that there is no such thing just is simply the cosmic silence that surrounds us. Notwithstanding the distances and the daunting task of mastering them technologically, once one factors in the enormous time at the disposal of whatever sentience there be out there, a time whose length is equally unimaginable as the distances involved, then, if there were anyone home in the universe besides us, we should already

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994).



have met the welcome wagon. So here, in the absence of a registered and reliable divine speech, the metaphysical silence can be taken to argue that there is no divinity capable of breaking the silence.

### *A Moral Consideration*

This first consideration grows in strength when we add in two factors conditioning the possible hearer of a divine word—two factors conditioning us, in other words: the first is moral, the second metaphysical.

The moral consideration has to do with the moral misery we live in. By that, I mean to advert both to our moral ignorance and to our moral fragility. It is difficult for us to know the moral law much beyond the first and primary precepts.<sup>17</sup> And then when we do, it is difficult for us to keep—that is, to obey—what we know of the moral law. The difficulty each man has in finding out what virtue is and then installing it in himself is matched on the larger scale by the difficulty each culture has in finding a positive law that matches and reflects the natural law, and the related difficulty of prosecuting large and lasting projects of empire and culture, of power economic and political and the associated projects of learning and science.

This consideration of man's moral indigence leads us to Cardinal Newman's argument for original sin in the *Apologia*, an argument very similar to Saint Thomas's argument in the *Summa contra gentiles*.<sup>18</sup> Remember how it goes: since there is a God—and that is one of Newman's certain starting points—and since we are in such misery that no good God would simply establish us from the outset in such estate, therefore there must be some original moral disaster at the beginnings of our history to explain our moral condition in a good world made by a good God. That is just what the word of God claims in the third chapter of Genesis, of course. So here, philosophical contemplation meets the revealed word; the revealed word provokes philosophical contemplation.

But Newman's argument—the nexus of intelligibility that unites the propositions together—depends on an antecedent supposition of the providence of a good God caring for an originally good creation. This antecedent supposition is hard to insulate from the word of revelation itself. The probability that we were not created as we come into the world now, and therefore the probability of an original sin whence we conclude

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

<sup>18</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia in Apologia pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans and Green, 1908 [originally 1865]), 241–43 (chapter 5: "Position of My Mind since 1845"); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, IV, ch. 52.

to the penal and non-natural character of our current condition, “rests,” so T. C. O’Brien says, “upon a knowledge of the ways of a special divine providence toward man.”<sup>19</sup> This providence is revealed to us in its fullness in and by Christ Jesus, and it is no mystery that the doctrine of original sin does not come fully blown simply from Genesis, but from Genesis read together with Romans. Without this antecedent supposition as to the providence and benevolence of God conveyed to us by revelation, the nexus of intelligibility Newman locates can yield another result. Since we have no *secular* record of an original catastrophe, and since there *is* no word of God, then the misery of our condition argues more simply that there is no God. It is not that we are orphans, as in Newman’s reading, for orphans have first to have had mother and father. Would that we were orphans! But no; we are rather and just as Nietzsche thought, the disease of the world—very accurate diagnosis according to his lights: we are the world come to consciousness of itself in pain, consciousness not of an original sin but of an original violence. The old high metaphysics of the Good and the One will have no resonance for us.

#### *A Metaphysical Problem*

If God does not speak, then not only morally but also metaphysically will man be interpreted in such a way as no longer to think of himself as an image of God. If we are no longer images, there is no longer any mark of God in the natural world. And the simplest explanation of that is that there is no God for there to be any mark of.

Let us begin with the immediate data on the nature of man, two things that, together, are quite paradoxical.

First, there seems to be something immortal, trans-temporal, eternal about man: he can certainly think beyond his present, his environment, his limitations both temporal and spatial: by his mind, he lives in a world, not in a habitat. If he can think absences, which is quite an epistemological feat, he can think eternity (absence of temporal limits), and in this way his thinking transcends the material. Is that true just of his act or operation, or is it true of him? Should we say that something eternal *belongs* to him by right, that it constitutes him, or should we more modestly say that he is merely touched by something eternal?

What makes the first answer hard—saying that the eternal *belongs* to him—is death. That is the second datum. That we think transcendentally

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<sup>19</sup> T. C. O’Brien, O.P., “Appendix 1: Attitudes Toward Original Sin,” in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 26 (1a2ae. 81–85): *Original Sin* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book company, 1964), 109.

belongs to us as wholes: and so it seems to be the very intelligibility of the human body just as such, given that the point of departure of all thinking, even the thinking of absences and eternity, is the senses and sense knowledge.

But death seems completely to undo us. Can we say that the intelligibility of man, of his being, since in its operations it extends to the eternal, is itself immortal? But without the body how can it function? Saint Thomas had the comfort of the remnants of the neo-Platonic universe to make it easy for him to suppose a separated, immaterial, and immortal soul could think, helped out by separated substances higher in the hierarchy of minds. But the Aristotelian principle remains, the principle that grew more powerful in his thought the older he got. It is this: the idea that some substantial form exists forever and ever without ever being able to place its proper operation is a complete non-starter.<sup>20</sup>

So, if we can make no sense of a separated soul thinking, then perhaps we ourselves in our empirical and social and personal reality are not immortal at all, but only touched by some angel, just as the medieval Arabians thought. On the other hand, if we are somehow immortal, it seems to be for no conceivable good.

Of course, our sense of our metaphysical selves would be fixed if we know of the resurrection of the body, the restoration of our whole, natural, complete being. In that way, the anomaly of a detached soul, a remnant of the whole, existing forever and ever without being able to place its proper operation, would disappear. But for that hope, God has to speak to us. And if we think he has not spoken, then once again, all metaphysical bets are off.

For Saint Thomas, while there are strong philosophical reasons to assert the immortality of the soul, its status as but a principle of being, and not a complete being or substance, makes it difficult to conceive of it as subsisting everlastingly just as such, as a bare principle. Such a state of affairs is deeply unnatural. The natural immortality of soul meets an unnatural condition of its existence. Thus, as Aquinas observes: "If the resurrection of the body be denied, it is not easy, rather, it will be hard to maintain the immortality of the soul."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Aristotle, *De anima* 1.403a10–11. See also Anton Pegis, "The Separated Soul and Its Nature in St. Thomas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274–1974, Commemorative Studies*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 2:131–58.

<sup>21</sup> *Super 1 Cor* 15, lec. 2 (Marietti no. 924; translation mine, from the Latin in *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, Woks of St. Thomas Aquinas [Latin–English] 38 [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012]). For, St. Thomas explains, that the soul be without a body is both *per*

The ground of asserting immortality, however, is the immateriality of the intellectual operations and powers of man. If there is no immortality, we will assert no immateriality in any strong sense. We will look, as the modern world does, for an empirically scientific, positivist, naturalist—materialist—account of mind, intentionality, consciousness.

Resurrection and much less glory are not really thinkable outside of a created universe. Will the necessity of resurrection in order to make sense of the continuing existence of the intelligibility of man make us think God, and judge him to exist who alone could solve the problem of our being? That would be a stretch. And if there is nothing immortal and immaterial about us, we are no longer images of any possible divinity. It turns out then that not only our moral experience, but our very being no longer point to God. If we are mysterious, we are mysterious the way matter is mysterious.

Without the word of revelation we are mysteries; remaining mysteries, without any word, we shall not suppose God even exists—for it would have to be him who is responsible for the almost contradictory character of our being, and the idea of God as making contradictories is not a very successful way into affirming his existence as guarantor of the being, truth, intelligibility, and goodness of the world.

Natural theology is necessary for theology, for its speculative coherence; and then, as for its existential conditions, theology is necessary for natural theology, for its moral or practical coherence!

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It may be helpful to conclude by linking up what has just been said to how Robert Sokolowski thinks we come to know God. On his showing, the distinction between God and the world and the knowledge of God as creator, itself *depends* on revelation for its completion and clarity. Aristotle does not think the First Mover creates the world, and the world is not created by the One in Plotinus. The idea of creation is not really formulated till the second century, and it is first fully formulated by Christians. The idea of creation necessarily involves the idea of a God who is so transcendent to the world that he does not need the world in any way whatsoever. Such a God is not part of the world or our experience of the world, and so the idea of creation has first to be taught to us from outside the world, by God himself. Subsequently, just as the Church teaches, we can then reason

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*accidens* and contrary to nature, and such a thing cannot be thought to perdure infinitely.

to God and to his distinction from the world. But God has first to teach us the distinction for that to happen, and hence Sokolowski's name for it, the "Christian distinction."

The Christian distinction is a distinction of such scope and fundamentality that it provides the frame not only for understanding the revealed mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, grace, and the sacraments, as Sokolowski shows in *The God of Faith and Reason*, but also, and paradoxically, for the fact of revelation itself.<sup>22</sup> Revelation cannot be made epistemically coherent until, given the Christian distinction by revelation itself, we can subsequently establish the existence of the transcendent and creator God independently of revelation, and just so that revelation may be recognizable as what it is: the word of the God who could be, in unexampled majesty and infinite glory, all that he is whether the world existed or not. By revelation itself, therefore, God undertakes freely to indicate to us how we may naturally recognize him apart from the word of revelation, and as a necessary step in coming to assent to that word. This revelation culminates with the incarnate Son of God, and is expressly articulated in Scripture, in both the Book of Wisdom and in St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. The First Vatican Council and *Fides et Ratio* simply repeat this scriptural teaching. But when we refuse assent to that word, because we think it never spoken, then, as I have tried to show, the natural theology revelation requires and so sustains also becomes unraveled. It *must* exist in order for revelation to be affirmed; it is *enabled* to exist only with the continued assent of faith to that same revelation. Thus an account for John Paul II's twofold observation with which this essay began. N-V

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Sololowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).



## Wisdom Be Attentive: The Noetic Structure of Sapiential Knowledge

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“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?”  
T. S. Eliot, “The Rock”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

THE PRESENT ESSAY will argue that we Aristotelians and Thomists do not always appreciate the qualitative difference which exists between the noetic character of science and that of wisdom.<sup>2</sup> While we generally assert that wisdom is defined as knowledge through first causes in a given order, it very often seems that we hold that the noetic character of wisdom is, in the end, quite similar to that of science. Thus, domains such as metaphysics, moral philosophy, natural philosophy (in its own limited

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<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems* (New York: Harcourt, 1934), 179. I owe the pertinence of this quote to Kieran Conley, *A Theology of Wisdom: A Study of St. Thomas* (Dubuque, IA: Priory, 1963), vii. As will become obvious in notes to follow, Fr. Conley’s text is well aware of the problem at the heart of the discussions in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I believe it is rhetorically important to note from the beginning that this essay is as much a self-reflective critique as it is a general call for a shift in how we discuss the character of *scientia* and *sapientia*. It is written in the spirit of open dialogue and not that of dogmatic proclamation. Moreover, as will be stated below in a brief methodological preamble, my focus is less exegetical than it is a kind of reflection offered within the conceptual space established by certain Thomist authors.

domain<sup>3</sup>), and acquired supernatural theology would indeed be knowledge of *conclusions* (i.e., forms of *science*, strictly speaking, as an objectively inferential kind of knowledge in contrast to *intellectus*) with the brief addition of “using principles that are first in this given order of knowledge.” In other words, it would seem that wisdom is, truth be told, a “knowledge of conclusions,”<sup>4</sup> albeit of conclusions drawn from the highest principles. This makes one wonder how the supposed distinction between science and wisdom does not collapse into a kind of Hobbesian outlook which would reduce wisdom to just a quantitatively broader sort of science, an outlook that was once perspicuously summarized by Monsignor Robert Sokolowski: “[For Hobbes, in *Leviathan* 1.5.22], wisdom is not different from science, not something else than science. [It is] just a lot of science.”<sup>5</sup> Is wisdom qualitatively distinct from science, or in the end, are they noetically and phenomenologically the same? Truth be told, we Thomists seem to talk out of both sides of our mouths on this issue. It calls for discussion—at least if we are to honestly go on claiming that they are formally distinct classes of *habitus*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This last claim, regarding natural philosophy, is not universally accepted within Thomist circles. It will be taken up below.

<sup>4</sup> One finds the same concern regarding the reduction of theology to *scientia conclusionum* voiced in Edward Schillebeeckx, “What is Theology,” in *Revelation and Theology*, vol. 1, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 112–60. Also, see the interesting remark by M.-D. Chenu in *La théologie comme science au XIIIe Siècle*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1969), 39: “The distinction *scientia* and *sapientia*, which in him [i.e., Aristotle] introduces no technical heterogeneity between the two types of knowledge, here [in Alexander of Hales] bears with itself a radical structural separation” (translation mine). The issue concerning the nature of theology was very much “in the air” in the 1930s through the 1950s, and while my desire is to develop the Thomist school *from within*, I do acknowledge that even the more progressive authors of this era were not lacking insight as regards the “nerve” of the certain very important issues involved in this debate. I personally think that Aristotle and Aquinas (and even the later Thomists) sensed the need for making a noetic distinction but that a hardening of vocabulary tended to render *sapientia* ultimately homogeneous in structure with *scientia*. Obviously, as will be born out in what follows, I do not call for a radical differentiation.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Sokolowski, “PH 876: Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, Lecture Notes,” Course Delivered at Catholic University of America, August through December, 2013, 27.

<sup>6</sup> In the late days of editing this paper, I became aware of parallels to my own concerns, voiced in the mid-twentieth century in a disagreement between Fr. Marie-Rosaire Gagnebet, O.P., and Fr. Louis Charlier, O.P. (as well as the Franciscan Fr. Jean-François Bonnefoy, O.F.M.). Hermeneutically, I remain on the side of Fr. Gagnebet, conservatively looking to connect my own insights back to the tradition that he and I both share, through the same Dominican masters. However, Charlier’s concerns regarding the *sapiential* functions of theology are not without merit. Fr. Henry Donneaud, O.P., has (perhaps) attempted to cast



Of course, for a *host* of reasons with which the readers of *Nova et Vetera* are all too familiar, it would be unfair to claim that Thomists have, in fact, fallen prey to nominalist-Hobbesian errors in these matters. Nonetheless, even great Thomists have fallen into distortions in their understanding of the nature of wisdom, treating it as being univocally akin to science. Among such great Thomist forebears, we may arguably include the renowned and much-venerated commentator, Santiago Ramírez, O.P.<sup>7</sup> In *Science and Wisdom*, Jacques Maritain makes a passing, but quite important, critique of Ramírez's articulation of the nature of theological wisdom, making remarks that will guide our reflections in this article. In his critique of Father Ramírez, Maritain emphasizes that beyond the drawing of "theological conclusions," theology has a task that is loftier still: that of meditating on (and also defending) its principles. Indeed, as Maritain intimates (though all too briefly), in such activities, we find ourselves faced precisely with what gives "wisdom-knowledge" (i.e., *sapientia* in its various forms) its *uniquely sapiential character*: because of the comprehensive nature of a given sapiential discourse, it must fulfill "offices" beyond the drawing of certain *conclusions* from principles that one holds with certitude. To put it somewhat crudely, sapiential knowledge must reflectively

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Gagnebet in a more revolutionary light than is necessary. I can only leave these historical matters to the reader, for this already-lengthy article remains *an essay* in the strict sense, not a full historical-critical treatment of the distinction of *scientia* and *sapientia*. Even if I do not share his full estimation of how to interpret Gagnebet's own development of the position of the Thomist school, I highly recommend Donneaud's recent article, as well as the relevant texts from this mid-century debate, one *closely* related to the famed *Dialogue théologique* interchange (indeed, to which Gagnebet's thought was connected, as was openly admitted by Fr. Michel Labourdette). See: Henry Donneaud, "Un retour aux sources cache sous son contraire: Rosaire Gagnebet contre Louis Charlier sur la nature de la théologie spéculative," *Revue thomiste* 119 (2019): 577–612; Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie, New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: Continuum, 2010), 61–82; Jean-François Bonnefoy, *La Nature de la théologie selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1939); Louis Charlier, *Essai sur le problème théologique* (Thuillies, Belgium: Ramgal, 1938); Marie-Rosaire Gagnebet, "La nature de la théologie spéculative," *Revue thomiste* 44 (1938): 1–39, 213–55, 645–74; Gagnebet, "Un essai sur le problème théologique," *Revue thomiste* 45 (1939) 108–45; Gagnebet, "Le problème actuel de la théologie et la science aristotélicienne d'après un ouvrage récent," *Divus thomas* 46 (1943): 237–70.

<sup>7</sup> I will note well, however, that Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrangé's own language is akin to that of the rest of his era, at times using *sapientia* and *scientia* interchangeably when speaking of *sapientia*, though in other places distinguishing tasks that only fall to *sapientia* (while noting too that such sapiential discourses *also* have tasks falling to *scientia*).

“burrow into” the principles themselves in a way that is impossible for the limited scope of sciences *strictly so called*.

This assertion by Maritain is not uniquely his own and deserves to be laid out in the context of the relevant Thomists of his day. (Indeed, at face value, it is backed up by a number of texts in Aquinas.) A strong and clear articulation of this point can be found in the theological works of Father Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., especially in his *De Revelatione*, as well as in several articles he wrote on the nature of acquired supernatural theology. Moreover, further explanations of this matter can be found in the work of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange’s student Father Emmanuel Doronzo, O.M.I. Let us begin, however, by first laying out the issue at hand. Then, we will consider some specific points, following in particular Father Doronzo’s own clear articulation of these matters as providing important pointers for further work on this very important question of the internal structure of our knowledge. Finally, we will close with some synthetic suggestions.

### Methodological Prolegomenon

It is important that I begin this article with a kind of prolegomenon for the reader. This article truly began as an “essay,” an attempt to articulate an issue that I had, in fact, only espied from a distance. (Indeed, as the reader will soon see, its first inspiration was based upon an accidental confluence of my reading of both the English and the French of a text by Maritain.) Thus, the way that the issue at hand will be approached will bear the marks of being *in fieri* rather than *in facto esse*. To put it another way, this article was indeed involved in the “way of discovery” much more than the “way of judgment.” With ongoing reflection on this matter, I feel that I have reached the point of articulation *in via iudicii*, at least in part. However, this would require the complete rewriting of this essay. Stumbling along into an insight is not a useless thing for one’s reader, so my intention in this article is to lead the reader along the way of the *via inventionis* that I followed in reflecting on these matters.

However, I must also note another point, one of perhaps even greater importance, and here I perhaps diverge methodologically from a number of Thomists. This study is written sincerely out of a desire to develop *in the line of Thomist thought*, but it is not written to seek out precisely what was Thomas’s own thought on the nature of *sapientia*. To that end, I rely on the excellent work of Father Kieran Conley, O.S.B., *A Theology of Wisdom: A Study of St. Thomas*. This text provides a thorough study of the texts in which St. Thomas discusses *scientia* and *sapientia*. Indeed, only at the very

end of my research into this topic, just prior to my initial submission of this essay to *Nova et Vetera*, did I manage to find a copy of this text. Therein, I was shocked to find an assertion akin to what I was arguing on behalf of: “While *science is interested in principles only insofar as they are related to its conclusions*, wisdom not only considers conclusions in the light of principles; it also judges the principles themselves, evaluating and defending their content.”<sup>8</sup> The second half of the quote is stated frequently enough in Aquinas that it is not surprising by itself. However, the first half expresses a point of great importance. We will see why this is so in what follows.

Moreover, as I was preparing this final redaction of my work, I received an unsolicited suggestion telling me of a little text by Francisco P. Muñiz, *The Work of Theology*.<sup>9</sup> Since then, I have discovered that this work was insightfully summarized by Reinhard Hütter in his *Dust Bound for Heaven*,<sup>10</sup> and also was used in an interesting work by Mark Johnson, “God’s Knowledge in Our Frail Mind: The Thomistic Model of Theology,”<sup>11</sup> which in many ways lies within the same space of concerns as those which I articulate here, without, however, drawing some of the systematic conclusions that I propose in the present article. It is, however, well worth reading in parallel to my own investigations herein.

In Muñiz’s text, the reader will find a striking confirmation of what I will reflect on below. Though there are a number of points of great importance in his little text, several well-argued assertions are in line with what we will pursue in the body of my own investigation:

Wisdom then has two distinct functions: first, that of explaining and defending principles; and secondly, that of inferring conclusions. In the exercise of the first function, wisdom attains the object which is proper to understanding, namely, principles or truths

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<sup>8</sup> Conley, *Theology of Wisdom*, 77 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> See Francisco P. Muñiz, *The Work of Theology*, trans. John P. Reid (Washington, DC: Thomist, 1958).

<sup>10</sup> See Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 331–40.

<sup>11</sup> See Mark P. Johnson, “God’s Knowledge in Our Frail Mind: The Thomistic Model of Theology,” *Angelicum* 76, no. 1 (1999): 25–45. This work appears to be a digest of his unpublished doctoral dissertation, “The Sapiential Character of Sacra Doctrina in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas” (University of Toronto, 1990). Further work on this topic should refer to it. Moreover, note that Johnson cites texts by Fr. Ramírez that show that he is not at all ignorant of the sapiential offices of wisdom. However, like many Thomists (and as witnessed to by his disagreement with Maritain), he still seems to think of theology primarily in terms of its *scientific, conclusion-oriented* offices.

which are *per se* and immediately evident. In the exercise of its other function, wisdom attains the object which is proper to science, namely, truths which are known mediately or by demonstration. Therefore, the object of wisdom is broader (*amplius*) than the objects both of understanding and of science taken separately.<sup>12</sup>

Second:

Hence, the concursus of natural reason with and under the light of divine revelation is evidently broader in its scope than virtual revelation.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when one concludes that the union of natural reason and the light of revelation must equal virtual revelation, an illicit jump has been made from the whole to the part, from the unqualified (*simpliciter*) to the qualified (*secundum quid*). This very leap is made by the authors *because of the overly-restricted—and hence imperfect—concept which they have of Theology which is*

<sup>12</sup> Muñiz, *Work of Theology*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the notion of “virtual revelation,” see note 46 below. Muñiz is, however, opening up a larger problem here. He seems to hold that virtual revelation is the *lumen sub quo* only for the deduction of conclusions in theology (i.e., the scientific task of theology). However, in that case, we are lacking the appropriate formal object *quo* for theology as such, a light which traditionally has been termed “virtual revelation.” I tend to think that the very light of virtual revelation may well be nothing more than the broader attempt of reason to have some *intellectus fidei*, whether through reflection on principles or in the drawing of conclusions. However, one might say that the part-whole analysis undertaken by Muñiz would enable us to see virtual revelation, strictly so called, as being only one part of the *lumen sub quo* of theology. This would, of course, require some shifting in the discussion of these matters, at least if we are to maintain the language of the later *schola* (language which I believe is crucial to a clear articulation in these matters). Indeed, his stated position, one that I am inclined to think is of great merit (though calling for further noetic elaborations) is stated clearly in *Work of Theology*, 23: “The light *sub quo* of Theology in its total extension is the natural light of reason, exercised under the light of divine revelation, or under the positive direction of faith; it is ‘reason guided by faith,’—as our Angelic Doctor writes—or ‘reason illumined by faith,’ in the classic expression used by the Vatican Council.” Such a position seems to be implied in the presentation offered by Fr. Labourdette in the text cited in note 47 below. Muñiz’s qualification here helps to make clear how apologetics can remain clearly under the *lumen sub quo* of theology, thus providing a welcome clarification for the insights of Gardeil and Garrigou-Lagrange in this important matter. Muñiz makes important remarks concerning this point on pages 15–20. This is all of great importance for Thomistic theological methodology, and doubtlessly his study has repercussions on the understanding of philosophical wisdom as well.

*accepted by them only under the formal ratio of science.*<sup>14</sup>

Third, noting the incomplete position held by a number of theologians, including no few Thomists:

What is commonly maintained by the authors concerning the nature of Theology is all true in itself, and would not be in the least reprehensible, *if it were applied to Theology as it is formally a science or under the formal notion [ratio] of science.*<sup>15</sup>

And finally:

Theology is called, in the first place, “wisdom,” which *in itself embraces simultaneously the ratio both of science and of understanding*, since it both deduces conclusions and concerns itself with [its] very principles.<sup>16</sup>

However, whereas Muñiz thinks that St. Thomas was purposefully ambiguous in his wording precisely to avoid confusing these matters, I am not convinced, upon reading his study, that St. Thomas was so intentional.<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that I think St. Thomas was wrong on these matters. Far from it! I think that he saw in a vague way something that needs to be made more distinct: What we might call the *ratio sapientiae* (the general formal character of wisdom as a kind of knowledge attained by the third operation of the intellect in its speculative operation) is distinct from the *ratio scientiae* (the general formal character of science as a kind of knowledge attained by the third operation of the intellect in its speculative operation). However, the whole problem lies in this: how *precisely* are these *rationes* distinguished? Is it a univocal distinction (i.e., according to one generic *ratio* which would apply both to science and to wisdom) or an analogical distinction (i.e., according to *multiple rationes* which are more different than they are the same)?<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Muñiz, *Work of Theology*, 23 (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> Muñiz, *Work of Theology*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Muñiz, *Work of Theology*, 28–29.

<sup>17</sup> See Muñiz, *Work of Theology*, 25–26.

<sup>18</sup> Every battle cannot be fought in one place. However, a thinker’s position on the nature and role of analogy lies at the center of his or her thought. For my part, I remain convinced of the positions articulated by Thomists who followed Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, in particular drawing my thought from Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange in this matter (e.g., in *God: His Existence and His Essence*, vol. 2, trans. Bede Rose [St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1949], 187–267), though as supplemented

Reflecting on the original form that the current article took on, *this* is the problem that will be presented below as a kind of *via inventionis* in dialogue with fellow Thomists. I cannot present an *ad mentem Thomae* argument for fear of freighting an already-lengthy study with concerns that risk deflecting the point I desire to make. Indeed, as can be seen in detail in the excellent studies mentioned above (Conley, Muñiz, and Johnson), as well as in ones like the recent work of Tomáš Machula, which will be an important dialogue partner in footnotes below,<sup>19</sup> and Father Wallace's *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology*,<sup>20</sup> this very central question seems to have evaded those who primarily wish to ground their studies solely on the questions answered according to the terms predominantly used by St. Thomas himself.

However, the question mentioned above—how *precisely* are these *rationes* of science and wisdom distinguished?—just does not seem to have been a matter of *direct* concern for St. Thomas. In other words, the *distinct* and detailed articulation in response to this question does not seem to have been *St. Thomas's* own question, though it can be answered *from within the fraternal bonds of Thomist dialogue*, for he did articulate many aspects of the problem facing us here. I personally cannot subscribe to the attitude privately expressed by Étienne Gilson to John Deely near the end of the former's life: "A 'Thomist' of whatever brand should find it superfluous to develop a question which Thomas was content to pass over with a few words."<sup>21</sup> Without at all denigrating textual studies of Aquinas, which are

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by the utterly indispensable progress made by Yves Simon in, e.g., "On Order in Analogical Sets," in *Philosopher at Work: Essays*, ed. Anthony O. Simon (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 1999), 135–71.

<sup>19</sup> See Tomáš Machula, "Theology as Wisdom: Renaissance and Modern Scholastic Commentaries on Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 91, no. 3 (2019): 211–25.

<sup>20</sup> See William Wallace, *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology* (Washington, DC: Thomist, 1962), 57–70.

<sup>21</sup> John Deely, "Quid sit postmodernismus?," in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman T. Ciapalo (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 68–96, at 70. Likewise, see Étienne Gilson's further remarks to Deely: "It is very difficult to develop such a question with any certitude of doing so along the very line he himself would have followed, had he developed it. If we develop it in the wrong way, we engage his doctrine in some no thoroughfare [dead end], instead of keeping it on the threshold his own thought has refused to cross, and which, to him, was still an assured truth" (cited by Deely on 70). Of course, Deely, who is personally very dear to me, was a bit of a curmudgeon in these matters. I personally believe that his *insight* is correct in this intra-Thomist feud, though his *tone* was often a bit strident.



the continued source of so many insights, drawn from the well of so great a master, Aquinas's text is not an outer boundary for one wishing to think in line with a sure and faithful tradition of Thomists.

Granted, I do not doubt that I will be critiqued for my methods, which have their own limitations. For those looking for an excellent treatment of this topic precisely in St. Thomas's texts, all I can do is turn the reader to the other studies (especially that of Conley) and pray for clemency as a fellow searcher for the truth in such matters. The argument I am presenting is primarily the fruit of my time spent in the "tutelage" offered by the works of Maritain, Garrigou-Lagrange, and Doronzo. And yet, my goal is to present an argument that none of them were ready to make, though it seems to be one that to my eyes is *utterly necessary* in these matters—indeed, above all in light of Muñiz's work, which provides me no small confidence that my inchoate insights, while perhaps marked by some haze, are set along the path of finding some definition in a very important matter. In any case, to put the point of methodology in brief form: my concern is not exegetical; it is primarily that of a faithful Catholic intellectual interested in a problem involving both philosophy and theology. Let it be judged on those terms—and not in a spirit of rancor, which too often is that of contemporary academic squabbings! It is not my intention to engage in such things, even if I may methodologically differ from my brethren in arms. In the language of my Latin Church brethren, I truly mean the words *procedamus in pace!*

Thus, my argument can be summarized as follows. In Thomas's own thought, we find some looseness regarding what we could call the "genus of science," or what I would rather call it, the *ratio scientiae*, "broadly speaking," as applied to both *science* and *wisdom*. Most Thomists (including those cited above, even Muñiz,<sup>22</sup> who seems to have seen this point most clearly) regularly speak of wisdom as being the loftiest form of science (even Father Garrigou-Lagrange does so on a good number of occasions, although he nonetheless at times also seems to say things quite strikingly at odds with the idea that wisdom is science in an eminent but univocal sense<sup>23</sup>), language for which they really cannot be faulted, given the fact

<sup>22</sup> Along these lines, see the interesting accidental slurring of science and wisdom found on Muñiz, *Work of Theology*, 30. Similar terminological looseness can be found in other Thomists, even those who seem to have seen this point to varying degrees.

<sup>23</sup> To this end, the text that is associated with note 66 below is not to be overlooked, for the theme does repeat in various works by him. The implications of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange's words are not to be quickly overlooked: "Even were theology not to deduce *any* theological conclusions, properly so called, but were only to explain,

that Aquinas himself at times speaks along these same lines.<sup>24</sup>

The question with which I will be concerned in what follows is the following: is there a generic unity embracing *scientia* and *sapientia*? This is generally what is implied by many Thomist presentations of these matters.<sup>25</sup> The *ratio* (or “formal character”) of science is treated as though it were a genus in which *sapientia* would be the loftiest species. Even on its own terms, this outlook is troubling, for then *scientia* is not a species of discursive knowing distinguished from *sapientia* by way of some kind of difference. It is merely a genus. To overcome this, one could only say that there is a genus like “certain, discursive, speculative knowledge drawn from first principles” (i.e., resolute-analytic knowledge reached through the activity of the third operation of the intellect).<sup>26</sup> However, we can be quite sure that *scientia* is a *knowledge of conclusions* for Aristotelians (indeed, of many stripes). Thus, this genus (a kind of univocal “genus *scientia*”) would implicitly be divided in relation to the loftiness of the principles

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through a profound metaphysical analysis, the subject and predicate of *revealed truths*, . . . even in such a case, it would have a considerable importance.” In other words, theology does a considerable amount for the *intellectus fidei* precisely by fulfilling offices that do not fall, strictly speaking, to the *ratio scientiae*, namely, *knowledge of conclusions, objectively inferred on the basis of self-evident, first principles*. However, the project of this article is to explain just why this insight is important (even if it requires us to go beyond St. Thomas, while remaining in line with him).

<sup>24</sup> This is the upshot of Thomists like Domingo Bañez, Jean-Baptiste Gonet, and Vincent L. Gotti as discussed in Machula. Based on remarks in Muñiz, this seems to have been implied in certain passages in Thomists like Gotti, Charles René Billuart, Tomasso Maria Cerboni, Édouard Hugon, and John of St. Thomas. Below, we will see the ambiguity involved in John of St. Thomas’s articulation of the important notion of virtual revelation.

<sup>25</sup> As is well summarized by in Machula, “Theology as Wisdom,” 225: “[Bañez and Gonet] understand scientific knowledge (certain knowledge through causes) as a more universal term that can be divided into scientific knowledge in a narrow sense (knowledge through lower causes) and wisdom (knowledge through the highest cause).” He does note the fact that wisdom has “knowledge of principles in addition to conclusions,” but in the end, he seems to accept Bañez’s position, more directly articulated earlier on 222–23: “Scientific knowledge can be considered as a genus (habit acquired through demonstration) that abstracts from the type of cause through which it is acquired and that is divided into wisdom as scientific knowledge through the highest cause and scientific knowledge (as a genus) through the lower causes. In this meaning, we can understand also the sentence of Vincent L. Gotti, according to whom wisdom is not something different from science, but something added to science. It can be considered as the specific difference of wisdom added to the genus of science.”

<sup>26</sup> Or, one could say “science in a broad sense,” like Machula.



in the light of which it draws its conclusions. However, that knowledge, *precisely because of its scientific character*, would be a knowledge of *conclusions grasped in light of these first principles*. It would only be a question of dividing it in terms of *highest principles or less lofty principles*. But it would still be *essentially and univocally a knowledge of conclusions*.

This is the very position I contest, though I must admit that I am merely exploring the possibility of my insight (one that seems to be implied by the various authors dialogued with, without them all seeing the full implications of the point). In short, my contention is that *scientia* and *sapientia* represent two properly proportional analogates within this broader analogous *ratio*: certain, discursive, speculative knowledge. By saying this is a properly proportional unity, we can be quite certain: *sapientia* does not do away with *scientia*. No, *sapientia* and *scientia* are analogates of this analogical set: certain, discursive, speculative knowledge. The analogue is predicated formally of each of its analogates, though according to a proportionality and an ordering. He who is wise has all of the intellectual perfection of the one who “knows scientifically.” However, this activity of “knowing scientifically” is performed precisely in a sapiential way, ever magnetized by the primary task of the wise man or woman: meditation upon the formal richness of the first principles of the sapiential discourse in question. In short, I mean that the *ratio scientiae* is formally and eminently embraced within the *ratio sapientiae*. He or she who “knows scientifically” is also concerned with the principles in his or her discourse. However, this interest extends only to the degree that they illuminate the conclusions drawn therein. Thus, we have Father Conley’s remark, which virtually contains everything that I wish to assert in this article: “While science is interested in principles only insofar as they are related to its conclusions, wisdom not only considers conclusions in the light of principles; it also judges the principles themselves, evaluating and defending their content.”<sup>27</sup> The *rationes* of science and wisdom are united, but not generically. Both have knowledge of principles and conclusions, but in different ways. We do not *univocally* assert what is common to them. We only do so analogically: asserting and denying *the very thing that is common to the analogates*.<sup>28</sup>

To this end, the reader will see a very important theme emerge with this essay’s development. I will contend that *sapientia*’s appreciation is primarily (but *not* exclusively) with the *formal* richness of the principles which are its light, whereas *scientia* primarily appreciates their *virtual* riches. Yes, the

<sup>27</sup> Conley, *Theology of Wisdom*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> See Simon, “On Order in Analogical Sets,” 18–26.

objectively inferential (i.e., demonstrative and *scientific*) functions of theology fill theological discourse with many discussions of great importance for a full *intellectus fidei*. However, its most precious activity is found in the articulation of the analogy of faith, illuminating one faith-held principle in light of another.<sup>29</sup> And in a philosophical discipline like metaphysics, one will indeed draw many conclusions in light of the first principles of being qua being. However, the metaphysician's loftiest task is a kind of meditation on the coherence of the principles of metaphysics. Such a meditation is not, strictly speaking, objectively inferential. In other words, it is not knowledge of a *new conclusion* drawn in light of given premises through a middle term. Indeed, this point of logic deserves further work, for it is something once upon a time appreciated, though no longer as well known.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, my investigations into these matters were primarily focused on humanly achieved wisdom, thus generally speaking of philosophical and (acquired) theological wisdom (which though *radicaliter* supernatural remains a true accomplishment by the theologian, and not itself an infused *habitus*). On occasion, I will (mostly in footnotes) draw on remarks made by John of St. Thomas in the context of his treatment of the Spirit's gift of wisdom. However, such comments generally bear evidence to implications for the notion of wisdom generally speaking. The particularities befalling the divine modalities of the Spirit's gift of wisdom lay outside of my concerns in this article. My concern is with trying to work out the analogous *ratio* of wisdom in light of less lofty analogates, though we most certainly should look for further illumination for this analogical notion by considering not only the Spirit's gift of wisdom but also the case wherein that analogue is realized formally and eminently in the Deity, which likewise answers (though in an "excessive" manner) to the formal character of wisdom.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See note 73 below.

<sup>30</sup> See notes 42, 43, 64, and 71.

<sup>31</sup> Concerning the Spirit's gift of wisdom, the reader can consult, as a kind of "exhortation," Walter Farrell and Dominic Hughes, *Swift Victory: Essays on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 79–104. Likewise, see: Ambroise Gardeil, *The Holy Spirit in the Christian Life* (London: Blackfriars, 1953), 130–47; Gardeil, *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Dominican Saints* (Tacoma, WA: Cluny, 2016), 92–101. A recent study of related topics can be found in John Meinert, *The Love of God Poured Out: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018). For more technical discussion of this topic within the Thomist school, see John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, trans. Dominic Hughes (London:

### Raising of the Issue and the “Maritain-Ramírez Affair”

The basic question, therefore, is: What differentiates the noetic character of *scientia* from *sapientia*? We can begin by making the straightforward distinction between *intellectus* and *inferential* knowledge noted above. *Intellectus* (and its speculatively practical counterpart, *synderesis*,<sup>32</sup> as well as the knowledge elicited supernaturally by faith’s assent) is direct knowledge formed by the intellect’s second operation. It is expressed in an enunciation and asserted to be true or false in a judgment.<sup>33</sup> In humans, this knowledge represents the perfection of the work first accomplished by the first operation in defining terms, now combining or dividing simple intelligibilities so as to express some essential or non-essential character (or property/accident) of a subject that was already grasped by the intellect’s first operation.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, judgment is where the being of things is fully reached by the human knower in an explicit intellectual manner.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes, such knowledge really reaches the level of first principles, in which case we are faced with *intellectus/synderesis* in the strict sense. Sometimes, it does not reach so high, but still indeed, we form judgments about many

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Sheed and Ward, 1950), 123–47 (*Cursus theologicus* I-II, q. 70, disp. 18, a. 4, nos. 1–48). For a lengthy discussion of the problems involved in mystical knowledge, see in particular the second volume of Ambroise Gardeil, *La structure de l’âme et l’expérience mystique* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1927).

<sup>32</sup> It can be argued that there is ambiguity concerning whether or not St. Thomas distinguishes *intellectus* and *synderesis* from each other. For our purposes, I hold that they are distinct. On this, see: Leonard Lehu, *La Raison: Règle de la moralité d’après Saint Thomas* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1930), 144n2; Michel Labourdette, “Connaissance pratique et savoir morale,” *Revue thomiste* 48 (1948): 149–50; Yves R. Simon, *A Critique of Moral Knowledge*, trans. Ralph McInerney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 28n2.

<sup>33</sup> On the second act of the intellect’s enunciative and judicative operations, see: Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Logic*, trans. Imelda Choquette (London: Sheed & Ward, 1946) 2, 82–93; Yves R. Simon, *Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 136–58.

<sup>34</sup> On the active role of *nous* in forming definitions, see: Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Sense of Mystery*, trans. Matthew K. Miner (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic Press, 2017), 23n31; Garrigou-Lagrange, “De Investigatione definitionum secundum Aristotelem et S. Thomam. Ex posteriorum Analyt. I. II, c. 12–14; lect. 13–19 Commentarii S. Thomae,” *Acta Pont. Academiae Romanae S. Thomae Aq. et Religionis Catholicae* 2 (1935): 193–201.

<sup>35</sup> See the relevant texts associated with Joseph Owens, “The Conclusion of the Prima Via,” in *Saint Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The Collected Papers of Joseph*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 159nn109–11.

things that are not first principles: “Every house, as such, is a shelter.” For all of their infinite difference from us in this matter, the angels and God know in a way that must have some of the perfection of judgment, albeit without the conditions of befalling human intellection on account of the weakness of the latter’s light. Judgment remains the loadstar for understanding the perfection of understanding, even if our poor human intellection involves composition and division.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, as is well known among Thomists, there is another operation involved in the human person’s speculative knowledge,<sup>37</sup> and it is there that his particular perfection as a knower is achieved.<sup>38</sup> It is not enough to say that man is an intellectual creature. His particular way of having an intellect is expressed in the fact that he is rational. The mobility that affects man on account of his bodily constitution also, in a way, affects his knowing. The light of some first insight is never enough for human knowers. We must “spread out” our insights into chains of reasoning, through which we come to express (and therein know) the causal structure of things. The light of our intellect is so weak that we must, as it were, think in quasi motion.<sup>39</sup>

All by itself, the major premise of a syllogism does not provide us the full light of its irradiation. Were our intellects angelic, we would see in a single stroke all the truth contained therein. However, our intellects are not angelic, pure *intellects*; rather, they are human, and therefore *rational*,

<sup>36</sup> See Jean-Hervé Nicolas, *Synthèse Dogmatique: complément, de l’Univers à la Trinité* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires, 1997), 295–97.

<sup>37</sup> It is, of course, involved in practical knowledge as well, though in that case, it is ordered to the declaration of the terminal and particularized *imperium* which will rule the will *hic et nunc* and includes as one of its conditions the virtuous (or vicious) subjective conditioning of the agent himself or herself.

<sup>38</sup> Whence, syllogistic *relationes rationis* represent the principal object studied in logic, which itself has second intentions as its formal object. On the primacy of the third act here, see John of St. Thomas, *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, q. 1, a. 3, sub-question 2 (trans. Yves R. Simon, John J. Glanville, and G. Donald Hollenhorst [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955], 26–27). On the problem of the subject of logic from a Thomist perspective, see Matthew K. Miner, “Thomism and the Formal Object of Logic,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93, no. 3 (2019): 411–44.

<sup>39</sup> See: Armand Maurer, *St. Thomas and Historicity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1979); Anton Pegis, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), esp. 47: “History is the signature of the soul’s intellectuality, for the human soul is an intelligence living by motion at the level of intelligibility found in matter. That is why it is a man, temporal spirit, engaged in an incarnated intellectual life.”

intellects. We stand in need of the discourse of reason in order to slowly draw out all of the illuminating riches of our directly attained insights. Through this discourse, we must render actual what is only potential in our most basic (and yet, quite often, most fruitful) insights into reality.<sup>40</sup>

From an Aristotelian and Thomist perspective, “scientific” knowledge represents knowledge *of conclusions* that are drawn in light of *per se nota* principles. In order for science to exist at all, one must base oneself on certain knowledge of judgments that are self-justified on the terms of the proposition enunciating such knowledge (e.g.: “The good is to be done and evil avoided”; “Being is not non-being”; “Knowers are beings that become the other as other”).<sup>41</sup> That is, in order for scientific knowledge to exist in its full stature, one must also have self-evident knowledge with certitude.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Technically, this strictly applies to objectively illative discourse which renders actual that which was only potential. In other forms of discourse, we render explicit that which was implicit.

<sup>41</sup> Though a topic for another investigation, it should be noted that there are many such judgments. Too often, Thomists consider only the very basic judgments given as examples by St. Thomas as being the only such knowledge reached through *intellectus* and *synderesis*. However, there are many *per se nota* principles in the domains of both speculative intellection and practical knowledge. Regarding the former, one need only think of the metaphysical principles reflected on at length by Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange almost to the point of tiresome repetition (the principle of non-contradiction, the principle of causality, the principle of finality, etc.), though there are many such principles in all the various domains of knowledge. Moreover, in the practical domain, the moral virtues receive their ends from the knowledge grasped through *synderesis*, a fact that attests to a great host of practical *per se nota* judgments. On the latter topic, see Ryan J. Brady, “Aquinas on the Respective Roles of Prudence and *Synderesis vis-à-vis* the Ends of the Moral Virtues” (PhD diss., Ave Maria University, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> This distinction between *certitude* and *evidence* is what enables the theology of wayfarers to be a true “science,” and above all, wisdom, even though it is in an imperfect state. See John of St. Thomas (Poinso) *On Sacred Science: A Translation of Cursus theologicus I, Question 1, Disputation 2*, trans. John P. Doyle, ed. Victor M. Salas (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2019), disp. 2, a. 3, no. 6: “In the nature of a science there is not evidence, but only certitude. For Aristotle (1.2.71b10–12), in the definition of science does not posit evidence but certitude, when he says that ‘to know scientifically is to know that the cause on account of which a thing exists is in fact the cause of that thing, and that it cannot come about that the thing be other than it is.’ And the reason is that by certitude alone, even when evidence is absent, that habit is based upon an infallible connection and relates to an infallible truth; therefore, in this it is distinct from an opinionative habit which relates to a fallible and contingent truth and is, therefore, a habit which is subject to error, which is not to be a correct or virtuous habit of an intellectual kind. A habit, however, that proceeds infallibly and certainly perfects the

However, objective certitude in *per se nota* principles provides the foundation for then having *inferential* knowledge built upon the foundation of such certain “stopping points” of reasoning. These inferentially known conclusions are precisely *what scientific knowledge is*. It is a knowledge of a concluding judgment—for, according to the maxim of *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 8, a. 1, ad 2, “The discourse of reason always takes its beginning in an insight [*ab intellectu*] and expresses its ultimate conclusion in one as well [*terminatur ad intellectum*]<sup>43</sup>—that of its very nature is known *as inferential*.<sup>44</sup> The fact that it is inferential “colors” the very concluding insight, which is known *precisely as a conclusion*, that is, as something discursively attained through some middle term. Once again, that is what scientific knowledge is: knowledge *of conclusions* ultimately drawn in light of *per se nota* principles.<sup>45</sup>

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intellect without any danger of error and without possible failure (*indefectibiliter*).

This entire article is worth reading in relation to our present topic. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Salas, who provided me with this text, which is still awaiting official publication, being one of the last works undertaken by his much-revered mentor, Dr. John Doyle.

<sup>43</sup> See: Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 2nd ed., trans. Mabelle N. Andison and J. Gordon Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 53; Maritain, “No Knowledge Without Intuitivity,” in *Untrammelled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering, vol. 20 of *The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1997), 316.

<sup>44</sup> Thus, John of St. Thomas is of the opinion that, although we form one kind of *verbum* for the first operation of the intellect and another through the second (a position that predates him), there is not a unique kind of *verbum* for the third operation. Rather, the propositions are themselves modified. On the earlier history of this point, see André de Muralt, “La doctrine médiévale de l’*esse obiectivum*,” in *L’enjeu de la philosophie médiévale: études thomistes, scotistes, occamiennes* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 90–167 (esp. 127–29). For John of St. Thomas’s own position, see *Cursus philosophicus thomisticus*, ed. Beatus Reiser, vol. 3 (*Naturalis philosophia*, vol. 2) (Turin: Marietti, 1930), q. 11, a. 3 (esp. 372A7–373B17). He concludes: “And thus, I concede that the third operation has a distinct *verbum* since it is a distinct operation. *However, it is modally, not really, distinct from what is represented in its own propositions.* However, when one proceeds from a simple apprehension to a composite representation [i.e., from the first to the second operation of the intellect], a distinct object shines forth in the quiddity or truth to be represented. And thus, discourse according to causality (i.e., according to illation) presupposes discourse according to succession (i.e., according to many succeeding propositions), as St. Thomas says in *ST I*, q. 14, a. 7. *However, it does not make one [concept/verbum] out of many propositions*” (translation mine; emphasis added).

<sup>45</sup> Thus, one distinguishes between “scientific intelligibility” and “mere intelligibility” precisely because of this inferential character of the knowledge. See John of St. Thomas, *Ars logica*, pt. 2, q. 27, a. 1 (823a:15–22): “*Scientific knowability [esse*



Now, let us begin our turn from science to wisdom. It is clear in St. Thomas that theology is not only a form of *scientia*, but is also, and above all, *sapientia*.<sup>46</sup> Later Thomists came to spill a great deal of ink defending the scientific status of theology<sup>47</sup> to such an extent that their brief remarks about theology as a form of *sapientia* can be lost in their noble efforts to show how it is that human intellection can have its own natural, acquired

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*scibile*] adds over and above mere intelligibility [*esse intelligibile*] such a mode of knowing, namely that something is understood not merely in a simple manner but, rather, illatively, from causes (or, premises) proceeding to conclusions, for to know scientifically [*scire*] is to know [*cognoscere*] the cause on account of which something is, etc.” (my translation). Also, see John of St. Thomas, *Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 132 (*Cursus theologicus* I-II, q. 70, disp. 18, a. 4, no. 21): “There are two kinds of judgment. One is a simple assent, such as is had in the judgment of first principles. Assent is made to these from the evidence of the terms. Likewise, simple assent is had in faith. In the judgment that the thing is true, there is no inquiry into the causes of the thing, but merely an assent to the testimony and authority of the witness [or to objective evidential certitude in the case of natural knowledge of this kind]. The other type of judgment is analytic and scientific. When a man assents to the truth, judges of it, and even gives reasons for his judgment, investigating and defending it, he not only knows the thing, but he knows the foundation and cause of his knowledge. Such an act is proper to science. It is called wisdom when it is had through the highest causes.”

<sup>46</sup> See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6. A study of relevant texts can be found in Conley, *Theology of Wisdom*, 59–104.

<sup>47</sup> This fact was very recently studied in Machula’s excellent “Theology as Wisdom.” Machula’s study was published just as this article was being drafted, so he is not a direct interlocutor for my discussions. However, it should be noted that, on many points, our concerns dovetail, though we do fundamentally differ, insofar as he seems to be a partisan of univocal unity of science and wisdom. Regarding Thomists of the fourteenth century, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Le savoir théologique chez les premiers thomistes,” in *Recherches thomasiennes: Études revues et augmentées* (Paris: Vrin 2000), 158–76. This is not the place to undertake a point-by-point study of other Thomists, but the general sense one has when looking through the treatments by Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, Billuart, and Gonet is that the topic is not of great importance. None of them are unaware of the issues at hand, as Machula in part shows (and, indeed, as a pivotal quote from Cajetan to be cited below in this article shows quite clearly). Nonetheless, the theme of *sapientia* as a unique kind of *habitus* does not play a *thematic* role for their consideration, even though their thought indicates aspects of its unique character. Alas, even in so perspicuous a theologian as Fr. Labourdette, one can find a kind of focus on the scientific character of theology to the detriment of wisdom, at least in his lucid and insightful summary in “La théologie, Intelligence de la foi,” *Revue thomiste* 46 (1946): 5–44. The fact of such a general oversight by Thomists was lamented in Fr. Conley in his decidedly Thomist *Theology of Wisdom*, 77 (see also 33–35). Also, see notes 4 and 6 above.

*habitus* concerned with these supernatural truths of faith. The methodological justification of an *inferential* form of knowledge of the supernatural order is indeed a difficult enough affair to explain. Once such things are justified, it understandably seems to be a minor affair to add, “Yes, indeed, theology *obviously* must judge all other sciences and hence is a form of wisdom, for it is *notitia ordinativa et iudicativa de aliis* [‘a kind of knowing which orders and judges other forms of knowledge’].”

Great light is shed upon the character of theological knowledge by John of St. Thomas’s notion of “virtual revelation,” a terminological distinction that allowed him to clearly express the character of theological knowledge as distinct from faith in what is formally revealed:

Therefore, virtual revelation includes both these features [*ratio*]. For it is taken from principles of Faith, which partake of supernatural light [*lumen*], and are consequently maximally spiritual and elevated above natural intelligibles, inasmuch as they are derived from a participation of Divine light [*lumen*]. And through this spirituality, or immateriality so elevated, it is distinguished from the light and the natural intelligibility of any natural object whatever. [However, precisely because] the principles of Faith are taken as inferential for conclusions, they constitute the formal feature [*ratio*] of theology in the character [*ratio*] of a scientifically knowable light [*lumen*], and of virtual revelation, insofar as in an inferential, and not a simple, mode, they manifest those things which are virtually contained, and can be deduced from things revealed through Faith.<sup>48</sup>

Or, as is stated with great clarity by Father Michel Labourdette, O.P., writing from this same tradition:

Therefore, what is this objective light [of acquired theology]? It is exactly this: concepts and propositions which by faith were solely held as being guaranteed by God, as pure objects of adherence, are

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<sup>48</sup> John of St. Thomas (Poinso), *On Sacred Science*, a. 7, no. 12 (*Cursus theologicus*, q. 1, disp. 2, a. 7); see the whole of nos. 11 and 12. A pedagogical explanation of this point of Thomist doctrine can be found in Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “Remarks Concerning the Metaphysical Character of St. Thomas’s Moral Theology, in Particular as It Is Related to Prudence and Conscience,” trans. Matthew K. Miner, *Nova et Vetera* 17, no. 1 (2019): 261–66 (“Translator’s Appendix 1: Concerning the Formal Object of Acquired Theology”).



now considered as objects of an intellectual movement that introduces (under faith and its irradiation) a rational consideration with the aim of explaining the proper intelligibility of these concepts, of manifesting the connection of these propositions, of becoming aware of the temporal and historical conditions of their revelation to man and of the progress of their successive formulations, of grouping certain ones around those which explain them, of manifesting through reasoning all of their intelligible implications, and so forth, . . . in short, as engaged in the characteristic movement of the human mind striving toward *knowledge*.<sup>49</sup>

The distinction between formal revelation and virtual revelation helps us to distinguish quite clearly between the noetic character of our reflective theological knowledge (which is quite appropriate to our little, discursive intellects) and the truths that we know by faith. Even though theological knowledge must presuppose faith as its root principle and as the light in which its judgments are resolved,<sup>50</sup> we assent to theological knowledge precisely on the grounds of the faith-illuminated reasoning involved. By contrast, we assent to formally revealed knowledge *precisely on account of God's authority as the First Truth who reveals*.<sup>51</sup> However, note John of

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<sup>49</sup> Labourdette, "La théologie," 22.

<sup>50</sup> Thus, Maritain rightly inveighs against the idea of a theology in which reason would merely judge revealed truths in its own natural light. See: Jacques Maritain, "The Deposition of Wisdom," in *The Dream of Descartes*, trans. Mabelle L. Anderson. (London: Poetry Editions London, 1946), 46–82; Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan et al. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 269; Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 103n25. See also Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione per Ecclesiam Catholicam Proposita*, 5th ed. (Rome: Desclée et Socii, 1950), prol., ch. 1, a. 1, no. 3 (pp. 8–17).

<sup>51</sup> On this, see the appendix cited above in note 46. A similar distinction can also be made for the case of the knowledge had through the gift of wisdom, whereby God is "tasted in a dark yet quasi-experiential manner." I fear, however, that, in the aforementioned appendix, I perhaps rhetorically overstated the role of human reasoning in such assent, for in fact, the supernatural roots of theology (which most certainly were affirmed in said appendix) require the motive of theology not to be purely natural. It is a matter of emphasis in that text, and the comments made there should be supplemented by the relevant comments found in Maritain, *Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 106n41. Likewise, authority plays an important role in such arguing, given these supernatural premises, which illuminate all of theology's discourse (cf. *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2). And yet, the insight of Labourdette on this matter seems to be a nuanced balancing of this point (care being taken, however, to note his significant focus on *scientia* in theology): "Whether the proposition thus

St. Thomas's focus in the passage cited above. His words might lead us to believe that the primary concern of theology is drawing such conclusions and coming to understand all those things that are not formally revealed but which, nonetheless, are virtually contained within the light of what is formally revealed. In other words, we would tend to think of theology as being a *science*.

To see the point I am moving us toward, let us consider a controversy in which Maritain found himself engaged. In *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, Maritain famously defends his notion of adequate consideration of moral theology,<sup>52</sup> holding that a true moral *philosophy* stands in need of data drawn from revealed sources in order to fully perform its *philosophical* tasks. According to him, the state of the human person subject to the fall, as well as our vocation to grace and glory, require us to take these data into account even to understand our action on the purely natural level as it is found in the actual world in all its singularity. In short, the activity of our human nature is that of a *fallen and* (at least potentially) *graced* human nature, thus meaning that, according to Maritain,<sup>53</sup> there can be no fully

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connected as a conclusion to a revealed principle already is a truth of faith held by revelation or is one that has been learned in a completely different manner, the process remains the same: it is a purely scientific procedure using inference and, in no way, *as such*, authority. The latter is involved in the processes of speculative theology in order to assure its principles but not at all in order to then demonstrate its conclusions" ("La théologie," 38; translation mine). Note, however, that he makes some important qualifications immediately hereafter.

<sup>52</sup> See: Maritain, *Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 38–43 and 61–100; Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944), 137–220, 231–41. For considerations on this topic, see Matthew K. Miner, "Revisiting Maritain's Moral Philosophy Adequately Considered," *Nova et Vetera* 16, no. 2 (2018): 489–510. For a lengthier study, see Ralph Nelson, "Jacques Maritain's Conception of 'Moral Philosophy Adequately Considered'" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1961). As is clear in Maritain, the *nature* of such knowledge remains philosophical and natural (that is *human acts considered under the light of the natural principles of practico-moral reason*). However, in the case of moral philosophy, the very existential state of the human person requires subalternation (not by way of subject, but by way of principles) to theology. The problem is too difficult for full treatment here and therefore must be left to the aforementioned texts.

<sup>53</sup> He was followed in this by Simon and Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange. Regarding the former, see: Simon, *Critique of Moral Knowledge*, 58–62; Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, ed. Robert J. Mulvaney (New York: Fordham University, 1991), 87–96 and 112–13.

Regarding Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "On the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion," *Philosophizing in Faith: Essays on the Beginning and End of Wisdom*, ed. and trans. Matthew K. Miner (Providence, RI: Cluny, 2019), 376n34 and 390. As can be seen in the final citation, he prefers

constituted moral philosophy without some form of subalternation of moral philosophy to theology, at least as regards principles to be used in the former. And here, Maritain makes it quite explicit that he has been speaking of “theology” (and *not* faith) with good reason throughout his discussions in *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*:

In a strict manner of speaking at least, it should be said that moral philosophy adequately conceived is subalternated to theology and not to faith. In point of fact, a science is subalternate to another science, not to the principles thereof; its proper and proximate principles . . . are the conclusions not the principles themselves of the subalternant science. . . . If moral philosophy adequately considered were to resolve its conclusions in the revealed datum, and in the very principles of theology, just as they are communicated to us by faith, it would merge with theology, of which it would become a part; it would not be a science subalternated to theology.<sup>54</sup>

This passage raised concerns for the great Dominican commentator on Aquinas Father Santiago María Ramírez, who in a review of the Maritain’s text critiqued the latter’s conception of “adequate consideration” of moral philosophy on a number of fronts. Of interest to us here is the fact that Father Ramírez did not believe that an appeal to theology (instead of to faith) sufficed to save Maritain from reducing moral philosophy to moral theology:

Maritain wishes to justify and explain this adequate moral philosophy by saying that it is a philosophy that is subalternated to theology. And note that he adds a point of clarification: “to *theology* and not to faith.” Thus, moral philosophy draws its principles from moral theology’s own proper conclusions. However, at the same time, we are told [by Maritain] that the principal truths which [such an adequate moral] philosophy borrows from theology are these two: the existence of a supernatural ultimate end and the fact that human nature is fallen and redeemed.

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the term “subordination” to “subalternation.” Note, however, that he does seem to be in agreement with Maritain on the very point under discussion in this article, for Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange notes that such adequate moral philosophy would make use of “revelation *theologically explicated*.” The importance of this point will be made clear in what follows.

<sup>54</sup> Maritain, *Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 102n12.

Are the existence of a supernatural ultimate end and the fallen state of human nature, as well as its redemption, theological conclusions or truths of faith? There can be no doubt how to respond to this question: these truths are explicitly and formally truths of faith and not simple theological conclusions. Therefore, the proper principles of adequate moral philosophy are explicitly and formally truths of faith. And thus, once more, we find ourselves openly within the domain of theology, since theology has the truths of faith as its proper principles.<sup>55</sup>

In the final sections of *Science and Wisdom*, Maritain responds quite directly to Father Ramírez's critique.<sup>56</sup> He notes that, in *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, he used the expression "the truths of theology" precisely to avoid the problems that would have arisen had he used the expression "theological conclusions," which designates the body of inferential truths drawn in light of virtual revelation, that is, the faithful intellect reflecting on the intelligibility of what is held on faith. More important still than such objectively inferential knowledge is a meditation upon the very principles of theology known through faith so that their interconnections may be understood more fully, thus deepening our penetration of the mysteries of faith, though doing so in a natural manner acquired through studious reflection.<sup>57</sup> As an all-embracing body of knowledge, theology has this task as well, for no other form of acquired discursive reasoning stands "outside" of acquired supernatural theology. It alone can argue on behalf of its principles.

Thus, Maritain notes that Father Ramírez's concern regarding theological knowledge bespeaks a limited outlook concerning the tasks of theology precisely as a form of wisdom.<sup>58</sup> It is quite easy to miss this point because of a mistranslation in the English rendering by Bernard Wall, who uses "science" to translate *both* of two French terms, *sagesse* and *savoir*, in a critical passage where Maritain most certainly wishes to be exact in his wording. There Maritain says:

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<sup>55</sup> J.-M. Ramírez, "Comptes Rendus: J. Maritain, *Distinguir pour unir ou les degrés du savoir* et *De la philosophie chrétienne*," Y. Simon, *Critique de la connaissance morale*; Th. Deman, *Sur l'organisation du savoir moral*, *Bulletin thomiste* (1935): 430–31.

<sup>56</sup> See Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 236–37.

<sup>57</sup> See Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 236–37.

<sup>58</sup> However, as Johnson shows ("God's Knowledge," 32–33), Ramírez was forcefully aware of the sapiential nature of theology, even if he seems to have articulated it in a "scientific manner" in his debate with Maritain.

Theology, like every *wisdom* [*sagesse*] *simpliciter dicta*, knows its principles by turning back upon them. Even when it is a question of a truth of faith, theology *knows* it, not *inasmuch as it is a mystery of faith*, transcending theological knowledge [*savoir*], but inasmuch as it is an *object to which this knowledge* [*savoir*] *returns by scrutinizing it, explaining it, and giving it precision in the light of virtual revelation.*<sup>59</sup>

In other words, wisdom *as such* has its own offices. It is not merely concerned with the task of inferentially drawing conclusions on the basis of certain premises. Beyond that, it turns back upon its principles, defending them and reflecting upon their own intrinsic truth. It not only has direct knowledge of these principles (as occurs through *intellectus* and theological faith) but also analytically *judges* concerning these principles, as well as the principles of subordinate forms of discourse.<sup>60</sup> Thus, as Cajetan sagely observes in his only substantial remark on *ST* I-II, q. 57, a. 2, wisdom contains both science and understanding by way of eminence (as one may say that God “contains” all the formal content of being, truth, goodness, etc. but does so in an eminent manner<sup>61</sup>):

For wisdom makes use of *per se nota* principles by deducing conclusions, which is [an office] of science, and it judges, defends, and establishes that these very *per se nota* principles are true on the basis of their terms’ meanings, something that understanding sees in an absolute manner [and not through a reflective, analytical judgment upon them]. And it has both [of these offices] through the resolution that it makes to the highest cause, containing these offices in a more eminent manner.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires, 1984), 242–43 (my translation). Cf. Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 237: “Theology like every **science** *simpliciter dicta* knows its own principles by turning back on them. Even when the matter concerns a truth of faith theology *knows it*, not *in so far as it is a mystery of faith* which transcends theological **science** but in so far as it is an *object to which this science returns to examine it, and explain it and make it more definite in the light of virtual revelation*” (bold emphasis added).

<sup>60</sup> On the distinction between assent and analytical resolution, see John of St. Thomas, *Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 132–34 (*Cursus theologicus* I-II, q. 70, disp. 18, nos. 21–25). For Aquinas on the offices of wisdom, see *ST* I-II, q. 57, a. 2, ad 1 and ad 2. Various other relevant texts can be found in the studies by Machula and Conley noted above.

<sup>61</sup> See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “The Eminence of the Deity, Its Attributes, and the Divine Persons,” ch. 3. in *Sense of Mystery*, 171–97.

<sup>62</sup> Cajetan, commentary on *ST* I-II, q. 57, a. 2 (translation mine, from Cajetan’s

Thus, wisdom is not a kind of “side by side” combination of understanding and science but, rather, is formally science and understanding, though precisely by containing them *eminently in a formally richer kind of discourse*.

To consider the nature of such offices, we can turn to some very clear points raised on this very point in relation to theological wisdom. Our guides will be Fathers Garrigou-Lagrange and Doronzo, who provide us with a clear articulation of the uniquely sapiential tasks of acquired theological wisdom. In light of what they say about theological knowledge, we will then draw our discussions to a close by considering the twofold manner of judging that falls to *scientia* and *sapientia*.

### The Offices of Wisdom, Supernatural and Natural

It is almost certain that in addition to several relevant passages from John of St. Thomas, Maritain owes the aforementioned insight to Father Garrigou-Lagrange’s *De Revelatione*, which he cites at length elsewhere.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Maritain’s citation of chapter 4 of the First Vatican Council’s *Dei Filius* places him directly in continuity with the great Dominican who often appeals to this text in order to defend the “sapiential offices” of theology. The conciliar text reads:

Nevertheless, if reason illumined by faith inquires in an earnest, pious, and sober manner, it attains by God’s grace *a certain understanding of the mysteries*, which is most fruitful, both from the analogy with the objects of its natural knowledge and from the connection of these mysteries with one another and with man’s ultimate end. But it never becomes capable of understanding them in the way it does truths that constitute its proper object (emphasis added).<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, as Father Garrigou-Lagrange notes elsewhere, St. Thomas frequently undertakes conceptual reflection and analysis of revealed truths as the very first task of given treatises of the *ST*. Such reasoning is only explanatory (or explicative) in character, not objectively inferential.<sup>65</sup>

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commentary in the Leonine edition of *ST*).

<sup>63</sup> For example, see Maritain, *Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 55–61.

<sup>64</sup> Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed., English ed. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 3016.

<sup>65</sup> As Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange explains in “Theology and the Life of Faith,” in *Philosophizing in Faith*, 431n19: “We use the expression ‘Objectively illative reasoning’ for that form of reasoning which leads to *another* [objectively new] truth. For example,

Thus, the theological explanation of the Word's consubstantiality with the Father *is not* a theological *conclusion*, but instead is the revealed truth itself in its profoundest sense, viewing the truth that "the Word was made flesh" immediately in light of "the Word was God." The field of theology does not grow in *extension* by seeing this connection (as it might, for instance, in understanding how it is that Christ's infused knowledge functions, or in arguing on behalf of the physical-instrumental causality of the sacraments). Rather, the believer, reflecting on the profound meaning of the divinity of Christ, then reflects on the mystery of the Hypostatic Union in a light that shines with all the greater *intensity*. The profound character of the Word drawing Christ's human nature to himself is seen all the more radiantly precisely because the meaning of "the Word" is thereby deepened through reflection: "Indeed, *the Word, He who is unchanging and eternally begotten of the Father*, was made flesh." Through the analogy of faith, our poor, discursive human intellects thus come to reflect upon the profound meaning of the Trinity, the redemptive Incarnation, the Church, the sacraments, theosis, and so forth. And this is no mean affair, as Father Garrigou-Lagrance notes:

Even were theology not to deduce *any* theological conclusions, properly so-called, but were only to explain, through a profound metaphysical analysis, the subject and predicate of *revealed truths*, and even were it only to show *their subordination* in order to make us be better aware of the depth, riches, and elevation of the very teaching of the Savior, even in such a case, it would have a considerable importance. And this is how theology prepares for the elaboration of increasingly explicit dogmatic formulations of one and the same dogma, that is, of one and the same assertion or revealed truth, before it is a question of deducing from it *other truths* through an *objectively illative* reasoning. This deepening of the meaning of a fundamental truth sometimes takes centuries, as with the deepening of this expression: "And the Word was made flesh."<sup>66</sup>

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from the Divine Intelligence, we can deduce the Divine Freedom through this major: every intelligent being is free. On the contrary, a reasoning is only *expllicative* (or at most *subjectively illative*) when it establishes the *equivalence* of two propositions in enunciating the *same truth*. For example, there is the *equivalence* of these two propositions: 'You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell will not prevail over it' = 'the successor of Peter, when he speaks *ex cathedra* to the universal Church, in a matter of faith and morals, cannot be deceived.'" Also, see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrance, *Sense of Mystery*, 28n41.

<sup>66</sup> Garrigou-Lagrance, "Theology and the Life of Faith," 430–31.



Indeed, entire domains of theological conclusions are *virtually* contained within these premises, which must be understood aright if the *scientific task* of theology (i.e., having knowledge that is “conclusion-oriented”) is to be undertaken. Indeed, given that the certitude of such scientific knowledge is derived entirely from the certitude of our knowledge of the principles of that discourse, the *scientific task of wisdom* can only benefit from *wisdom’s* own task being undertaken within the same domain of knowledge.<sup>67</sup>

Because we are in need of a teacher on this topic, let us turn to Father Doronzo, whose *Theologia Dogmatica*<sup>68</sup> can be considered one of the last truly great manuals of theology written in line with the theological-philosophical school of which Father Garrigou-Lagrange was a member. In *De Revelatione*, the latter theologian distinguishes the tasks falling to theology as a science from those falling to it as a form of wisdom.<sup>69</sup> However, in Doronzo’s manual, we find this distinction made with even greater clarity and detail, drawing on other theologians up to the time of his composing of the manual in the 1960s. The general perspective remains the same: *qua wisdom* theology has the specific tasks of *defending* and *meditating upon* its principles. These tasks fall to the theology because it is the highest form of acquired discourse, thus standing at the peak of the orders of natural and supernatural *scientiae* and *sapientiae*. All perspectives must be considered, responded to, and accounted for. Moreover—and here we see a point that will be essential to my closing, synthetic reflections—wisdom is concerned more with the formal and intrinsic illumination, so to speak, radiating from its principles than it is with the various truths *virtually* illuminated by that light. Science cannot exist without certain principles, but in scientific discourse, those principles are appreciated precisely as *the source of conclusions*.<sup>70</sup> The primary concern for *scientia* is the attainment of certain conclusions, and thus its principles are appreciated for the fact that their certitude enables this conclusion-certitude. Wisdom’s primary concern

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<sup>67</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that, for John of St. Thomas, the sapiential character of theology is discussed when he addresses the question of the certitude of theological knowledge.

<sup>68</sup> For what is discussed here, see Emmanuel Doronzo, *Theologia Dogmatica*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), 70–76 (nos. 62–64). Significant elements of the subject we are to discuss here can be found in the partial translation of the text published as Emmanuel Doronzo, *Introduction to Theology*, vol. 1 (Middleburg, VA: Notre Dame Institute, 1973).

<sup>69</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione*, prolat., ch. 1, a. 1, no. 3.

<sup>70</sup> As has been stated on several occasions before, this was the very conclusion reached by Conley on the basis of his lengthy textual-exegetical study of Aquinas’s own works.



is with the principles themselves, which formally contain much more in themselves than what is refracted in the various truths derived from them, just as white light contains more in itself than we could ever get from mixing together the colors of the rainbow derived from it.

However, let us turn to the five categories of sapiential-theological tasks presented to us by Father Doronzo. (We should note, however, that his perspective seems to be primarily that of theology in its systematic/speculative undertakings. We should, moreover, integrate into these tasks those falling to “positive theology” in its study of Scripture, the creeds/councils, magisterial statements, the Fathers, and theologians. However, such important points must await later studies by others skilled in such matters of theological methodology.<sup>71</sup>)

First of all, the theologian can prove the convincing power of faith on the basis of *extrinsic credibility* drawing its probative force from prophecies and miracles (presumably including the “moral miracle” of the Church herself, as well as the sublimity of Christian doctrine). Such arguments aim to show that supernatural faith is rationally credible. One does not thereby arrive at a supernatural judgment of credentia, but one does in fact show how the truths of faith are deserving of rational belief. Such arguments are, according to him and the tradition in which he stands, evident criteria of such rational credibility.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> To this end, consideration of the following texts would be of interest to the reader: Labourdette, “La théologie,” esp. 26–44; Doronzo, *Theologia Dogmatica*, 399–544; Ambroise Gardeil, *Le donné révélé et la théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1932), 196–223; Gardeil, *La notion du lieu théologique* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1908); Gardeil, “Lieux Théologiques,” *Dictionnaire de théologie Catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant (Paris: Letouzey, 1926): 712–47; Albert Lang, *Die loci theologici des Melchior Cano und die Methode des dogmatischen Beweises: ein Beitrag zur theologischen Methodologie und ihrer Geschichte* (Munich: Kösel and Pustet, 1925); Joachim Joseph Berthier, *Tractatus de Locis Theologicis* (Turin: Marietti, 1888); Boris Hogenmüller, *Melchioris Cani De Locis Theologicis Libri Duodecim: Studien zu Autor und Werk* (Baden: Tetum, 2018). Of related interest, likely also having repercussions for philosophical and scientific methodology, is the much under-studied issue of probable certitude and the *Topics* of Aristotle. As a beginning here, see L.-M. Régis, *L’Opinion selon Aristote* (Paris: Vrin, 1935); Ambroise Gardeil, “La certitude probable,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 5 (1911): 237–66, 441–85; Gardeil, “La topicité,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 5 (1911): 750–57. Note, however, Melchior Cano’s immediate inspiration remains within the humanistic rhetorical traditions of his day. (His immediate inspiration seems to have been Rodolphus Agricola’s *De inventione dialectica*. One can find similar treatises *De locis* in the Reformed theology of this era as well.)

<sup>72</sup> This perspective is argued for at length in Garrigou-Lagrange’s *De Revelatione*. See also Joseph Clifford Fenton, *Laying the Foundation: A Handbook of Catholic*

However, the principles themselves can be defended against those who deny them, thus giving us a second kind of sapiential task. By means of an argument directed at whatever it is that the person in question actually holds, the theologian aims to infer from a truth that his adversary does indeed admit another truth he or she denies. Thus, one has the example St. Thomas himself avers to, namely, the use of the Old Testament in arguments with Jewish interlocutors and the use of both Old and New Testaments for Christian heretics. Such arguments do not prove the principles of theology, but through such argumentation one shows one's interlocutor that, on his or her own terms, a given principle held on divine faith should not be denied.

The third category of sapiential tasks is the loftiest, for it involves the explanation of the principles themselves. Thus, beyond merely having *direct knowledge* (*intellectus* or, in the case of supernatural knowledge, faith) of its principles or seeing the principles *as certain lights for drawing conclusions* (*scientia*), wisdom involves direct reflection upon and deepening of our grasp of the very principles of that discourse. Doronzo lists three ways that theology explains its own principles. First, it determines and penetrates their meaning, through a gathering and ordering of the documents of Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium so that the terms of the propositions expressing what is known by faith may be given greater specification. Secondly, the theologian can make use of expository syllogisms to explain the *immediate* content virtually contained within some truth known by faith.<sup>73</sup> Finally, through the analogy of faith, the

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*Apologetics and Fundamental Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2016 [originally published as *We Stand with Christ*]).

<sup>73</sup> The nature of an expository syllogism is explained thus by Fr. Austin Woodbury, S.M., a student of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange and long-time director of the Aquinas Academy in Sidney, Australia. See Austin Woodbury, *Logic*, The John N. Deely and Anthony Russell Collection, Latimer Family Library, St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA no. 299 (p. 240): "Let us take this example: 'Judas betrayed Christ. But Judas was an apostle. Therefore, an apostle betrayed Christ.' This is an *expository* syllogism (or, a syllogism of exposition). The middle term is *singular* (not particular). Therefore, there is no passage from one truth to another. Therefore, we do not here have a true illation because the principle 'said of every, said of none' (*dictum de omni, dictum de nullo*), which is supposed by every true illation (since every genuine illation has a universal objective concept as its middle term) here has no place. The expository syllogism is immediately regulated by the principle of triple identity or of the separating third (cf. no. 257Ab). As is stated in *De natura syllogismorum*, a work long apocryphally attributed to St. Thomas: 'The expository syllogism is not truly a syllogism but, rather, is a certain sensible pointing-out or analysis made to the sense for this purpose, that the consequence, which is true

theologian can illuminate one truth by comparing it with others (e.g., by comparing the mystery of the Church with the mystery of Christ's Incarnation so as to understand the former in light of the latter). Citing Fathers Charles Journet, Garrigou-Lagrangé, and Bartolomé Xiberta, Doronzo states that, "indeed, this is the most excellent office of theology inasmuch as it is a form of wisdom."<sup>74</sup> And given that wisdom is the loftiest analogate of *scientia* "broadly so called," I believe we could add: "This is the most excellent office of theology *tout court*, indeed, the most excellent office of any form of wisdom."

The fourth category of such sapiential tasks is said to aim directly at strengthening reason in its attempt at grasping supernatural truths, making use of either probable arguments (or arguments from suitability) or analogies drawn from natural knowledge. Such arguments may indeed have great strength for the believer, who through them (especially regarding arguments of suitability) aims at the very certitude of the Beatific Vision<sup>75</sup> wherein these truths are seen with evidence. However, because of their non-probative character, such arguments should be limited only to those who hold such truths on faith, and not as arguments presented to non-believers, who would risk being confirmed in their skepticism precisely because of the non-probative character of such arguments.

Finally, the fifth category can be seen as being one step down from the previous. In a purely defensive posture, theology can make use lower disciplines for the end of defending its own principles. He cites the use of metaphysics and logic, though arguably one could add, for example, moral philosophy as another such discipline of a natural order utilized by supernatural theology in defense of the latter. Thus, one can show the philosophical, historical, logical, and so forth untenability of some position stated against the faith. The theologian does not thereby become a philosopher, historian, and so on, but he or she is tasked with knowing enough of his or her topic to be able to instrumentally utilize the discipline in question in such a defense.

Moreover, as a form of discourse that is capable of such detailed self-reflexive knowledge of its principles, theology has a unique relationship of

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according to intellectual knowledge, be declared in a sensible medium.' Likewise, as is stated in Richard's *Philosophie de raisonnement* (p. 363): 'In this case, the syllogistic form plays the same role as does the material object or diagram drawn upon the blackboard as a help in certain demonstrations.'" (edited for clarity; parenthetical numbered citations are internal references to Woodbury's own text).

<sup>74</sup> See Doronzo, *Theologia Dogmatica*, no. 62 (p. 1:72).

<sup>75</sup> See Garrigou-Lagrangé, *Sense of Mystery*, 168. Also, see Doronzo, *Theologia Dogmatica*, no. 63 (p. 1:73).

superiority over inferior forms of discourse. Thus, without replacing the tasks of, for example, metaphysics and moral philosophy, it can externally judge the claims of those forms of discourse *in light of its own superior viewpoint*. In this way, anything judged to be irreconcilable with supernatural theology can be judged as being necessarily false. Moreover, theology can make use of such discourse for its own internal explanations: think merely of natural theology, as well as the philosophy of relation, both as applied in a super-elevated manner in the *Tractatus de deo uno et trino*, or the analogical extension of the philosophical notion of *eudaimonia* as super-elevated to explain the intrinsically supernatural beatitude of the Christian life, or the use of practical signification to explain the reality of the sacraments. With a serene countenance, theology uses these notions precisely by making them exceed themselves in the light of faith.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> On the superanalogy of faith, see: J.-H. Nicolas, *Dieu connu comme inconnu: essai d'une critique de la connaissance théologique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966), 237–316; Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 256–59. See also Charles Journet, *The Dark Knowledge of God*, trans. James F. Anderson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), 61–64 and 69n20: “In *metaphysical analogy*, our intellect ascends from contingent being to its divine Analogue. In the *superanalogy of revelation*, it is God who comes down to us, making us understand that such concepts, proposed for our acceptance by faith, ‘are analogical signs of what is hidden in Him, and of which He makes use to speak of Himself to us in our language’ (Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 298 [citing the superseded translation by Wall]). In the first case, God is known *materially*, being concealed in the radiations, as it were, of His creative activity; in the second case, He [is] known *formally*, for it is God Himself Who then tells us the secret of His own Trinitarian life. But analogy obtains in both cases, because the knowledge we have of God must be mediated to us through concepts, which are patterned after created things. In the act of vision whereby God will be apprehended without the mediation of any concept, there will be no room for analogy.” See also Charles Journet, *The Wisdom of Faith*, trans. R. F. Smith (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 14–32, esp. 16: “So it is when divine faith is born in a heart, when the Light which enlightens every man (John 1:9) penetrates to the innermost being of a person: the man is changed. He may be unconscious of the transformation, like some pauper who has become wealthy but is not yet aware of it, or like a sick person who does not yet know that he has already been cured; but for all that he is no longer what he once was. If now he says, “God is,” [or] “God is good” he does not make such assertions on natural grounds, as a philosopher might if left to the unaided resources of his reason; but—presupposing that he speaks from the depths of his heart and not with his lips only—he makes such assertions in a supernatural way, urged on as it were by the power of affirmation of the Spirit. Such an affirmation, such an activity of the soul does not pertain to the sphere of purely human achievement, but is concerned with the kingdom of God. . . . [And then citing Fr. Ambroise Gardeil’s *Le donné révélé et la théologie*:] “The Church is a society, the sacraments are signs, sanctifying grace is a

Now, we have perhaps spent so much time reflecting on the question of theological knowledge that the reader likely is wondering, “what about the philosophical problem concerning *scientia* in contrast to *sapientia*?” This is an understandable vexation. However, it is quite often the case that theological reflection pushes philosophy to sharpen itself so that it may be a fitting instrument for discussing supernatural truths. The now-sharpened scalpel then returns to philosophy to be fully explained in the lower form of discourse. Thus, Cajetan pushed the analysis of the formal object *quod* and *quo* of sciences to a high degree of precision precisely in order to explain the difference between theology and faith.<sup>77</sup> In the philosophy of the sciences, this distinction arguably has a great number of ramifications. Likewise, discussions surrounding the redemptive Incarnation required incredible precision in understanding the metaphysics of subsistence, and profound discussions on the nature of practical signification are to be found in arguments surrounding the sacraments. Here, as regards the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*, we find ourselves faced with a similar situation. The Catholic theologian is aware of this distinction between science and wisdom in the general Aristotelian noetic. Well aware that the theologian does something more than merely draw conclusions in the virtually revealed light by which formal revelation, so to speak, extends itself, he or she cannot help but push the philosophical point further along; how are these two kinds of knowledge different, precisely as unique kinds of discursive knowledge?

In our natural knowledge of the world around us, there are domains that are “uncircumscribed,” at least within their own order. Endless texts can be gathered from Aristotelian and Aristotelian-Scholastic sources praising metaphysics as a form of wisdom.<sup>78</sup> The unique character of a discipline concerned with “being as being” is deceptively simple, yet it is hidden in the very structure of the expression “being as being.” It pres-

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reality that exists in man, charity is a virtue. . . . All this is true, but it is not at all true if the words are taken in their usual and ordinary meaning as might happen in a first consideration. Rather, to take one example, it is necessary to say what signs are in our natural lives. Have you, in fact, ever seen signs that by their own power efficaciously effect what they signify? And what is it that these sacramental signs effect? They produce something divine, a participation in our soul of the divine life itself. What a sacrament is in its innermost nature is inaccessible to our minds, just as is the Holy Trinity. And in the final analysis the mystery in both cases is the same.”

<sup>77</sup> An excellent summary of this can be found in Jacques Maritain, *The Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Imelda C. Byrne (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 125–35.

<sup>78</sup> See the study by Conley cited above for a gathering of many such texts.

ents us with the absolutely most general context for considering a subject matter: “being.” However, the qualifier does not delimit any field of knowledge but, instead, merely reduplicatively returns us to this all-embracing context: “as being.”<sup>79</sup>

While I do not wish to make the point at length here, I also believe that this exact dynamic actually begins in natural philosophy, which is not solely scientific in character but, instead, is a first wisdom whose formal object—*ens mobile*—resonates well with the character of the human intellect’s proper object in the current state of union with our body (the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter).<sup>80</sup> Knowledge of “being qua being” occurs through an analogical “stretching” that allows us to grasp notions at the third degree of abstraction.<sup>81</sup> However, to begin the process of human knowing, we need that wisdom which is most attuned to our poor little intellects, which, after all, are the lowest among all intel-

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<sup>79</sup> Here, I owe my approach to Robert Sokolowski, “PH 880: Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Lecture Notes,” Course Delivered at Catholic University of America, January through May 2014, 28–31. However, as regards natural philosophy’s own independent character, I differ from my beloved teacher (and likewise from those Thomists who adhere to a position akin to that held by the so-called “River Forest” and “Laval” streams of Thomistic thought concerning the relationship between the modern natural sciences and the philosophy of nature).

<sup>80</sup> For a very clear discussion on the distinction between the proper, adequate, and extensive objects of the human intellect, Woodbury is likely helpful: Austin Woodbury, *Natural Philosophy: Treatise 3, Psychology*, The John N. Deely and Anthony F. Russell Collection, Latimer Family Library, St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA, esp. nos. 902, 904, and 920. These texts are quoted at length in an editorial footnote in Garrigou-Lagrange, *Sense of Mystery* (146n6). To this end, I must merely admit that I accept the language of the later school as found in Garrigou-Lagrange, Simon, Maritain, Woodbury, F.-X. Maquart, et al. The language on this point is not isomorphic with St. Thomas’s own language, but I believe that there is doctrinal continuity, though such a contention lies outside the scope of this current paper’s aims and endeavors.

<sup>81</sup> However, Thomists should always maintain a kind of humility here, given the distinction between our intellect’s *proper object* (*the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter*) and its *common object*. The latter is divided into the *mediate object* (that which is accessible through the intellect’s proper object—being as being— analogically known) or *extensive object* (that *toward* which the human intellect is *not* opposed by its nature, that for which it has a *negative* obediential potency). The *proper* and *mediate* objects are included in the *proportionate* object of the intellect. Its *adequate* object includes the *extensive* object as well. For an important summary of this topic in relation to the possibility of metaphysics, see Woodbury, *Natural Philosophy: Psychology*, nos. 936–38, and as regards the possibility of the Beatific Vision, see nos. 960–71. However, these are matters to be discussed in a different venue.



lects. Our intellects find a kind of proper (albeit not “complete”) natural wisdom in the domain of sensible quiddities and, so to speak, “being in motion.” Thus, just as metaphysical wisdom’s formal object, “being inasmuch as it is being,” contains within the latitude of the qualifier (“inasmuch as it is being”) the same latitude as what is qualified (“being”), so too does our intellect’s *proper* object—the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter—have a matching form of wisdom which considers the entire domain of mobile being *as mobile*, natural philosophy, as Maritain expresses it: “being under the conditions of poverty and division which affect it in that universe which is the material universe, *being viewed from the outlook of the mystery peculiar to becoming.*”<sup>82</sup>

If two physical sciences disagree about some principle, who can adjudicate the matter but an external discourse (arguably natural philosophy, though metaphysics as well)? But who will come to the defense of a sphere of discourse which embraces all of mobile being like natural philosophy or being in its full latitude as does metaphysics? They must come to their own defense as a proper task of their own discipline (though the latter ultimately is wisdom *simpliciter* in the natural order).

Thus, in *Metaphysics* 3, Aristotle defends the principle of non-contradiction at length, reducing to absurdity those who argue against it. Likewise, the *Physics* opens with a defense of the universally illuminative principles that are matter, form, and privation, as well as the four causes, which are defended on their own account in a manner that transcends various subordinate scientific disciplines. In my closing remarks, I will return to an open issue regarding the question of other sciences in the first order of abstraction. Nonetheless, whatever we may say about the distinction between natural philosophy *as wisdom* and the sciences *as sciences*, we can say that for Aristotle *metaphysics* directly defends its principles in a

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<sup>82</sup> Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, 120; regarding natural philosophy as a first sort of wisdom, see 118–25. For a different outlook from the Laval perspective, see John G. Brungardt, “Charles De Koninck and the Sapiential Character of Natural Philosophy,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2016): 1–24. Note, however, that most thinkers following De Koninck are not willing to separate the scientific disciplines off from natural philosophy, nor even the specific treatises of natural philosophy. Here, we must just admit the open feud among Thomists. Some thinkers (such as Cajetan) held that its various branches were specific sciences, though this was not the general position held by others, including John of St. Thomas and members of the so-called Laval school (as well as the River Forest school of Thomists, at least if we take Frs. Benedict Ashley and William Wallace as expositors of this perspective). See Yves R. Simon, “Epistemological Pluralism,” in *Foresight and Knowledge*, ed. Ralph Nelson and Anthony O. Simon (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 97n5.

way that cannot be “handed off” to any higher discipline. In addition to its objectively inferential “conclusion tasks,” metaphysical discourse must turn back upon itself and become critical as well. *Using* tools attained from lower disciplines (such as logic, philosophical psychology, etc.), it defends its principles against those who would deny them, no matter the (natural) perspective from which they are denied.<sup>83</sup> Thus, among Thomists of no small repute in the twentieth century, we can find *critical metaphysics* as a course topic to be covered as an integral part of metaphysics. In their best forms, such concerns were concerned with this kind of “saptiential criticism,” not merely with a kind of “epistemological criteriology,” as one may find in certain Scholastic manuals at the time.<sup>84</sup> Writers like F.-X.

<sup>83</sup> See Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione*, prol., a. 1, no. 3 (p. 15): “St. Thomas compares Sacred Theology and metaphysics inasmuch as they are supreme sciences in different orders. He says that because in the natural order metaphysics is not only science but a supreme science, or, wisdom, it not only deduces conclusions from its principles but also ‘disputes with those denying its principles.’ Thus, it defends against skeptics the ontological value of the first principles of reason, as well as the real value of the supreme criterion or motive of natural knowledge, namely objective evidence. Consequently, in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defends in particular the real value of the supreme principle of reason, namely, the principle of [non-]contradiction by resolving the objections of those who deny it, namely Heraclitus and the Sophists. Hence, this supreme principle stands forth not only as the logical rule of our reason but also as the ontological rule of extramental being itself, which is the object of metaphysics.

This defensive part of metaphysics can be called critical metaphysics or epistemology (ἐπιστήμη, science, λόγος discourse), that is, the science concerning the real value of our scientific knowledge. This critique, which is frequently set forth at the end of logic, is thus transferred from logic to ontology, and since it now treats not only of *ens rationis*, which is the subject of logic, but rather, of extramental being as it is knowable by us, it now pertains *per se* to metaphysics, which is the science of being. Hence, Aristotle treated of it not in logic but in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics*. Critical metaphysics indeed *uses* logic in order to defend the ontological value of our natural knowledge—but now in relation to extramental being. Hence, it can be called fundamental philosophy, for it treats of the objective foundation of our natural certitude. Thus, the defense of the first principles *per se* pertains to metaphysics inasmuch as it is not only science but is the supreme science. I say *per se* and not only *per accidens*, for even if there were nobody denying them, namely the skeptics, it would be necessary to scientifically determine the objective foundation or ultimate resolution of our natural certitude” (my translation).

<sup>84</sup> See the discussion on this in Woodbury, *Defensive Metaphysics*, nos. 5–10 (St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA: The John N. Deely and Anthony Russell Collection). Woodbury also seems to owe much to the lecture notes of Fr. Pirotta, whose *Metaphysica Defensiva seu Critica* was never published. Moreover, as in much of his work, Maquart’s *Elementa Philosophia* remains the textual backbone of Woodbury’s own



Maquart and Austin Woodbury (who stand in line with Maritain and Garrigou-Lagrange) focused on the “critical” tasks of metaphysics related to human knowledge.<sup>85</sup> However, I suspect in light of the tasks that we have discussed in the theological order (as well as in light of the general claim that *sapientia* as such must defend its principles), there are many other *defensive* and *meditative* tasks that fall to *sapientia* in the order of natural knowledge as well, though a phenomenology and enumeration of these tasks remains as a kind of research project for the future.

### A Suggested Way Forward

It is tempting to see wisdom as being one more species of scientific knowledge, albeit the loftiest such species. Indeed, despite the fact that John of St. Thomas is not unaware of the fact that wisdom contains science, one still has the sense that he would hold that science and wisdom are part of

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text, which then builds upon it in important and significant ways. See F.-X. Maquart, *Elementa philosophia*, vol. 3, part 1 *Metaphysica defensiva seu Critica* (Paris: Andreas Blot, 1938). Indeed, perhaps the whole disagreement between Gilson on the one hand and Maritain/Garrigou-Lagrange on the other concerning “critical realism” comes down to a misunderstanding of vocabulary, for the latter meant “critical” in the sense discussed above, not in the sense of a quasi-Cartesian criteriology. See: Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauk (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986); Gilson, *Methodical Realism: A Handbook for Beginners*, trans. Philip Trower (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011); Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 75–144; Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Order of Things: The Realism of the Principle of Finality*, trans. Matthew K. Miner (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020), pt. 2, ch. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Woodbury, *Defensive Metaphysics*, no. 17 (edited): “Therefore, there is a twofold consideration of being [in metaphysics]. On the one hand, being inasmuch as it is being is considered absolutely according to itself; on the other, it is considered according as it is knowable to us. The former consideration is named OSTENSIVE metaphysics, for it demonstrates conclusions regarding being. Ostensive metaphysics embraces two parts, according as it (a) first deals with BEING IN COMMON, and this treatise is called ONTOLOGY, and (b) secondly, as it deals with the CAUSE OF BEING, which is God (and this treatise is called NATURAL THEOLOGY). The consideration of being according as it is knowable to us is named DEFENSIVE or CRITICAL METAPHYSICS, for it defends or critically vindicates our knowledge of being. Defensive metaphysics embraces two parts. On the one hand, it considers WHETHER being is in our mind through knowledge (which is the *critical* treatment of the NATURE of knowledge). This part is called CRITICAL NOETICS. On the other hand, it considers HOW being is in our mind through knowledge (which is the critical treatment of the truth of knowledge, which is the PROPERTY thereof). This part is called CRITERIOLOGY” (the use of all capitals for certain terms is a convention original to Woodbury).

a single genus of *generally scientific* (i.e., conclusion-oriented) knowledge. Thus, we find him saying in q. 26, a. 1, of the material logic of his *Cursus philosophicus*: “Wisdom is truly an inferential habitus using inferential proof and proceeding from [*per se nota*] principles: thus, it belongs to the system of the sciences.”<sup>86</sup> I suspect that this same temptation to hold that there is a kind of generic unity between science and wisdom<sup>87</sup> is what led to the disagreement between Maritain and Father Ramírez discussed above. To the degree that wisdom is viewed as being *generically and univocally* the same as science, the temptation is to see it as knowledge *of conclusions* through principles. However, one wonders if there is need to develop (obviously, in continuity<sup>88</sup>) the doctrine of the *Posterior analytics* so as to make clear the methodological distinction between wisdom and science. Other-

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<sup>86</sup> For full fairness even to this text, however, see John of St. Thomas, *Material Logic*, q. 26, a. 1: “Concerning the difference between the habitus of wisdom and that of science, let us merely quote the sentences of St. Thomas (Op. 70 [Exposition on Boethius’s treatise on the Trinity], q. 2, art. 2 ad 1): ‘The distinction between wisdom and science does not have the character of an opposition; rather, the concept of wisdom results from an addition to the concept of science. As Aristotle says (Eth. 6. 7), wisdom is the head of all the sciences and controls all of them inasmuch as it is concerned with the highest principles.’ Thus, the function of wisdom is to judge and resolve by ultimate cause and first principles. On this see also *ST I-II*, q. 57, a. 2, and *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6. Owing to the universality of the principles from which it proceeds, wisdom has also the property of reflecting upon principles; it reflects both upon its own principles and upon those of the other sciences, not in such a way as to prove them, but in such a way as to explain and defend them. Wisdom is said to include understanding as well as science because it extends even to the principles whose habitus is called understanding. But wisdom is truly an inferential habitus using inferential proof and proceeding from principles: thus, it belongs to the system of the sciences” (Simon, Glanville, and Hollenhorst trans., p. 509).

<sup>87</sup> This is a position that we find in Thomists like Bañez and Gonet (but arguably also in John of St. Thomas), holding that science and wisdom have a generic unity. See Machula, “Theology as Wisdom,” nn52–54. I believe that it is better to say that *resolutive-analytic knowledge* (not *scientific knowledge*) is divided into *science* and *wisdom*. Moreover, in light of our discussions, it does not seem that such a division is that of a genus into two species but as two analogates related through proper proportionality, with the primary case being that of *wisdom*. This seems to be the case because the *unifying, universal* notion of *resolutive-analytic knowledge* is not said univocally and in the same sense of the analogates in question, but rather is affirmed as being *conclusion-oriented* in the case of *science* whereas it is *principles-oriented* in the case of *wisdom*. See Conley, *Theology of Wisdom*, 33–35. Granted, I am presenting this here as an open opinion for consideration, not as a decisive conclusion, nor as an exegetical or historical claim.

<sup>88</sup> This is what, ultimately, places me in the camp of those like Gagnebet and Labourdette, not Charlier, Chenu, Schillebeeckx, et al. (see notes 4 and 6 above).

wise, one must admit that wisdom is not something eminently containing *scientia* and *intellectus* within it and must, instead, say with Monsignor Sokolowski's interpretation of Hobbes: "Wisdom is not different from science, not something else than science. [It is] just a lot of science."

For my own part, I am tempted to go the direction of Cajetan: *scientia* formally-eminently contains *intellectus* as part of its discursive task, and *sapientia* formally-eminently contains both *scientia* and *intellectus*. He did not draw this interpretive conclusion in a vacuum, for it seems indeed to be suggested by *ST* I-II, q. 57, a. 2, ad 2:

Whence, if we consider the point aright, these three virtues [i.e., *intellectus*, *scientia*, and *sapientia*] are distinct from each other according to a certain ordering and not merely as being on equal footing with each other. This is what also happens in the case of potential wholes having one part that is more perfect than another (e.g., as the rational soul is more perfect than the sensitive soul, which itself is more perfect than plant souls). For, in this manner, science depends upon understanding as upon what is more principle. And both of these depend upon wisdom as upon what is most principle, for wisdom contains under itself both understanding and science as rendering judgments concerning the conclusions of the sciences, as well as concerning their principles. (translation mine)

*Life* is a properly proportional analogous notion, formally applied to its analogates. In embodied creatures, it is found realized in vegetative life, sense life, and rational life. Indeed, it is a pure perfection which is realized in God. In all the cases of its realization, it denotes a way of existing that involves self-actuation in some form (albeit one that is subject to a host of efficient, final, and formal dependencies in all created beings).<sup>89</sup> And yet how varied that self-actuation is in each analogate! In the plant, it does not cross the threshold of material-subjective reception of forms. Nonetheless, the food becomes something it never was precisely because of the vegetative activity of nutrition: food *for* the plant's life.<sup>90</sup> In the sensate animal,

<sup>89</sup> See *ST* I, q. 18, a. 2.

<sup>90</sup> On this important though often-underrated point, see: Jacques Maritain, "Philosophie de l'organisme: Notes sur la fonction de nutrition," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires, 1984), 981–1000; Ambrose Little, "Are You What You Eat or Something More?," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (2018): 1–20; Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Washington, DC: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 17–56.

it involves actions based on the self-determination of simple voluntary actions. Animal action is performed within the objective domain of the animal's estimative power, something new in comparison with the "mere" givens of the surrounding physical environment, considered in its brute physicality.<sup>91</sup> In man, the activity of life involves a free, intellectual agent who can pursue the end precisely as an end. Moreover, through speculative knowledge, man rests in the other *qua other*. In God, the actuality of life is utterly pure and utterly immanent: the self-knowing life of the First Cause and, as we know through faith, the circumincessive life of the Trinity.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, *ad extra*, his activity does not add to his life either; it solely *gives* in utter largesse and mercy.

Through all these analogates, the notion of life is not susceptible to generic unity, but instead has only an analogical unity. The limitations befalling the lower analogates are denied of the higher ones. And yet, the higher ones embrace all of the perfection of the lower ones, albeit eminently. The animal to some degree can be said to determine itself in its passionate activity, and yet it does not play on the keyboard of the virtues as does man, who elevates the life of the passions to the life of reason and of grace.<sup>93</sup> Finally, all finite living beings truly and formally live, though with nowhere near the purity of he who formally and eminently is Self-Subsistent Life in the eminence of the Deity.

The same kind of analogical unity can be found in the case of science and wisdom. The knowledge had through *scientia* is not mere opinion. It is certain knowledge through causes. The principles of a given *scientia*, themselves known through *intellectus*, are of supreme interest to the science. Without them, there would be no science. And yet, *qua scientia*, its gaze is primarily turned toward the virtual riches of those principles, as reflected in the conclusions known scientifically through objectively inferential discourse.

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<sup>91</sup> The most excellent recent studies on this topic can be found in the insightful work of Daniel D. De Haan: "Perception and the Vis Cogitativa: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2014): 397–437; "Moral Perception and the Function of the Vis Cogitativa in Thomas Aquinas's Doctrine of Antecedent and Consequent Passions," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 25 (2014): 289–330. Also, for an excellent overview, see Julien Peghaire, "A Forgotten Sense: the Cogitative according to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Modern Schoolman* 20 (1943): 123–40, 210–29.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. *Summa contra gentiles* IV, ch. 11.

<sup>93</sup> On the properly proportional character of life, see Simon, "Order in Analogical Sets," 148–49.

For its own part, wisdom or *sapientia* is indeed a discursive and certain form of speculative knowledge. While it does indeed appreciate the scientific task of drawing conclusions (something asserted in many places in Aquinas, as is well attested in studies cited above), it has a loftier task yet (something also asserted by Aquinas and noted by the same authors): defense and meditation on the very principles of that discourse, as well as judgment concerning “lower” domains of knowledge. Thus, the discursive task of *sapientia* is not the same as that of *scientia*, though the former does include the latter.<sup>94</sup>

As Yves Simon notes concerning the nature of analogy, analogical predication requires both “yes” and “no.”<sup>95</sup> Yes, science and wisdom are both kinds of discursive knowledge, certain through the principles involved therein, and interested in the illuminative capacity of those principles. They are united, analogically, by what we might call their *resolutive-analytic* character. This is the *ratio analgata* uniting them as a set of analogates. However, no, wisdom is not primarily concerned with those conclusions. Its first task, the one that magnetizes all of its undertakings, is the formal richness of its principles. Without this magnetization, one will lose the formal organization of wisdom, embracing only the *ratio* of *scientia* which is *formally and eminently* contained in the whole that is *wisdom*. One would thus fall victim to an intellectual trap which Father Garrigou-Lagrange himself admitted was a temptation in his own youth: “As a young student, . . . I was so engrossed in the many and varied questions of critica and metaphysics that I was in danger of losing my simplicity and elevation of mind and balanced judgment.”<sup>96</sup>

The intellectual dispositions of science and wisdom represent ways that our poor human minds “expand” the insights that we have through *intellectus*. We are not angels. We do not see conclusions in a single glance at principles. Our judgments are spread out through ratiocination (whether that reasoning be objectively inferential, explanatory, or expository in character). We may seek to know the truths that are virtually contained within our principles, thus turning our attention primarily toward the conclusions of our discourse. Or we may turn our gaze to the richness of our principles, not looking to understand them precisely as illuminating

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<sup>94</sup> The “*scientia* aspects” of sapiential bodies of knowledge themselves, however, do not go without change too. The drawing of conclusions is itself magnetized by *sapientia*’s own finalities.

<sup>95</sup> See Simon, “Order in Analogical Sets,” 18–26.

<sup>96</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with Christ*, trans. Rev. G. W. Shelton (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1954), 94.

some kind of objective inference (as is the case for scientific inference, properly so called), but instead, through an appreciation of their wholly intrinsic truth, using reason only to explain one principle in light of another principle, or through the use of examples to show the richness of the principle *formally in itself* and not as virtually containing the conclusions to be drawn therefrom.<sup>97</sup> Wisdom is, above all, contemplative. Thus, we can see both kinds of discourse trying to strive for a kind of synthetic unity—more disparate in the orderly conclusions of science, more united in sapiential meditation on the intrinsic intelligibility of the principles in wisdom.<sup>98</sup> Or, to put it another way, science is like looking at the light *as illuminating the whole valley*, whereas wisdom stands in awe with the light on high. It is tempting to be in awe of the extensive grandeur of principles which can illuminate *scientiae*, looking upon this “wise person” as a kind of simple and impoverished fool, ever babbling on about the same few principles over and over. Yet he or she is precisely the person whose apparent poverty more closely mirrors the infinite wealth of him who knows all things in the light of one, utterly simple gaze.

I think that we can see these two modes of attending to reasoned-out details in the difference between philosophical knowledge and scientific knowledge in the modern period. More open to the position of Maritain and Simon than to that of the Laval school (as well as the River Forest school) on this question,<sup>99</sup> I think that the modern sciences are more than

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<sup>97</sup> See John of St. Thomas, *Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 145–46 (*Cursus theologicus* I-II, q. 70, disp. 18, a. 4, nos. 46–47): “Wisdom proceeds from principles in such a way that it reflects upon the principles, not indeed proving them, but by explaining and defending them from contrary arguments. . . . [He first explains how one truth of faith can be proven from another.] Similarly, one principle proves another, not by an essential and intrinsic medium, since principles are self-evident propositions which need no medium of demonstration. Rather, one principle explains another by an extrinsic medium, by an explanation from a similar principle or an example. This may also occur when many inadequate reasons mutually concur in one nature or essence in such a way that one may be inferred from the other. Yet each ought to pertain to the integrity of the essence, its definition or principle. . . . Wisdom, therefore, reflects upon its principles not by proving them through middle terms or from intrinsic principles, as it might prove conclusions, but by explaining them from other principles used as extrinsic or similar mediums, or within the same nature by inferring one inadequate reason from another.”

<sup>98</sup> For matters summarized in this paragraph, see R. M. Jolivet, “L’intuition intellectuelle,” *Revue thomiste* 15 (1932): 52–71 (esp. 63–66). Also, while not in agreement with my own approach in this text, I gained much from Jan Aertsen’s work on the question of *resolutio* in Aquinas (“Method and Metaphysics: The *via resolutionis* in Thomas Aquinas,” *The New Scholasticism* 63, no. 4 [1989]: 405–18).

<sup>99</sup> See note 80 above.



a dialectic preamble to the philosophy of nature. Instead, I think that they are bodies of knowledge that draw *truly certain* conclusions, though within *limited* domains. Thus, they are forms of *scientia*. However, they are primarily concerned with the fact that their certain, *per se nota* principles *enable the drawing of these certain conclusions*. Thus, they are subject to an ongoing dynamic of internal structural change that one does not experience in philosophical disciplines. The once-upon-a-time popular topic of “paradigm shifts” in the sciences<sup>100</sup> seems to my eyes to be nothing other than a recognition of the fact that, *within its own domain*, scientific knowledge at best can critique its own principles as providing light for its conclusions. This represents a real form of critique, but it is not the same as the sapiential meditation upon principles for their own sake. To cite once more a passage from Conley to which I have referred above: “While science is interested in principles only insofar as they are related to its conclusions, wisdom not only considers conclusions in the light of principles; it also judges the principles themselves, evaluating and defending their content.”<sup>101</sup> In reality, such “paradigm shifts” represent the reorganization of a discipline that was perhaps not oriented around the deepest possible articulation of its subject and principles, in whose light the architecture of the science’s objective illation must be reorganized.<sup>102</sup> Methodological exactness prevents the “scientist” from undertaking a full defense of these principles *in themselves*, against all other disciplines (at least in a given order of abstraction). For this, a philosophical eye is needed—namely, the sapiential eye of the *philosophy of nature*.

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<sup>100</sup> See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>101</sup> See Conley, *Theology of Wisdom*, 77.

<sup>102</sup> Thus, we would have a *natural* analogy to what John of St. Thomas notes about the peculiar state of acquired supernatural, theological wisdom. Given that one holds the premises of such discourse on faith, such knowledge has a *certain* foundation. However, because of the lack of *evidential* knowledge of the supernatural mysteries included in what is known *de fide* (above all the mystery of the Trinity and that of the redemptive Incarnation, which illuminate all the rest), theology exists *in a diminished state*. In the case of acquired, supernatural theology, the deficiency is on account of the subjective state of knower *in via*. However, for the sciences, there is a possible objective deficiency. So long as a scientific domain remains explanatory within a range of principles and conclusions (e.g., classical mechanics), it would seem that we have a kind of imperfect science, though one that truly organizes itself around *per se nota* (and posited *per se nota*) principles. *Natural philosophy* provides the conceptual scaffolding that thus guarantees the fully scientific state of the natural sciences themselves. I note all of this as a pointer to further reflection and discussion, not as a definitive solution of the matter.

In line with our intellect's connatural, proper object, the philosophy of nature (at least for speculative knowledge<sup>103</sup>) represents the first *sapientia* wherein the various sciences should be critiqued within the *relatively* all-embracing domain of *ens mobile*. However, philosophically speaking, the true and full critique of all principles and domains of knowledge comes with the truly all-embracing domain of metaphysics, where everything is formally judged in terms of the first principles of all reality and thought, which themselves are also meditated upon and defended.<sup>104</sup> Finally, beyond this, the broadest domain of acquired wisdom opened to us through the supernatural light of faith is that of acquired supernatural theology, which provides the highest possible principles in whose light everything else may be judged.<sup>105</sup>

Of course, all forms of wisdom have their own conclusions to draw in a way following the manner of scientific knowledge.<sup>106</sup> Supernatural acquired theology has *many* concerns with virtually revealed conclusions to be drawn through objective inference. Moreover, to be assured of the scientific tasks of metaphysics, we need only think of natural theology's quest for deducing conclusions regarding the divine attributes. Finally, in natural philosophy, discussions of topics including motion, time, and the nature of divisible continua all provide ample domains for objectively linking properties to their proper subjects—thus drawing scientific conclusions through objective inference. And yet, something is missing if such forms

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<sup>103</sup> There are further topics to be considered concerning the sapiential and scientific aspects of our moral, technical-aesthetic, and logical knowledge. However, we can do only so much in an article that is already quite lengthy! I have undertaken some reflections on these matters in Matthew K. Miner, "Beyond Non-Being: Thomistic Metaphysics on Second Intentions, *Ens morale*, and *Ens artificiale*," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (2017): 353–79.

<sup>104</sup> And indeed, for almost the entire Thomist school, this alone seems to have been considered wisdom. Here, I believe that Maritain was right to make all the precisions that he did regarding the character of the sciences in distinction from natural philosophy, specifying the formal objects with great care so that we could see the truly sapiential character of the latter. It is with no small trepidation, however, that I separate myself from the school on a point of such importance.

<sup>105</sup> This same distinction that I have drawn here seems to have been held by Fr. Conley; see *Theology of Wisdom*, 29–39 and 77.

<sup>106</sup> One rightly wonders, however, whether such scientific knowledge itself would take on a new character as "the *scientia* exercised *within sapientia*," just as the *rationes* of simply simple perfections take on a new formal character in God, such that there is only an analogical unity between the *rationes* as applied to created analogates and the uncreated First Analogate. I say this by way of suggestion for further reflection, not by way of certain conclusion.



of wisdom are not *first and foremost* concerned with the intrinsic, *formal* intelligibility of their principles. The gaze of *scientia* is turned toward the refracted, *virtual* riches of its principles, like one who is entranced by white light because of its power to be split into the hues of the rainbow. The gaze of *sapientia* is fixed upon the very riches of its principles, first and foremost concerned with making clear the fact that their white light is something that qualitatively surpasses the combined power of however many colors it might be refracted into, though also indeed recognizing that white light contains such manifold and varied riches. This concern is precisely what begets wisdom's duty to defend and meditate on its principles. And whereas science rejoices in the certitude and truth that its conclusions draw from its principles, wisdom rejoices in the certitude and truth of its principles as an ever-rich and refulgent, illuminative center for all of its meditations, *formally* surpassing that which is *virtually* contained in it. The wise man is alone with the light.

To undertake theology, metaphysics, or even (perhaps) the philosophy of nature primarily with an eye to the conclusions drawn in that form of discourse would represent an abasement of those forms of sapiential knowledge. The great dignity of wisdom is the fact that its gaze is primarily fixed on the very lights from which all of its own conclusions may be derived: its principles. To try to capture this difference one last time, allow me to close with a quote from Father Garrigou-Lagrange wherein he describes Father Ambroise Gardeil in terms that capture the latter's sapiential outlook,<sup>107</sup> something that every theologian and philosopher should strive to imitate:

Fr. Gardeil was one of those people who believe that the living explanation of St. Thomas's *Summa theologiae* consists above all in emphasizing the great principles that illuminate everything and in drawing attention to the loftiest summits in this mountain range, that is, to roughly fifty articles that provide the key to the entire work. *He passed upward from conclusions to principles more than he descended from principles to conclusions.* Listening to some of his courses, one indeed understood why it is commonly said that St. Thomas learned more in prayer than in study—not, perhaps, that he would have grasped new conclusions, but because it is in prayer that the soul is lifted up to contemplation of the superior principles that have been often cited but whose elevation and radiation had not been yet seen well enough. One then perceives in an instant that

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<sup>107</sup> Gardeil, however, in line with the vocabulary of his age, does at times present theology in primarily scientific terms.

they virtually contain entire treatises,<sup>108</sup> and in this way, the unification of knowledge is brought about, something that is far more precious than the material multiplicity of conclusions.<sup>109</sup> N.V

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<sup>108</sup> And, indeed, far more than this: an intrinsic luminosity which far exceeds *all* the conclusions that could ever be drawn in those treatises.

<sup>109</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "In memoriam: Le Père A. Gardeil," *Revue thomiste* 36 (1931): 800 (my translation; emphasis added). In the course of editing this work, I received an unsolicited note online from a Mr. Geoff McInnes, who made me aware of Fr. Muñiz's little work, which is so important concerning this topic. Also, thanks are owed to Dr. John Kirwan for making me aware of the Gagnebet-Charlier disagreement, which echoes so many of my own concerns. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank the following people for various insightful comments and conversations related to the current paper, appreciatively recognizing their discerning eyes, without enlisting them in support of my own particular (and perhaps peculiar) positions: an unknown yet quite helpful reviewer for *Novae et Vetera* (English), Mr. James Bryan, Dr. Thomas Howes, Fr. Christiaan Kappes, Fr. Cajetan Cuddy, O.P., and Brett Kendall.

## There Is a Wideness in God's Justice

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A CHRISTIAN INQUIRING into the meaning of justice cannot elude the classical definition: the firm and constant will to render another his due.<sup>1</sup> In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas retrieved this definition from Roman law and developed it with a combination of profundity, rigor, and common sense that would imprint it on the Christian tradition for ensuing centuries.<sup>2</sup> As recently as 1994, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* espoused the definition.<sup>3</sup> Broader still, core features of justice in constitutional liberal democracies take the form of justice as due. Rights, which have an elephantine presence in these regimes as well as in international law, are claims to what is due. Retribution, another common feature of justice in these settings, is giving a criminal her due. Equality, fairness, respect, and liberty also shape the meaning of justice in law and politics in modern liberal democracies.

Despite due's venerable record, however, it does not exhaust the Christian tradition's teachings about justice, especially those found in the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> For helpful comments on this piece, I thank John Carlson, Therese Cory, David Cory, John Finnis, Ricky Klee, David Lantigua, Matthew Levering, Daniel Moloney, William Mattison, and Kevin Offner.

<sup>2</sup> The definition is attributed to Ulpian, the second- and third-century Roman jurist whose writings were compiled by Justinian in his *Digest*, completed in the sixth century; see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 22. Aquinas presents the definition in *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 58, a. 1, corp. The version of the ST used in this essay is St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1948).

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], §1807.

From the standpoint of biblical justice, justice as due is unduly truncated. Biblical justice includes qualities of flourishing and relationship that stand outside justice as due. Today's defenders of justice as due commonly hold that rights are integral to justice while virtues like generosity, love, care, mercy, and compassion exceed justice; that retribution, which is justice, contrasts with mercy, which exceeds, tempers, or compromises justice; that justice pertains to exterior action, not interior motives; that justice is public whereas other virtues are private. Biblical justice does not bear these dichotomies. It is far wider. It does not dispense with but rather incorporates rights and retribution, but also exceeds these principles. Comprehensiveness and holism are its hallmarks.

The justice found in the Bible I call the justice of right relationship. In this article, my aim is to define it, identify its crucial qualities, and compare it with the justice of rendering another her due. I pursue these aims in two parallel parts, corresponding to two valences of justice, which, following philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, I refer to as "primary justice," meaning a condition or state of affairs, and "rectifying justice," a response to past wrongdoing.<sup>4</sup> In each of these parts, for each valence of justice, I explain what the justice of due means and then argue that the justice of the Bible enfolds this meaning but also contains a wider set of obligations, resulting in a more holistic concept. While the Bible is the main source for the justice of right relationship, natural law and sacred Tradition help to explain it. The thought of Aquinas is particularly important for the argument. Not only did he define, extensively discuss, and secure enduring clout for justice as due, but he also drew capaciously from the Bible and sometimes invoked a justice that appears wider than and stands in tension with justice as due. I close the essay by adumbrating some political and social implications of Biblical justice in a world dominated by due.

### **Justice as a State of Right Relationship**

What is most worth stressing about biblical justice, and what most distinguishes it from the justice of rendering what is due, is its comprehensive quality. Justice in the Bible describes multiple dimensions of right relationship that add up to all dimensions of right relationship: God's actions toward humans; obligations that humans have toward God; obligations between individual humans; obligations of individual humans toward society; obligations of society, especially as performed by judges and kings, toward humans; humans' obligations toward the natural world; and the

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<sup>4</sup> Wolterstorff, *Justice*, ix–x.

character of a human soul that is rightly ordered toward its relationships with other humans and with God. Relationship means that two or more persons—including groups and entire societies—are linked together through principles, duties, virtues, and bonds that define how they ought to interact with one another.<sup>5</sup>

Let us focus first on primary justice, that is, the sense in which the justice of right relationship is a state of affairs.

### *The Bible's Wide Justice*

The case that justice in the Bible means comprehensive right relationship begins with the words in Scripture that translate to justice. In the Old Testament, the most common of these words, and the ones that denote the widest range of conduct, are Hebrew terms with the root, *šdq*-, which appear 523 times.<sup>6</sup> Of these, it is *šedeq* and *šedeqah*, masculine and feminine variants of the same term, that translate to justice most often.<sup>7</sup> Appearing across the Old Testament in manifold contexts, these terms possess a wide semantic range yet share an overarching meaning, which is fidelity to the demands of right relationship in all spheres of life.<sup>8</sup> *Šedeq*

<sup>5</sup> There are thicker understandings of relationship to which I am sympathetic but do not invoke here out of a wish to keep the argument focused. Relationship can imply dependence such that people cannot realize their flourishing without interaction and mutual assistance. Even stronger, relationships do not merely help people achieve their good but actually constitute that good. This is the case with friendship, marriage, and community.

<sup>6</sup> J. J. Scullion, "Righteousness (OT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 725.

<sup>7</sup> Scholars disagree about whether the masculine and feminine forms carry different meanings. G. A. F. Knight argues that they do, with *šedeqah* referring to something that humans do and *šedeq* referring to the actions of God, in "Is 'Righteous' Right?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41, no. 1 (1988): 1–10, at 10. Other scholars hold that there is little difference between the terms. Scullion holds this view and offers examples of scholars on both sides of the debate in "Righteousness (OT)," 725. Other *šdq*- words are also important and related to the present argument, for instance, *šaddiq*, which describes a righteous or just person and appears often in Psalms and Proverbs.

<sup>8</sup> This definition is close to that of John R. Donahue, S.J., "Biblical Perspectives on Justice," in *The Faith That Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change*, ed. John C. Haughey (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1977), 68–112, at 69. The case for an overarching meaning of justice is also found in: Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Method and Cases* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 88; Scullion, "Righteousness (OT)," 735; and K. Koch, "*šdq*," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3 vols., ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:1055.

and *šedeqab* characterize God's fidelity to his promises to the Israelites and to all of humanity, as well as the right conduct of humans in a wide variety of relationships, including between parents and children, merchants and buyers, judges and disputants, kings and subjects, priests and worshippers, people and God, and members of the Jewish community and the widows, orphans, poor, and sojourners among them.<sup>9</sup> Renowned Bible scholar Gerhard von Rad observes that "there is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all the relationships of human life as that of *sdqb* . . . . It embraces the whole of Israelite life."<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 16:20 is only one verse in which the term (in this case, *šedeq*) speaks quite clearly of acting rightly in general: "Justice and justice alone shall be your aim, that you may have life and possess the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you."<sup>11</sup> Aggregated and applied to an entire society or to all of humanity, the many meanings of right conduct also can be summarized as right order.<sup>12</sup>

The other major term in the Old Testament that often translates to justice is *mishpaṭ*, which commonly refers to the standards of justice in courtroom procedures but also carries a much wider set of meanings and sometimes denotes right conduct in all spheres, much as *šedeq* and *šedeqab* do.<sup>13</sup> Frequently, *šedeq/šedeqab* and *mishpaṭ* appear as a hendiadys, a type of couplet, in which the two words together denote right conduct in the social and political order, often involving a king, as in Isaiah 16:5: "A throne shall be set up in mercy and on it shall sit in fidelity [in David's tent] / A judge upholding right [*mishpaṭ*] and prompt to do justice [*šedeq*]."<sup>14</sup>

As this last verse shows, it is not only *mishpaṭ*, but also other words such

<sup>9</sup> See Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Righteousness in the OT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4th ed., G. A. Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 80–82, and Donahue, "Biblical Perspectives on Justice," 69.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Peabody, MA: Prince, 1962), 370, 373.

<sup>11</sup> Bible quotations in this essay are taken from the New American Bible (NAB) translation in *The Catholic Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Similar here is H. H. Schmid's argument that the meaning of *šedeq/šedeqab* can be described as world order (*Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968], 166).

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Johnson, "Mispaṭ," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 89; Scullion, "Righteousness (OT)," 725–26, 735–36.

<sup>14</sup> On this hendiadys and its connotations, see Scullion, "Righteousness (OT)," 727–28, and Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 7–56.

as *hesed* (“steadfast love” or “loyalty”), *shalom* (“peace”), *’emet* (“truth” or “fidelity”), *teshu’a* and *yeshu’a* (“salvation” or “saving action”), and *rahāmīn* (“mercy”) that often parallel, and serve to complement and shape the meaning of, *šedeq* and *šedeqah*.<sup>15</sup> It is primarily *šedeq* and *šedeqah*, but sometimes *mishpat*, that mean right conduct in a universal and comprehensive sense: all of God’s ways, and all human conduct performed in fidelity to God’s ways.<sup>16</sup>

In the New Testament, the Greek words that translate into justice are ones that share the *dik-* root (*dikaios*, *dikαιοō*, *dikaiosynē*, and *dikē*), which appear 302 times. The authors of the Septuagint, the third-century-BCE Greek translation of the Old Testament, translated *šedeq* and *mishpat* through *dik-* terms, most prominently *dikaiosynē*, which appears ninety-two times and more than any other *dik-* term.<sup>17</sup> *Dik-* words, then, carry the meaning of comprehensive right relationship from the Hebrew terms into the New Testament. *Dikaiosyne* appears in the Gospel of Matthew seven times, for instance, where it means acting rightly toward other persons and God in a general sense.<sup>18</sup> It also shows up in the First Letter of John, where it means God’s commandments.<sup>19</sup>

To translate these Hebrew and Greek terms into English, scholars have settled mainly on words from two families, one derived from Latin roots and consisting of *just-* terms (“just,” “justice,” “justify,” “justification”), the other stemming from Anglo-Saxon origins and consisting of *right-* terms (“right,” “righteous,” “righteousness”). Certain contemporary meanings of these English words do not perform this translation well. “Righteousness” sometimes connotes priggishness or self-righteousness, while “justice”—much as I argue in this essay—often takes on a narrow, legalistic meaning in the contemporary West. These English terms and their siblings, however, also have a wide semantic range and possess other meanings that converge with comprehensive right relationship.<sup>20</sup> Translators turn

<sup>15</sup> Scullion, “Righteousness (OT),” 734; Knierim, *Task of Old Testament Theology*, 86–87.

<sup>16</sup> Knierim stresses this universality strongly in *Task of Old Testament Theology*, 15–16, 86–87.

<sup>17</sup> John Reumann “Righteousness (NT),” in Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 747.

<sup>18</sup> Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World*, trans. Seán Charles Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 217.

<sup>19</sup> 1 John 3:10; cf. 1 John 2:29.

<sup>20</sup> On these families of English words, see: Reumann, “Righteousness (NT),” 746; Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retributivism: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 35–37; John R. Donahue, S.J., “The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching: Will This



to these terms often and fluidly. Words that translate into “justice” in one English version of the Bible will often translate into “righteousness” in another. In the family of *just-* and *right-* terms, “justice” and “righteousness” are the nouns that express a broad state of relationship, and thus the key terms for the argument at hand. The upshot of their intimately close semantic relationship is that the Bible’s justice means comprehensive right relationship and is virtually synonymous with righteousness.<sup>21</sup>

A look at the New American Bible translation confirms this broad meaning of justice. “Justice” describes the character and desires of God, as in Psalm 11:7: “The Lord is just [*šedeqab*] and loves just deeds [*šedeqab*].” Many other verses in the Old Testament aver that the Lord is just, loves justice, rules the world with justice, and is known through his justice.<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes that justice is “God’s stake in history.”<sup>23</sup> Several verses in the New Testament likewise describe Jesus himself as righteous, or just (*dikaïos*), while the Apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians identifies Jesus with righteousness (denoted by *dikaïosynē*, thus meaning also justice): “Christ Jesus . . . became for us . . . righteousness.”<sup>24</sup>

Justice is also the encompassing term for the ways in which God desires

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Engagement Lead to Marriage?,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth F. Himes, O.F.M. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 13–15.

- 21 William Mattison III comments that the word “righteousness” is “understood in both the history of commentary and in contemporary biblical scholarship to be equally well translated as justice” (*The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017], 32). Other examples of scholars who argue for this interchangeability include: James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul The Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), 341; Dunn and Alan M. Suggate *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at The Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 32–37; Marshall, *Beyond Retributivism*, 35–37; Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 217, 267; John C. Haughey, “Jesus as the Justice of God,” in Haughey, *Faith That Does Justice*, 276–288. In the Latin Vulgate and in translations of the Bible into Romance languages, *šedeq/šedeqab* and Greek *dik-* words are translated into *just-* words (such as *justitia*), which in turn readily translate into English *just-* words (such as justice).
- 22 Deut 32:4; 2 Chr 12:6; Job 34:17; Ps 9:9; 9:17; 33:5; 50:6; 71:16, 71:19, 71:24, 92:16; 116:5; Isa 5:16; 56:1; 61:8; Jer 23:6; 33:16; Rom 3:21; 2 Cor 5:21; 2 Thes 1:6; Rev 15:3.
- 23 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 1:198.
- 24 Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 Cor 1:30; 1 John 2:1. See Bethany Hanke Hoang and Kristen Deede Johnson, *The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 3.

for people to act in their relationships with one another and toward him. In the language of numerous Old Testament verses, justice is walking in the ways or the paths of the Lord, for instance, Proverbs 8:20: "On the way of duty I walk, along the paths of justice."<sup>25</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus similarly teaches that justice (often translated as "righteousness") is that for which the blessed hunger and thirst, for which people are persecuted, which characterizes those who keep God's commandments, which leads to the kingdom of heaven, and which his followers ought to seek first.<sup>26</sup> Again and again, the Bible speaks of justice as the entirety of the ways in which God's followers are to interact with one another and to form community in fidelity to God. No terms apart from "justice" and "righteousness" connote the same entirety (perhaps with the exception of "love," discussed further below).

God promulgates justice through his covenants, especially those—such as the ones revealed to Moses—through which he communicates commands and promises blessings to those who follow them and curses to those who break them.<sup>27</sup> God's laws, though, are not arbitrary or to be followed merely in response to extrinsic rewards or punishments, but rather are the pathway to flourishing, happiness, and holiness. Among the many passages that make this point is Deuteronomy 6:24–25: "Therefore, the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes in fear of the Lord, our God, that we may always have as prosperous and happy a life as we have today."<sup>28</sup> Through practicing justice toward one another, people draw nearer to God. Bible scholar Enrique Nardoni points to the Holiness Code in Leviticus and in Ezekiel as places where justice unites worship of God and right relationship among God's followers.<sup>29</sup>

For whom does God establish his justice? It was the people of Israel to whom God communicated his justice at Sinai, with all of its precepts, codes, and injunctions, and whom Isaiah names: "The Lord is exalted, enthroned on high: he fills Zion with right and justice" (Isa 33:5). Other

<sup>25</sup> See also: Gen 18:19; 2 Sam 22:33; Ps 5:9; 19:10; 119:7, 75, 121; Mic 6:8.

<sup>26</sup> Matt 5:6; 5:10; 5:19–20; 6:33. Nardoni writes that justice in the Gospel of Matthew is "a person's action in obedience to God's will concerning his relationship to others" (*Rise Up, O Judge*, 234).

<sup>27</sup> Deut 30; Ps 34:18–20; Wis 3:10; Ps 89:15; Isa 9:6; 16:5.

<sup>28</sup> See also: Deut 16:20; 30:16; Ps 19:8–12; 33; 35:28; 37:17; 37:29; 89: 16; 106:3; Isa 32:16–17; Hos 2:21.

<sup>29</sup> Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 110–11. See also Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 112–13. Examples of verses linking justice and worship are Ps 35:28 and Ezek 20:19.

verses, though, especially in the Psalms, speak of judgment or justice with respect to “all living creatures,” “all peoples,” and “all the nations,” indicating all of humanity.<sup>30</sup> Jesus then pronounced justice (or righteousness) as the way of the kingdom of God, into which he invited all of humanity (Matt 5:19–20). Wide, too, then—and increasingly wider—is the collection of people invited to participate in God’s justice.

### *Aquinas’s Wide Justice*

Aquinas articulates a similarly wide concept of justice in several places in the *Summa theologiae* [ST]. He cites Psalm 11:7 (quoted above) in affirming that justice is in the nature of God.<sup>31</sup> Toward the beginning of his long treatment of justice in the ST II-II, he teaches that justice is the virtue that directs humans in their relationships to others, including both particular humans and the community as a whole. The common good subsumes both of these “others” and is the object of what he calls general, or legal, justice.<sup>32</sup> Aquinas also includes God in these “others,” thus enfolding acts of religion, or reverence for God, into the virtue of justice.<sup>33</sup> He quotes Augustine as saying that “justice is the love of God and our neighbor, . . . the common principle of the entire order between one man and another.”<sup>34</sup> Outside of ST, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Aquinas follows the Latin Vulgate Bible’s translation of *dikaïosynē* as *iustitia*, the Latin word that readily translates into “justice” in English. He interprets an instance of the word in the Sermon on the Mount—“I say to you, that unless your *justice* abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees . . .”—as meaning a widely inclusive combination of “moral precepts, judicial ones, figures, and promises.”<sup>35</sup> For Aquinas, then, justice encompasses all obligations that people have toward all other people and God.

Aquinas explicitly grounds justice in the Bible: “All the precepts of the decalogue pertain to justice.”<sup>36</sup> He calls these moral precepts, meaning that they are about virtue, and holds that the first three of them pertain to human relationships to God and are ones of religion, and that the other

<sup>30</sup> Ps 36:7; 97:6; 82:8.

<sup>31</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* [ST] I, q. 21, a. 1.

<sup>32</sup> ST II-II, q. 58, a. 5.

<sup>33</sup> ST I-II, q. 99, a. 5, ad 1; II-II, q. 122, a. 1.

<sup>34</sup> ST II-II, q. 58, a. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Super Matt 5*, lec. 7 (Marietti no. 476), in *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 1–12*, trans. Jeremy Holmes and Beth Mortensen (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2018), 158. The biblical passage is Matt 5:20.

<sup>36</sup> ST II-II, q. 122, a. 1; see also I-II, q. 99, a. 4, ad 3.

seven pertain to relationships between persons.<sup>37</sup> The Decalogue thus combines the great commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor, commandments that the Old Testament states separately and that Jesus combines together, teaching that the entire law and prophets hang on them.<sup>38</sup> The precepts of the Decalogue are perfective of human nature, Aquinas argues, designed to promote goodness and holiness.<sup>39</sup>

### *Granting the Bible Its Due*

Is the wide justice of the Bible compatible with the justice of rendering another his due, the definition that Aquinas propounded and propelled into historical prominence? What exactly is the justice of due? It is a justice that features rights, I argue. Although scholars dispute whether the writings of Thomas Aquinas contain rights—the kind that a person asserts, sometimes called subjective—I am persuaded that the concept is to be found in *ST*, indeed at the heart of Aquinas's definition of justice, which he presents in question 58 of *ST II-II*.<sup>40</sup> Toward the end of this definition are found the words *ius suum unicuique*, which are often translated into English as “to

<sup>37</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 122, corp.

<sup>38</sup> Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Matt 22:37–40; see also *ST I-II*, q. 99, a.1, ad 2.

<sup>39</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 92, a. 1, corp. See Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment*, 19. Aquinas holds that the moral precepts can be known through reason, and thus belong to the “law of nature.” They are not known through reason in the same way, though. On the one hand, “there are certain things which the natural reason of every man, of its own accord and at once, judges to be done or not to be done . . . and these belong to the law of nature absolutely,” while at the same time, “there are some things, to judge of which, human reason needs Divine instruction, whereby we are taught about the things of God.” It appears that Aquinas holds that the first three precepts of the Decalogue are of the latter sort whereas the latter seven are of the former sort. See *ST I-II*, q. 100, a. 1, corp.

<sup>40</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 58, a. 1, corp. The interpreters whom I follow most closely on this question include: John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 198–230; Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 133–38; Jean Porter, *Justice as a Virtue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 131–46; Thomas D. Williams, *Who is My Neighbor? Personalism and The Foundations of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 256–300; Paul A. Macdonald Jr., “Grounding Human Dignity and Rights: A Thomistic Response to Wolterstorff,” *The Thomist* 82, no. 1 (2018): 1–35; Dominic Legge, “Do Thomists Have Rights?,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 17, no. 1 (2019): 127–47. Other scholars, however, dispute the presence of (subjective) rights in Aquinas. See, for instance, an exchange involving Brian Tierney, Michael P. Zuckert, Douglas Kries, and John Finnis, “Natural Law and Natural Rights: Old Problems and Recent Approaches,” *The Review of Politics* 64, no. 3 (2002): 389–420. Tierney, Zuckert, and Kries (representing Ernest Fortin) take a skeptical view.

each his due” but are equally translatable as “to each his right,” or “to each what is his by right.”<sup>41</sup> Just earlier in the same article, he explains, “hence the act of justice in relation its proper matter and object is indicated by the words, *Rendering to each one his right* since, as Isidore says (*Etym.* x), *a man is said to be just because he respects the rights (jus) of others*”; and, at the end of the previous article, he writes, “it belongs to justice to render to each one his right.”<sup>42</sup> In Aquinas’s extended discussion of justice, the word *ius* translates directly to “rights,” as well as to “law,” and by “law” it means a norm requiring a rendering of what is due or owed.<sup>43</sup> *Ius* is synonymous with *suum*, which means “his,” as well as a third term that Aquinas often employs, *debitum*, or “debt,” which also implies something due or owed.<sup>44</sup> In all of these meanings, justice involves actions that render a person what is his, belongs to him, or is owed to him.<sup>45</sup> This is the essence of a right, in which an obligation is viewed from the standpoint of its beneficiary, who may assert rightfully that other people refrain from treating him in certain ways (such as lying, killing, stealing, torturing, or defaming; such are negative rights), or that they provide him with certain goods (such as subsistence, safe working conditions, or the deliverables in a contract; such are positive rights).<sup>46</sup> If the performers of the obligation fail to refrain from the proscribed action or to provide the good in question, then they will have wronged the beneficiary. Rights entail a complex notion of relationship, involving agents who carry duties, beneficiaries who possess corresponding rights, a specification of what is owed with respect to each right, and often a third party who promulgates and enforces the rights.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *ST* II-II, a. 58, a. 1, corp. Here I am indebted to the explanation of Thomas Williams, *Who is My Neighbor?*, 272.

<sup>42</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 1, corp. See also *ST* II-II, q. 57, a. 4, ad 1.

<sup>43</sup> See Finnis, *Aquinas*, 133–35.

<sup>44</sup> See Williams, *Who is My Neighbor?*, 264–65.

<sup>45</sup> For this rest of this paragraph, for simplicity’s sake, I use the term “person,” but groups can also assert rights and fulfill or respect the rights of other groups as well as persons. Sovereign states, for instance, have a right against aggression and a duty not to commit aggression upon other states.

<sup>46</sup> Stressing the importance of the standpoint of the beneficiary is Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Right*, 205. I also concur with Finnis, who follows Wesley Hohfeld, in the view that rights may take the form of claims (negative and positive), liberties, powers, and immunities. In addition, some rights are natural (human) rights, while others are positive, meaning that they are posited by authorities, such as legislatures, and except in the case of international law, that they pertain only to a bounded group of people. Thus, the set of beneficiaries and the people who owe them something will be different depending on the right.

<sup>47</sup> Bolstering the argument for rights in Aquinas are several places in his writings in

A defense of rights requires far more analysis than I can offer here. What is important for the argument at hand is that rights express the idea of due, and thus merit a central place in justice defined accordingly. Not the only place. Concepts like equality, equity, impartiality, and fairness, which are distinct from but closely related to rights, are also integral to justice as due. Aquinas considers equality as essential for defining what is due.<sup>48</sup> To render each person her right, especially in the case of natural rights, is to show respect for the dignity she shares equally with all other persons, a dignity grounded in her nature as a being endowed with free will and intelligence. Equity and fairness, close cousins of equality, define due in more specific domains such as economic exchange.

The cluster of concepts that make up the justice of due—rights, equality and its cousins, and, increasingly over the centuries, liberty—has exerted enormous influence on the modern world, even where the explicit definition of justice as rendering due has been forgotten. This justice is axial in the liberal tradition of John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and their latter-day legatees, most prominently John Rawls, as it is in liberal democratic institutions around the world. It is present, too, in Christian thought, where, contrary to the claim that rights originated through a departure from the Christian tradition in the thought of Hobbes and Locke, rights extend back through sixteenth-century Spanish Scholastic thought, medieval canon law, (arguably) the thought of Aquinas, and even the writings of early church thinkers like Tertullian and Lactantius.<sup>49</sup>

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which he refers to a right in a specific context, such as: the right of the poor to take from the rich in cases where they are desperate; the rights of parents to decide whether their children will be baptized; the rights of those accused of crimes; the right of self-defense; the right of entering on one's inherited estate; the right to receive Eucharistic communion; the right to receive tithes. For a discussion and identification, see: Porter, *Justice as a Virtue*, 140–46; Finnis, *Aquinas*, 133n10; H. Hering, “De Iure Subjective Sumpto apud S. Thomam,” *Angelicum* 16 (1939): 295–97; and Legge, “Do Thomists have Rights?,” 133. Legge finds twenty-three instances of “subjective *ius*” in Aquinas's writings.

<sup>48</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 2, corp.; q. 80, a. 1, corp.

<sup>49</sup> On Spanish Scholastic thought, see: Annabel Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David Lantigua, “The Image of God, Christian Rights Talk, and the School of Salamanca,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, 31, no. 1 (2016): 19–41. On medieval canon law, see Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150–1625* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2001). In chapter 2 of *To Scapula*, Tertullian articulates a natural, human right of religious freedom—remarkably at such an early date. Lactantius does not use the term human right but defends something very close to the human



But is the justice of due present in the Bible? In some respects, yes. Rights receive mention in several places. Proverbs counsels kings against drinking wine while violating the “the rights of all who are in need”; Job teaches that “God withholds not the just man’s rights”; Paul renounces his right to material support from the Christian community in Corinth; and other references mottle the Scriptures.<sup>50</sup> These explicit references are sporadic, none is systematic, and while some of them exude universality, none teaches directly or thoroughly that rights are intrinsic to justice.

A more indirect yet potentially fruitful argument for rights in Scripture is that rights are entailed in natural law, the moral precepts that are known through reason. Voices over the course of the Christian tradition have held that natural law can be found in the Bible, citing Paul’s teaching in Romans that the gentiles have the law “written in their hearts” even though God did not reveal it to them, as well as other passages that point to a natural law.<sup>51</sup> A smaller number of voices, some of them scholars influenced by Aquinas, have held too that people possess natural rights by virtue of natural duties, for instance, a right to life is a consequence of the proscription of murder.<sup>52</sup> Here again, I only adumbrate arguments—natural law’s place in the Bible, and the place of natural rights in natural law—about matters that are and have been disputed in the Christian tradition, doing so with the purpose of showing how the justice of due, understood in terms of rights, need not be at odds with biblical morality. Likewise, the Scriptures offer support for other aspects of justice as due such as equality, equity, fairness, and impartiality.<sup>53</sup>

### *Granting the Bible More Than Its Due*

But if the justice of right relationship found in the Bible includes what is due, it is not exhausted by it. This justice also includes duties that do not fulfill what is due, is owed, or corresponds to a right. These duties fit the description of what Kant called “wide” (or imperfect) duties, ones that require the promotion of an end but do not specify (or prohibit) the

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right of religious freedom in *Institutiones divinae* 5.20.

<sup>50</sup> Prov 31:5; Job 36:6; 1 Cor 9:12. For other examples, see: Exod 21:8; 21:10; Lev 25:29; 25:48; Deut 24:17; 1 Chron 5:1–2; Prov 29:7; Isa 5:23; 10:2; Lam 3:35; 1 Cor 9:15; 9:18.

<sup>51</sup> Rom 2:14–15. See Matthew Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 56–68.

<sup>52</sup> 55 See, e.g.: Finnis, *Aquinas*, 135–40; Williams, *Who is My Neighbor?* 292–99; Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy: The Rights of Man and The Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 106–9.

<sup>53</sup> Lev 19:5; Deut 1:16–17; Prov 2:7–9.



actions that this promotion involves, in contrast with “narrow” (or perfect) duties, which prohibit either performing or omitting certain actions. Wide duties are open-ended, leaving their performer discretion as to when or where, to what degree, or toward whom they are performed.<sup>54</sup> Wide duties vary in width. The Bible’s injunction to love one’s neighbor is quite open-ended, including not only negative prohibitions against lying, stealing, and the other misdeeds, but also a duty of beneficence that does not specify who one’s neighbor is and how one’s neighbor is to be served. Other duties are somewhat less wide, such as the biblical teaching to serve the poor, which narrows somewhat the set of people to be served yet remains considerably open-ended.

Wide duties do not easily admit of corresponding rights. Let us say that Miriam has an obligation to serve the poor, that is, to discharge a portion of her time and money to assist the poor in addition to her other duties in life. She confronts the reality that her town alone—not to mention the entire globe—contains far more poor people than she alone could possibly befriend. Does she volunteer at a homeless shelter? Tutor children? Give to a charity that promotes economic development in Bangalore, India? Her capacities are adequate only to a tiny portion of the world’s needs. It would be strange to say that any one person—say a poor person in Bangalore—has a right to Miriam’s resources, implying that Miriam would be committing a wrong if she did not help this particular person. She has a duty to serve the poor, but which poor is at her discretion.

The justice of right relationship does not deny that the poor have rights—to subsistence, basic forms of care, housing, and safe working conditions, for instance.<sup>55</sup> The justice of right relationship, though, is not confined to rights. Miriam and the society of which she is a part are obliged to promote the cause of the poor beyond what the poor assert as a right.

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<sup>54</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor with introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 194; for a good explanation of Kant’s distinction, see Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 154.

<sup>55</sup> There may be situations in which the poor—or more broadly, those in need—have rights to care from other individuals. One might argue that, if a person comes into close proximity to another person in great distress, then the distressed person has a right to the able person’s care. For instance, a capable swimmer may pass by a lake where a person is drowning and be obligated to rescue him. These situations demand more treatment than I can give here. My broader argument is that a poor person in general does not have the right to any other particular individual’s assistance. Any particular individual’s duties toward the poor are in good part open-ended, that is, unspecified by the rights of the poor alone.

Duties of justice correspond with rights most plausibly when the duties are specified in their requisite actions and their criteria for fulfillment. Most negative human rights (immunities) meet these criteria. The right not to be murdered, tortured, or have one's property stolen is honored when people refrain from murder, torture, and stealing. Many positive rights (entitlements) pass muster, too, most clearly those that are specified by a contract—a creditor's right to be paid as promised, for instance—but also certain human rights like subsistence and safe working conditions.<sup>56</sup> As duties grow wider, however, it becomes less plausible to associate them with a right. What would it mean that everyone has a right to the love of one's neighbor? The justice of right relationship, then, contains duties that correspond with rights—and with what is owed or due—but also duties that do not because they are wide, or open-ended.

The same is true of biblical justice, which is not limited to rights and entails wide duties to promote the well-being of others. Many of the Bible's teachings on justice deal with the poor, condemning abuses and deprivations in language that sometimes involves or implies rights, but also calling for a positive alleviation of their plight, an open-ended duty.<sup>57</sup> Psalm 146:6–7 commends the one “who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry.” Deuteronomy 15:7 teaches, “if one of your kinsmen in any community is in need in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to him in his need.” Nardoni comments that, in Deuteronomy, relationships between rich and poor are determined “not just on the basis of principles of commutative and distributive justice, but primarily on the basis of a beneficent justice, suffused with a compassionate love in imitation of the love of God toward Israel.”<sup>58</sup> When Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 25 that, when they see the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the ill, and the imprisoned, they are seeing him, he is commanding a wide commitment to the poor, one that has no strict boundaries.<sup>59</sup>

Some of the Bible's commandments to assist the poor even fly in the face

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<sup>56</sup> This is not to deny that virtually any right requires some degree of specification. The right not to be tortured, for instance, raises the question of what constitutes torture, one that was hotly disputed in the United States in the 2000s in the context of combatting terrorism. Many positive rights—to subsistence and to health care, for instance—require a specification of what kind and how much.

<sup>57</sup> On this point, see Deede and Hoang, *Justice Calling*, 92.

<sup>58</sup> Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 84–85.

<sup>59</sup> Other verses that stress a generalized commitment to the poor include, among others: Deut 10:18–19; 15:7–11; Ps 72:4; 72:12; Ps 82:3–4; 103:6; Prov 31:9; Isa 1:17; 11:4; Jer 22:16.

of rights. To honor the Jubilee year—that is, to free one's slaves and cancel debts—is to forego one's rights, as is following the injunction to continue to loan to the poor as the Jubilee year approaches and repayment becomes unlikely (Deut 15:1–4, 9–11). The injunction that farmers leave gleanings in their fields for the poor at the time of harvest appears to be a commandment of generosity. In several places, the Bible grounds concern for the vulnerable in God's deliverance. Israelites ought to protect the foreigners among them because God delivered them from Egypt where they were foreigners. Here, the ground for concern for the vulnerable is gratitude to God, not a duty to fulfill the foreigners' rights (Deut 10:18–19).

The Book of Sirach teaches that almsgiving is an act of righteousness (and thus justice). Commenting on this teaching, Bible scholar Gary A. Anderson explains that almsgiving is a mode of laying up treasures in heaven. Jesus then discusses almsgiving as a "righteous deed" in the Sermon on the Mount and promises heavenly reward for it, at least when it is performed without fanfare. Jesus does not specify, though, the poor people toward whom one should direct alms or how much one ought to give them and indicates no limits to the treasure that can be stored up in heaven (see Matt 6:1).<sup>60</sup> Almsgiving is a duty of justice, but a wide one.

Above, I argued that the righteousness and justice of the Bible enfold other virtues that direct people toward others. Some of these are wide. One of them is mercy, which Thomas Aquinas defines as "heartfelt sympathy for another's distress, impelling us to succor him if we can"; a merciful action is driven by this sympathy and alleviates distress caused either by sin or by unmerited suffering.<sup>61</sup> The latter sort is most relevant to primary justice. The Bible calls for mercy, as in Micah, where mercy is associated with justice: "Do the right [*mishpat*] and . . . love goodness [or mercy], and . . . walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8),<sup>62</sup> and as in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus commands, "be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Other virtues enumerated in the Bible like compassion and generosity are similarly wide. So, too, is solidarity, which has emerged as an explicit virtue more recently in the Christian tradition and means identification with the suffering of every other person, much as Jesus taught in the parables of the good Samaritan and of the rich man and Lazarus.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 132.

<sup>61</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 30, a. 1.

<sup>62</sup> In other versions of this verse, "right" is translated as "justice" (or "act justly") and "goodness" is translated as "mercy."

<sup>63</sup> See: William C. Mattison III, "Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching: An Inquiry

One other wide duty that emerged in the Christian tradition is the promotion of the common good of a society, a duty possessed quintessentially, but not exclusively, by public officials. Does a legislator spend her time lobbying for urban renewal? Promoting national defense? How should public money be allocated among priorities? Legislators have a duty to promote the public welfare, but how to do so—how to allocate wealth, what endeavors to support, what pursuits ought to be chosen over others in the face of scarcity—is unspecified, and no citizen has a right to any one course of action. In the Bible, this duty is referenced in commandments to kings to promote justice in general.<sup>64</sup>

### *Aquinas's Dilemma*

The argument thus far may seem to present a conundrum for Aquinas, who argues both that justice is general, pertaining to all relationships, and that justice is what is due among equals. If justice includes wide duties, though, then Aquinas's claim that justice is what is due stands in tension with his endorsement of general justice. Aquinas appears to recognize this problem in his discussion of what he calls the "potential parts of justice." He states that the "essential character of justice consists in rendering to another his due according to equality" and then observes that there are virtues that direct persons toward others yet lack either due or equality.<sup>65</sup> These virtues, then, are potential parts of justice, but not fully ones of justice. Religion and piety are examples of virtues that involve due but not equality, since they are directed to superiors—God or parents, for instance. Other virtues are directed to equals yet lack due. Among the examples Aquinas cites are affability, liberality, beneficence, and friendship; I would add mercy, which Aquinas associates with the supernatural virtue of charity. These latter virtues, not involving due—not strictly owed to others—appear to be wide duties.

That Aquinas sees the need to create the category of potential parts of justice bespeaks his commitment to justice as a general virtue. He argues that justice uniquely directs all other virtues to the common good, implying that justice governs human actions comprehensively, whereas other virtues do not, much as the Bible's *šedeq/šedeqah* is more universal than

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Employing Thomistic Categories of Virtue," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 15, no. 1 (2018): 1–43; German Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, vol. 2 of *The Way of the Lord Jesus* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 342.

<sup>64</sup> See also: Ps 72:1–2; Isa 32:1; 2 Chr 7:17; 9:8; Prov 16:12; 29:4; 2 Sam 8:15; 23:3–4; 1 Kgs 10:9; 1 Chr 18:14; Jer 21:12.

<sup>65</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 80.

other virtues like *hesed* and *rahamin* but also reflect their meaning.<sup>66</sup> Aquinas's potential parts also reveal his awareness that some aspects of relationship among persons and God are not consistent with due (or equality) and are thus, as he calls them, only potential parts of justice.

Biblical justice (and righteousness) has no need for this category. It includes all duties involving other persons and God and does not treat any of these duties as less than fully ones of justice, even when they do not correspond to something due, and even when the parties are unequal in station. The Bible also commends other virtues to be practiced among persons and God such as mercy, steadfastness, kindness, and compassion, all of which are assimilable into the more general category of justice even while they retain their distinctive meaning. The Bible does not call them potential parts of justice, though, but rather treats them as fully a part of holistic justice.

#### *What's Love Got to Do With It?*

One other issue arising from my argument is the relationship of justice to charity and love. Several passages in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, appear to grant love the central and encompassing role that I have claimed for justice. Jesus says that the law and the prophets hang on the commandments to love God and to love neighbor and issues "a new command, . . . love one another."<sup>67</sup> Aquinas precedes his discussion of justice with a discussion of the virtue of charity, which he claims is the greatest of all virtues, is more excellent than the moral virtues—which include justice—and directs, gives form to, and even contains all other virtues.<sup>68</sup> Both the Bible and Aquinas appear to host a clash of titan virtues, love and justice. How can this be sorted out?

Christian thinkers over the centuries have argued for a wide variety of ways to think about the relationship between love and justice. As noted above, Augustine holds that justice is none other than the love of God and neighbor, and Aquinas quotes his view favorably. Quite differently, Wolterstorff adopts the definition of justice as rendering due and amounting to rights and argues that love includes but exceeds this justice. Generosity, he says, is a dimension of love that gives beyond what

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<sup>66</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 6, corp. Porter argues that, for Aquinas, justice is an "architectonic" virtue, meaning that "it brings a certain ordering to the acts of the other virtues" (*Justice as a Virtue*, 112).

<sup>67</sup> Matt 22:37–40; John 13:34.

<sup>68</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 6, corp.; I-II, q. 65, a. 3, sc.

is due and is not contained in justice.<sup>69</sup>

My own view follows the lead of Pope John Paul II and Germain Grisez, who defend two propositions that appear to stand in contradiction: first, that love includes and exceeds justice, and second, that love shapes the very meaning of justice.<sup>70</sup> How can both claims be asserted together? Because, I argue, justice can be understood in two ways, natural and infused. The first, natural justice, is enfolded in and exceeded by love; the second, infused justice, is elevated by love.

Justice as a natural virtue is what Aquinas calls a moral virtue, one that is apprehended by reason and has as its object the human good that is known through reason.<sup>71</sup> It includes moral precepts that admit of being due (or owed, or corresponding to a right), as well as, in my own argument, the wide duty of beneficence.<sup>72</sup> Natural justice is distinguished from what Aquinas calls charity, a supernatural virtue that is infused—in the Apostle Paul’s phrase, poured into our hearts—by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Actions of love that proceed from charity have God, not the natural human good, as their object. One loves one’s neighbor out of a love of God. Love flowing from charity also has an expanded ethical content that includes norms of natural justice, but also extends to actions like love for one’s enemies, forgiveness, a sacrificial gift of self (becoming servant to all, taking up one’s cross), and a concern for others that extends beyond one’s community to all of humanity.<sup>73</sup> On this view, love includes duties of justice but also duties that reach beyond justice.

To leave matters here, though—justice versus charity—would fail to account for the expanded quality of justice (or righteousness) that Jesus articulates on several occasions. In the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, it is immediately following Jesus’s warning that, “unless your righteousness [or justice] surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven,” that he presents the six “antitheses” through which he expands, deepens, interiorizes, and radicalizes the law of the Torah (Matt

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<sup>69</sup> See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 207–20.

<sup>70</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §12, 14; Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, 365–67. For Grisez, it is mercy that is synonymous with justice (as well as a virtue that goes beyond justice). But he sees mercy as an expression of love.

<sup>71</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 63, a. 3, corp.

<sup>72</sup> Here I depart from Aquinas, who views beneficence as a supernatural virtue associated with charity. See William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 85–86, 153–156 for a view of beneficence as a natural virtue.

<sup>73</sup> Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, vol. 1 of *The Way of the Lord Jesus* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Herald, 1993), 604–6.

5:20–48). In Matthew and Luke, Jesus identifies the righteous (or just) with those who show abiding love for the poor and thus merit eternal life. Justice here takes on the ethical content of love that flows from charity (Matt 25:46; Luke 14:14).<sup>74</sup> Then, the Gospel of John and the Letters of John strongly associate love with the commandments of Jesus and in turn associate these commandments with righteousness, which, here again, translates *dikaiosynē*, and thus can also be rendered justice.<sup>75</sup>

This is a justice that is supernaturally infused or elevated by grace. While Aquinas familiarly identifies the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—as being infused by the Spirit, he also avers that the cardinal moral virtues—prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice—can become infused by grace and transformed into a supernatural form.<sup>76</sup> When natural justice is infused by grace, it looks more like the supernatural love that flows from charity.<sup>77</sup> This justice remains the virtue that entails duties related to others, including the duties that involve rendering due, but it also includes the full, expanded vision of right relationship that Jesus embodied and taught.<sup>78</sup> This justice, infused justice, is shaped by love.

<sup>74</sup> On justice being transformed by charity, see Matthew Levering, “Juridical Language in Soteriology: Aquinas’s Approach,” *Angelicum* 80 (2003): 309–26, at 322: “The theological virtue of charity, therefore, elevates and perfects the moral virtue of justice by enabling the rational creature to participate more intensely in the divine will.” See also Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment*, 57, 65.

<sup>75</sup> John 13:34, 14:15; 1 John 2:1–11; 2:29; 3:7, 10, 12. On the meaning of love in the Letters of John, I benefitted from Ceslaus Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament* (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1966).

<sup>76</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 63, a. 3, corp.; q. 63, a. 4, corp. Aquinas expounds on this transformation using the example of temperance. He does not discuss systematically how justice is transformed in content when it becomes infused.

<sup>77</sup> On infused justice, see: Michael Sherwin, O.P., *On Love and Virtue: Theological Essays* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 166; William C. Mattison III, “Moral Virtue, the Grace of God, and Discipleship,” in *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective*, ed. David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 210–14.

<sup>78</sup> Here, and elsewhere in my argument, one might raise a question concerning obligation: Do obligations (and duties, requirements, etc.) encompass everything that a Christian is enjoined to do toward others? If the answer is yes, then is there no role for performing gratuitous actions or deeds that take the form of a gift? My view is that obligations do in fact encompass everything that Jesus asks his followers to do toward others, that is, everything that is involved in love. In the Gospel of John, Jesus gives the “new commandment” to “love one another.” Loving others, then, is a command, and encompasses everything that one may do to promote the good of others. Love, though, includes acting gratuitously and giving gifts. Actions are no less gratuitous or gift-giving because they are commanded. What makes actions gratuitous or involving gift is that the recipients of these actions



### Justice as the Restoration of Right Relationship

The argument with respect to rectifying justice runs parallel to that for primary justice: The justice of right relationship, whose main source is the Bible, includes but exceeds the justice of rendering another his due. In rectifying justice, the most plausible meaning of due is retribution, the infliction of hardship upon a perpetrator as a payment for her crime in accordance with the rule of law and standards of proportionality. A perpetrator receives her due or pays her debt, thus receiving retribution.

Rights are less central to rectifying justice. They are dissonant with retribution. It sounds strange to speak of a perpetrator as enjoying or claiming a right to be punished.<sup>79</sup> In certain respects, though, rights define what is due in rectifying justice. Victims properly claim rights to—and thus are due—apologies, restitution, reparations, and perhaps truth.<sup>80</sup> Alleged perpetrators possess rights related to the due process of law.

With respect to rectifying justice, the justice of right relationship is, again, comprehensive, involving a holistic restoration of right relationship. It sometimes involves punishment and the fulfillment of rights, but also involves the granting of what people do not deserve or have a right to. This justice converges with mercy insofar as mercy addresses what has been ruptured by wrongdoing, not just misfortune. In Pope John Paul II's encyclical of 1980, *Dives in Misericordia*, he defines mercy consistently with Aquinas's definition yet accents this virtue's holistic, restorative character: "Mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in

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have no right to them. These actions are wide duties, that is. Pope John Paul II wrote: "In giving life to man, God demands that he love, respect and promote life. The gift thus becomes a commandment, and the commandment is itself a gift" (*Evangelium Vitae*, § 52). Grisez takes this view, I argue, in discussing mercy. He argues at once that "the duties of mercy do not correspond to any rights which anyone has apart from God's mercy to every human person" and that "the works of mercy are obligatory, and it is wrong to think of mercy's requirements as if they were supererogatory (that is, above and beyond the requirements of duty)" (*Living a Christian Life*, 84). This is precisely the argument that there are duties to which there are no corresponding rights (wide duties).

<sup>79</sup> Finnis points out that, in Aquinas's day, liability or a punishment might be considered a *ius*, or a right, but that today we would not use this language (*Aquinas*, 133–34).

<sup>80</sup> In international law, increasing recognition is being given to a right to truth for victims of human rights violations in a political conflict, often at the hands of the states who shroud murder, torture, and extrajudicial punishment in secrecy. See Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 182.

the world and in man.” John Paul II associates mercy closely with love and applies to mercy the twofold relationship that I have argued love has to justice.<sup>81</sup> In the first, love enfolds but exceeds justice. Thus, he speaks of justice as rendering due punishment and argues that it is tempered and “corrected” by mercy, which belongs to love but extends beyond justice. In the second, love expressed through mercy is equivalent to justice. He holds that mercy “accomplishes” the justice that means salvation in the Old Testament, that mercy and justice each “manifest” God’s love, and that mercy “reveals the perfection of justice,” “has the power to confer on justice a new content,” and is “the most perfect incarnation of justice.”<sup>82</sup> Grisez, following John Paul II, likewise holds both that mercy extends beyond justice and that “mercy *is* the justice of God’s kingdom.”<sup>83</sup> Again, justice in the first relationship is the natural justice of rendering due, while justice in the second relationship is transformed by grace and includes both the duties that involve due and acts that reach beyond what is due. The second of these versions is biblical justice, the justice that restores right relationship, which is identical with mercy, the virtue directed at the restoration of all that is broken.

The justice that restores right relationship is also manifested through forgiveness, which instantiates mercy. Forgiveness in the Bible is not merely the relinquishment of wrath, anger, or resentment, but is also directed toward the restoration of relationship. God forgives the people of Israel in order to restore his covenant with them in the Old Testament and forgives all of humanity in a new covenant in which people may live in friendship with God in the New Testament. The forgiveness that the Bible teaches people to practice toward one another is also directed toward the restoration of right relationship. In the story of the prodigal son, for instance, the father forgives the dissolute son in order to receive him back into the family. Forgiveness, like mercy, is not owed to the perpetrator of a wrong, yet manifests justice, the justice that restores right relationship.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §8: “In the eschatological fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy.”

<sup>82</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §§2, 4, 6, 7, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, 365 (emphasis added). Also, Aquinas says in *ST* I, q. 21, a. 3, ad 2, both that mercy goes beyond justice and that mercy perfects justice.

<sup>84</sup> Here, I partially disagree with Grisez. I follow him in holding that forgiveness manifests mercy, which is the justice of God’s kingdom. Thus, it appears that Grisez holds that forgiveness manifests God’s justice. But Grisez then argues that

In both the Old and the New Testament can be seen this justice that includes but also is wider than retribution and that involves a holistic restoration of right relationship.

### *God's Saving Justice in the Old Testament*

Aquinas uses the term original justice to describe what he calls the primitive state, or the Garden of Eden.<sup>85</sup> He describes it as perfect rectitude and right order; it is the justice of right relationship. The first humans lived in right relationship with God and with one another, and their souls were rightly ordered, meaning that their lower appetites were under the governance of their rational powers, which Aquinas calls “metaphorical justice.”<sup>86</sup> Aquinas says that the first human possessed perfect charity and justice—and in fact all of the virtues—and was created and sustained in virtue by grace.<sup>87</sup>

Then came sin, which Aquinas calls the disturbance of right order. Sin violates the justice of right relationship, whose norms are not extrinsic to, but rather furthering of, flourishing and fulness of being; sin is disintegrative. It incurs a debt of punishment corresponding to the three dimensions of right order: the soul, relationships with others, and relationship to God. Sin violates divine justice and involves a loss of charity, which is friendship with God.<sup>88</sup>

The Bible then proceeds to recount a long series of descents into sin and acts of restoration on the part of God. God renews the world after the great flood in Genesis, delivers the Israelites from Pharaoh (whose sin he punishes), forgives the Israelites after they build a golden calf, liberates Israel from exile in Babylon, and definitively redeems humanity through Jesus Christ. Several times, in the wake of sin, God establishes covenants, as with Noah, Abraham, and Moses and the Israelites, and as Jesus Christ did with all of humanity.

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the duty of forgiveness, arising from the mercy that God has shown humanity, implies that sinners have a right to be forgiven by fellow sinners (*Living a Christian Life*, 362–67). I would argue, by contrast, that while Christians have a duty to forgive, sinners do not have a corresponding right to be forgiven. Rather, just as Christians have been forgiven by God without their deserving it, so, too, they ought to forgive those who wrong them without their deserving it. This is the message of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18: 23–35, I contend.

<sup>85</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 1, ad 1; q. 85, a. 1, corp.

<sup>86</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 2.

<sup>87</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 95, a. 1, corp.; *ST* I-II, q. 95, a. 3, corp. I benefited in this section from Levering, “Juridical Language in Soteriology,” 315–19.

<sup>88</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 86, aa. 1, 3, 6. See Matthew Levering, “Creation and Atonement,” in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 58–60.

The Bible frequently uses the language of justice to describe God's act of restoration. Psalm 103:6–7, for instance, describes God's "mighty deeds" for Moses and Israel, ones that involve deliverance, in the language of justice and righteousness. Justice meaning deliverance is most pronounced in Second Isaiah, which is addressed to the people of Israel during their exile in Babylon and promises return. Referring to a messianic figure, Isaiah announces, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice [*mishpat*] to the nations," and a few verses later, "I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice [*sedeq*]." <sup>89</sup> Several times, God's justice is equated with salvation, as in Isaiah 45:21: "There is no just [*sedeq*] and saving God but me." <sup>90</sup> As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Dives in Misericordia*, "to the psalmists and the prophets . . . the very term justice ended up by meaning the salvation accomplished by the Lord and His mercy." <sup>91</sup>

Justice is not only the action through which God restores his people but also the condition to which God restores his people. God would make Jerusalem "the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isa 1:26–27). The restored people is also characterized by peace, calm, security, prosperity, and the rectification of the plight of the poor: land is restored, debts are canceled, wrongs are redressed, orphans and widows are protected and provided for, the lame walk, and the blind receive sight (Isa 40:17–20).

The Scriptures in Isaiah and other books of the Bible speak of God's saving justice as faithfulness to his covenant but not as something that God owes Israel. God's decisions to restore Israel are ones of love, mercy, and *hesed*, or faithfulness to his covenant.

And what of retribution? There is plenty of punishment in the Old Testament. Sometimes sinners are punished intrinsically, by suffering the consequences of their sin, and sometimes extrinsically, through being punished by another party, usually the political authorities, God, or some agent of punishment that God has deployed, such as a conquering nation.

In the Old Testament, retribution resides in covenants in which God couples commandments with blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience—most prominently, the covenant given at Sinai. When the Israelites and others sin, curses come. Isaiah 60:18 puts it starkly—"[The Lord] repays his enemies their deserts, and requites his foes with wrath"—

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<sup>89</sup> Isa 42:1–6. Other verses speaking of God's restorative action as justice include: Deut 32: 4–14; Judg 5:11; Isa 11:4–5; 45:8; 45:13; 45:19; 45:21; 45:25; 54:14.

<sup>90</sup> See also: Isa 46:12–13; 51:5, 8; 56:1.

<sup>91</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §4.

and many other verses indicate or describe retribution.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes God destroys people and entire groups of people for their sin.<sup>93</sup> God also inflicts punishment through natural phenomena—frogs, boils, gnats, flies, earthquakes, famine, and the like—clearly imposed upon sinners from without.<sup>94</sup> Many times, retribution is associated with the language of justice and judgment.<sup>95</sup>

The Bible's rectifying justice, though, is wider than retribution. Equally noteworthy as the episodes of requiting are those in which God does not mete out the punishment that sinners deserve. God foregoes punishment; promises it and then withdraws; applies punishment partially and then ceases; withholds punishment when his people repent, as with the city of Nineveh; and relents in response to pleas for mercy, as God did for Moses after the Israelites worshipped a golden calf.<sup>96</sup> Psalm 103:8–10 expresses this restraint most directly: "Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in kindness. God does not always rebuke, nurses no lasting anger, [has] not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our deeds deserve." The Bible describes other restorative measures too, including Israel's return from exile and a renewal of the land. On the role of kings, Bible scholar Moshe Weinfeld comments, "forgiveness and amnesty on the part of the ruler is called *doing righteousness and justice*."<sup>97</sup> Finally, retribution is challenged not only by the waiving of deserved punishment but also from the other direction, namely harsh punishment that confounds retributivism's prized principle of proportionality, as when God orders Saul to destroy the Amalekites, including "men and women, children and infants" (1 Sam 15:3).

While retribution is narrower than the Bible's wide rectifying justice, it also fits the character of this justice, furthering the restoration of right relationship. Retributive punishment involves a payment, but not one that is abstracted from the renewal of God's covenant. Deuteronomy repeats the phrase "so you shall purge the evil from your midst," indicating that

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<sup>92</sup> Ps 37:9; 58:12; 62:13; Job 34:12; Prov 10:16; 24:12; Eccl 12:14; Isa 3:10–11; 59:18; Jer 17:10; 25:14; 32:19; Lam 3:64; Hos 4:9.

<sup>93</sup> See, for instance: Deut 7:4; 9:8; Num 16:21–35; Ezek 43:8.

<sup>94</sup> For the plagues (frogs, etc.), see Exod 7–11; for earthquakes, see Isa 29:26 and Amos 8:8; for famine, see Ezek 5:12, 16. I have benefitted in this paragraph from the interpretation of Marshall, *Beyond Retributivism*, 121–22.

<sup>95</sup> See, e.g., Ps 34.

<sup>96</sup> See Exod 32:14.

<sup>97</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 11 (emphasis original).

punishment has a purifying aim.<sup>98</sup> This, of course, does not imply the compatibility of the Bible's full range of penalties, including the prescription of the death penalty for a wide variety of sins, with contemporary Christian ethics. The point is rather that biblical retributive punishment has a restorative purpose, in contrast to the retributivism of Kant, who, zealously distinguishing his ethics of duty from any form of eudaimonism, insisted that punishment take place for principle alone, apart from any consequences for the well-being of the perpetrator or others affected by the crime.<sup>99</sup> In the Old Testament, retributive punishment is one of several measures involved in the justice through which God restores the people and communities he has created, most of all the people of Israel.

### *God's Saving Justice in the New Testament*

Bible scholar N. T. Wright argues that Jesus's death and resurrection are the climax of Israel's story of God's saving justice.<sup>100</sup> Jesus proclaims his mission of saving justice in the Gospel of Matthew, where he directly identifies himself with the servant of Isaiah who "brings justice to victory" (Matt 12:20).<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Jesus's words to John the Baptist that he would "fulfill all righteousness [*dikaiosynē*]" signal not only his clarification and deepening of God's law but also his saving action. Through his Cross and resurrection, he will complete what he initiated in his baptism: defeating sin and death and restoring right relationship between humanity and God (Matt 3:15).<sup>102</sup> Likewise, when Paul writes in First Corinthians that Jesus became righteousness (1 Cor 1:30), he places this quality in a series with sanctification and redemption, signifying that righteousness is saving justice. Then, the First Letter of John holds that "if we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing" (1 John 1:9), where the word "just" (*dikaios*) implies the saving actions of forgiveness and renewal. Finally, Paul uses *dikaiosynē* in his Letter to the Romans, when he writes "for in [the Gospel] is revealed the righteousness [*dikaiosynē*] of God" (Rom 1:17), and similarly, when he expounds:

<sup>98</sup> Deut 13:6; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21–22, 24; 24:7.

<sup>99</sup> Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 140, 141, 168.

<sup>100</sup> See, among Wright's many works, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 75–100.

<sup>101</sup> The reference in Isaiah is 42:6—"I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice"—where the word for "justice" is *šedeq*. Matthew renders justice as *krisis*, rather than *dikaiosynē*, in presenting Jesus's quote of Isaiah. *Krisis* means judgment, though a judgment is always in accord with justice.

<sup>102</sup> Nardoni comments that the verse refers back to messianic verses in Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1 (*Rise Up, O Judge*, 231). See also Reumann, "Righteousness (NT)," 755.

But now the righteousness [*dikaiosynē*] of God has been manifested apart from the law, though testified to by the law and the prophets, the righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified (*dikaioō*) freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed, through the forbearance of God—to prove his righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) in the present time, that he might be righteous (*dikaios*) and justify the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3: 21–26)

“Righteousness” here is the saving action of Jesus Christ—and so, then, is justice.<sup>103</sup>

How does Jesus Christ perform this saving justice, the justice that restores right relationship? There is both a negative and a positive dimension to the action, both expressed in an important verse in First Corinthians that describes Christ’s reconciliation of humanity to himself: “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness [*dikaiosynē*] of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

First, the negative side of Christ’s justice is that he forgives sin and takes it away from humanity through his sacrifice on the Cross. “This is my blood of the new covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of my sins,” he tells his disciples at the last supper (Matt 26:28). His sacrifice is also conveyed by John the Baptist, who describes him as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

The positive side of Christ’s justice is his restoration of justice in people who follow him: “that we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).<sup>104</sup> Here again, justice is not only the action through which Christ saves but also the condition to which he restores humanity. Through the Cross and resurrection, Christ not only takes away sin but also, in triumphing over death and being restored to fulness of life by the Father, invites

<sup>103</sup> Nardon argues just this in *Rise Up, O Judge*, 281, as do Dunn and Suggate in *Justice of God*, 35, and Darrin W. Snyder Belousek in *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 369–80.

<sup>104</sup> On interpreting this passage in terms of justice, see the important work of Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel of God: Paul, Participation and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 246–54.



people to join in this restoration, and thereby become just themselves—a “new creation,” as Paul puts it in Second Corinthians (2 Cor 5:17). Christ’s rectifying justice restores primary justice, a justice elevated by charity, taught and exemplified by Jesus over the course of his life, including but also exceeding the previous moral commandments, and culminating in his death and resurrection. The person who decides to participate in this justice by professing faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and becomes just, including in his soul, in his relationships with others, and his relationship with God. This justice extends into collectivities, including political orders, economic systems, cultures, and the relationship of humans to the natural environment.

The positive, restorative work of justice is consummated at the Last Judgment. “We await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness [*dikaiosynē*] dwells,” says the Second Letter of Peter (3:13), indicating, first, that it is *dikaiosynē*—righteousness, or justice—that will prevail, and second, that the heavens and the earth will be made new in an actual restoration. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* echoes that “the Last Judgment will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures.”<sup>105</sup> Is this consummation a recapitulation of original justice? Yes, in the sense that people live in perfect community, but with the difference that it is a restoration of what was fallen. The risen Christ bears his wounds, the marks of one who has performed saving justice. The new heavens and new earth are not the Garden of Eden.

The saving character of justice and its positive and negative sides come together in justification, one of Paul’s most central concepts for describing what Christ accomplished through his death and resurrection. Taking issue with Wright’s view that justification is primarily God’s bestowal of a “not guilty” status upon the sinner according to Paul’s metaphor of the courtroom, Bible scholar Thomas Stegman argues that justification includes not only acquittal but also a bestowal of grace that transforms the sinner interiorly—the historical position of the Catholic Church.<sup>106</sup> Justification “is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man,” declared the Council of Trent in the sixteenth

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<sup>105</sup> CCC, §1040.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas D. Stegman, S.J., “Paul’s Use of *Dikaio*- Terminology: Moving beyond N.T. Wright’s Forensic Interpretation,” *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 496–524. Wright expresses his view in *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

century.<sup>107</sup> For Stegman, too, the fifth chapter of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians is pivotal, containing phrases like "new creation" and "we might become the righteousness of God" that point to inner renewal. In several other passages in Paul's letters, he also holds that Christ's Passion and justification bestow transforming grace.<sup>108</sup> In justification, then, God restores right relationship not only by coming to look upon the sinner as one no longer guilty but also in regenerating the sinner—both the negative and positive movements of saving justice. As the Council of Trent put it, "the alone formal cause [of justification] is the justice of God, not that whereby He Himself is just, but that whereby He maketh us just, that, to wit, with which we being endowed by Him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are, just, receiving justice within us."<sup>109</sup>

Justification, the justice that saves and that restores right relationship, is shaped by the divine charity that initiates the salvation that takes place through the Incarnation, Cross, and resurrection. It is also equivalent to mercy, the quality of actions that will to restore. In the Gospels, Jesus foretells the mercy that he will accomplish in his Passion, for instance, in the story of the prodigal son, while other verses in the New Testament also describe his Passion in terms of mercy.<sup>110</sup>

Saving justice is a gift, not something owed. Paul stresses in his Letter to the Romans that Christ died for us "while we were still sinners," not after first demanding that humans pay up for their sins, that sinners "are justified freely by his grace," and that Jesus Christ is a "gracious gift."<sup>111</sup> The *Catechism* likewise speaks of "God's gratuitous justice."<sup>112</sup> Out of love, the Father sends the Son to bring about justice to which humanity did not have a right, justice it was not owed, justice that was not due.

Does this mean that due has no place in Christ's saving justice? Let us turn again to Thomas Aquinas, who helps us to see that retribution is a part, but is not the whole, of this justice.

<sup>107</sup> Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 7 (trans. [thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm](http://thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm)).

<sup>108</sup> In addition to 2 Cor 5:14–21, Stegman focuses on: 2 Cor 1:18–22; Gal 2:15–21; Phil 3:7–11; Rom 1:17; 3:21–26; 5: 1–11, 15–21; 6: 10–19; 8:28–30; 12:1–15:13.

<sup>109</sup> Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 7. On justification as justice, see also: Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 222–60; James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God," *Journal of Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (1992): 1–21.

<sup>110</sup> Luke 1: 11–32. See, e.g.: Rom 11:30–32; 15:9; Eph 2:4–7; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3–5; 2:10; Jude 1:21.

<sup>111</sup> Rom 5:8; 3:24; 5:15 (respectively).

<sup>112</sup> CCC, §2009.

*Thomas Aquinas and the Place of Due in Rectifying Justice*

Aquinas accepts the major features of saving justice that I have identified in the Bible. This is clear in all that he says about God's justification of humanity through Christ: that justification is itself an act of justice;<sup>113</sup> that it involves not only a remission of sin but also an infusion of grace;<sup>114</sup> that this grace makes the sinner just, both in his actions and in his soul;<sup>115</sup> and that this justice is a gift.<sup>116</sup>

Is there any sense in which Aquinas views the justice by which God saved humanity as involving due—retribution, payment, something owed? Yes, there is. A century and a half before Aquinas wrote the *Summa theologiae*, Anselm of Canterbury wrote *Cur Deus homo?* in order to explain the Incarnation and Christ's death. He reasoned that humanity incurred a debt for its sin that it could not repay. God, who wished to be faithful to what he had created, became human through his son and payed humanity's debt through a sacrifice that would be pleasing to God. God's act involved both justice—insofar as it repaid what was owed—and mercy, insofar as it was God who paid the debt, Anselm reasons.<sup>117</sup>

In *ST III*, Aquinas takes up Anselm's argument and agrees that payment of debt is an important part of how Christ's Passion is to be understood.<sup>118</sup> He argues that humanity has incurred debt through its sin and is thus held in bondage, and that Christ's sacrifice redeemed humanity from this debt, and he describes both this debt and this redemption as justice.<sup>119</sup> His use of the language of debt, price, payment, and redemption finds support in verses in the New Testament.<sup>120</sup> Here we have retribution, the version of justice as due that is found in rectifying justice.

Yet, in certain other ways, Aquinas's argument does not follow the logic of retribution. Contrary to Anselm, Aquinas holds that God would not

<sup>113</sup> *ST I*, q. 21, a. 4, a. 1; II-II, q. 58, a. 2, corp.; III, q. 1, a. 2, corp.

<sup>114</sup> *ST I*, q. 21, a. 4, a. 1; I-II, q. 100, a. 12, corp.

<sup>115</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 58, a. 2, ad 1; I-II, q. 113, a. 1, corp. See Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment*, 120.

<sup>116</sup> *ST III*, q. 46, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>117</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 260–356.

<sup>118</sup> Levering, "Creation and Atonement," 64–66.

<sup>119</sup> *ST III*, q. 48, a. 4, corp.; a. 5, corp.; q. 49, a. 1, corp.; q. 50, a. 1, corp.

<sup>120</sup> Several verses speak of Christ as ransoming humanity from its sins. It is an ambiguous metaphor since it is not clear to whom the ransom is being paid. Still, it implies a price paid. See: Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Gal 3:13; 4:5; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 Pet 1:18; and 2 Pet 2:1. An example of a passage where Aquinas uses the word "ransom" can be found at *ST III*, q. 48, a. 4. In two other places, the Scriptures speak of Christ's sacrifice as a price paid: 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23.

have acted unjustly had God chosen to save humanity without a rendering of satisfaction. God could have accomplished salvation otherwise. Unlike a human judge, who cannot rightly waive what one person owes another, God would have wronged no one in forgiving humanity without demanding payment, much like a person who waives a wrong committed only against himself.<sup>121</sup> Aquinas, then, retains the notion that humanity owed a debt—the logic of due—but he does not require that the debt be paid or that a penalty be incurred, as a retributivist does. God could have waived the debt justly. Even still, Aquinas proceeds to argue that Christ’s sacrifice was nonetheless a fitting way to restore humanity—not necessary, yet most suitable for a range of reasons.

Aquinas makes another argument, this one in agreement with Anselm, that does not square neatly with retribution, which is that “by suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race.” Because Christ’s passion was “superabundant,” it exceeded what was due.<sup>122</sup>

Departing from retribution still more is the vicariousness of Christ’s sacrifice. Retributivists insist that a penalty be paid by the one who committed the wrong, a principle that retributivists tout for both protecting the innocent and directing justice to the guilty. But Christ, an innocent man, paid humanity’s debt in its stead. Anselm calls this mercy, but it also confounds justice understood as rendering a wrongdoer her due. Pope Benedict made the point in his Lenten message of 2010:

What kind of justice is this where the just man dies for the guilty and the guilty receives in return the blessing due to the just one? Would this not mean that each one receives the contrary of his “due”? In reality, here we discover divine justice, which is so profoundly different from its human counterpart.

In Christ’s divine justice, he did not give wrongdoers their due, but rather forgave them.

Finally, Christ’s rendering of satisfaction for debt through his sacrifice is only one of several ways that Aquinas cites in which Christ’s Passion was fitting. The New Testament contains a host of terms and metaphors to explain how the Cross and resurrection achieved salvation, and theologians have proffered manifold theories in the centuries since. Anselm’s theory of satisfaction was one of these theories, but only one. Prior to him,

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<sup>121</sup> *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>122</sup> *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2, corp.

virtually no Christian thinker had given satisfaction of debt such a central place. Another medieval scholar, Peter Abelard, reacted against what he saw as the harsh transactional character of Anselm's account and emphasized instead Christ's loving initiative and the charity that it inspires in those who would follow him. Aquinas weaves both accounts into his own, stressing not only satisfaction but also Christ's example of virtue, which inspires charity, excites hope of rising from the dead, and delivers humanity from fear of death.<sup>123</sup> Recall as well Aquinas's strong affirmation that Christ's Cross and resurrection yield grace that transforms those who place faith in him.<sup>124</sup> Not at all is his view one of mere mercantile exchange. The payment of what is due is a part, but only a part, of Aquinas's account of God's saving action, which is in turn the justice of restoring right relationship that the Bible describes. In Aquinas, as in the Bible, saving justice is wider than the justice that renders what is due.

### Conclusion

The argument is simple, despite its complex parts: The justice of right relationship, found primarily in the Bible, includes but exceeds the justice of rendering another her due. With respect to primary justice, the justice of right relationship includes rights but also wide duties. With respect to rectifying justice, the justice of right relationship includes retribution but also other forms of restoring right relationship.

That the justice of right relationship is wider does not mean that it is better. Its width is exactly what worries many of today's defenders of due, especially in the liberal tradition. The full normative argument for this justice is beyond the reach of this essay. It is an argument that is worth pursuing, though, not least because the meaning of justice carries implications for public life.<sup>125</sup> Rawls held that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, and Aquinas thought much the same, regarding justice as the virtue that directs people to the common good.

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<sup>123</sup> On the important role of charity in Aquinas's account of satisfaction, see Daria Spezzano, "Be Imitators of God' (Eph 5:1): Aquinas on Charity and Satisfaction," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 2 (2017): 615–51, at 618.

<sup>124</sup> *ST* III, q. 53, a. 1, corp. For an interpretation of Aquinas that stresses both satisfaction and restoration, see Romanus Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought from St. Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1989), 148–49.

<sup>125</sup> For an exploration of biblical justice conceived as "civic righteousness," see John D. Carlson, "Rights versus Right Order: Two Theological Traditions of Justice and Their Implications for Christian Ethics and Pluralistic Politics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 2 (2016): 79–100.

In broad outline, the argument for biblical justice would contend that such justice overcomes some of the dichotomies associated with the justice of rendering due, especially in its modern liberal incarnation, mentioned in the introduction to this essay.

Against the claim that justice is limited to rights, retribution, and principles linked closely with rights like equality, equity, fairness, and liberty, biblical justice includes wide duties associated with mercy, care, compassion, and the common good. Biblical justice finds an ally in contemporary feminist “care ethics” theorists, who call for a justice that extends beyond rights and includes wide duties to care for the vulnerable.<sup>126</sup>

Against the claim that justice is concerned only with right external action, biblical justice includes right motives and interior virtue. The Scriptures refer to certain persons as “just” or “righteous” to indicate that their heart and their soul are rightly directed to God and to others. While Aquinas stresses that justice is realized through right behavior toward others even in the absence of a right motive, and terms the rightly ordered soul “metaphorical justice,” he nevertheless holds that a just soul is to be sought and is a fruit of justification.<sup>127</sup>

Against the claim that justice is public while other virtues associated with wide duties are apposite only for personal life or civil society, biblical justice encompasses the whole of human interactions and admits of no sharp division between those aspects that are appropriate for politics and those that are not.

Against the claim that peace is a cessation of hostilities and that justice is a separate development, biblical justice understands peace, which the Bible renders most familiarly as *shalom*, as a condition of holistic right relationship, little different from the justice of right relationship conveyed by *sedeq*. A collection of contemporary Christian ethicists place this conception of peace—which one of them has termed “justpeace”—at the center of their thinking about social ethics.<sup>128</sup>

Against the claim that mercy is separate from justice, stands in tension with justice, and means clemency, as when a judge foregoes or reduces

<sup>126</sup> For a Catholic expression of this view, see Elizabeth R. Schiltz, “West, MacIntyre, and Wojtyła: Pope John Paul II’s Contribution to the Development of a Dependency-Based Theory of Justice,” *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* 45 (2006): 369–414.

<sup>127</sup> See *ST II-II*, q. 57, a. 1, corp; q. 58, a. 2, corp.; a. 1.

<sup>128</sup> See, e.g.: John Paul Lederach and R. Scott Appleby, “Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview,” in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–44; Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, 371.

punishment, biblical justice envisions mercy as something far wider—the will to restore all that is broken—and as converging with the justice that restores right relationship. Forgiveness, an expression of mercy, and reconciliation join in this same justice. Political orders who have confronted the past evils of genocide, civil war, and dictatorship in the past generation—South Africa, Germany, Chile, and many others—have frequently hosted a debate between advocates for the restoration of rights-based liberal democracy and judicial punishment for war criminals on one hand, and voices, many of them from Christian churches, proposing reconciliation, mercy and forgiveness, on the other. A similarly conceived “restorative justice,” has been applied to criminal justice in Western countries. While biblical justice does not necessarily reject rights and criminal punishment, it enfolds other measures that make it more holistic.<sup>129</sup>

Thus adumbrated, this defense of biblical justice might be developed further. Critics will demand a clarification of the meaning of this justice for institutions and policy, its compatibility with the limited government of constitutional liberal democracy, and the respective roles of religion and state. For Christians who believe that the Bible communicates “divinely revealed realities,” as the Second Vatican Council’s *Dei Verbum* puts it, the pursuit of this defense must not be shunned. N-V

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<sup>129</sup> I explore this contrast in Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace*, 207–50.





## Can Dead Faith Assent to God? A Brief Reflection on St. Thomas’s Account of the Relationship between Living and Lifeless Faith

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, like many within the Christian tradition, makes a distinction between living and lifeless faith. Living faith is faith that is accompanied by charity, or what St. Paul calls “faith working through love.”<sup>1</sup> Love, or charity, is the form of living faith. This is the faith that enables the believer to be ordered toward and attain their beatifying end, namely, union with the triune Lord. Lifeless faith, on the other hand, is faith that lacks charity. It is what we call, following St. James, “dead” faith.<sup>2</sup> It is to no avail. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, however, as we shall see below, even lifeless faith enables one to assent to the truths of the faith on the basis of the authoritative testimony of the revealing God. That is to say, in lifeless faith the intellect of the believer conforms to the mind of God, at least with respect to the intellect and its object, namely, the true. More specifically, in lifeless faith the intellect is able to assent to the articles of faith as revealed by God and mediated by the Church. In short, lifeless faith, which flows from

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 5:6. Cf. 1 Cor 12 and Jas 2, esp. vv. 20, 26. All scriptural passages come from The New American Bible (NAB).

<sup>2</sup> Jas 2:19. Of course, James also mentions the demons who “believe and tremble.” The belief of demons, which is a kind of faith, and we might even say “dead faith,” is an interesting case. Such “faith” shares certain characteristics with the “dead faith” of human beings. It is not, however, identical to it. While a comparison of human and demonic faith might be theologically fruitful, such concerns lay beyond the scope of this essay. I would like to offer thanks to the reviewer who noted the potential distraction such a discussion might cause here.

the same habit or disposition as living faith, is perfect with respect to the intellect, though imperfect with respect to the will. It assents to God and the articles of faith, though, without charity, which is to say that it assents without loving and living in accordance with that to which assent is given in faith.

Some interpreters have challenged this claim. The late Princeton philosopher Victor Preller maintained that lifeless faith is incapable of conforming the intellect of the believer to the mind of God. Without living faith, one does not and cannot do so.<sup>3</sup> We see this in his rigorous “reformulation” of St. Thomas in *Divine Science and the Science of God*. He notes, “Unless God ‘takes the opportunity’ of infusing the intentional forms of *live faith*, the mind of the ‘believer’ will not be conformed to the being of God.”<sup>4</sup> He suggests that those without living faith “do not refer to God or conform the mind to God. . . . This [conformity] is not done by the communication of intelligible forms, but the ordination of the whole soul, intellect and will, to the Word or Image of God.”<sup>5</sup> Such conformity, insofar as it requires the ordination of both the intellect and the will, obtains only in living faith. A further consequence of Preller’s interpretation is that, without living faith, or what he calls here “live faith,” one cannot even in principle assent to the truth “God exists.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Although Preller may not be widely known in theological circles, his intellectual progeny are. His influence extends, either directly or indirectly, to the work of, for instance, George Lindbeck (*The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox, 1984], esp. 48 and 70n3), Stanley Hauerwas (*With the Grain of the Universe* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001]; “Connections Created and Contingent: Aquinas, Preller, Wittgenstein, and Hopkins,” in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain [London: SCM, 2004], esp. 76), Bruce Marshall (“Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian,” *The Thomist* 53 [1989]: 353–402; “Thomas, Thomisms, and Truth,” *The Thomist* 56 [1992]: 499–524; “Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Aquinas and Luther on Deciding What is True,” *The Thomist* 63 [1999]: 1–48), Eugene Rogers (*Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995]), Fergus Kerr (*After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* [London: Blackwell, 2008]), and D. Stephen Long (*Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009]), to name only a few.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God: A Reformulation of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005 [originally 1967]), 241, (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> Preller, *Divine Science*, 263.

<sup>6</sup> There is no single place where Preller makes this claim. Rather, it is one of the emphases of his entire book. While a consideration of the differences and similarities between the assents of faith and philosophy vis-à-vis the existence of God, and whether those assents intend the same “God,” is important, the present essay

Only believers, which are, for him, only those with living faith, can assent to the truth “God exists.”<sup>7</sup>

There are good reasons, both exegetical and systematic, for thinking that the interpretation of Preller is incorrect on this point. In order to make this clear, the following discussion will be threefold. First, I shall consider St. Thomas’s distinction between Christian *credere*, on the one hand, and other kinds of cognition, namely, *scire* and *opinari*, on the other. This discussion sets forth the principles of faith, the relationship between those principles, and the objects or ends of its act. Second, I shall discuss what, for St. Thomas, is the essential notion of faith, the roles of the intellect and will, and the relationship between the theological virtue of charity and this essential notion. This discussion maintains, following St. Thomas, that the essential notion of faith resides primarily in the intellect, being perfective of it, whether or not it is accompanied by charity. Moreover, the will-act that is a part of faith is not charity, but a prior or preexistent (and graced) will-act that is further elevated and perfected by charity. So, while charity perfects faith (and its prior will-act), it does not constitute faith. With or without charity, faith heals the believer from unbelief vis-à-vis God and the truths of faith. Lastly, third, I shall consider an obvious interpretive difficulty with the preceding analysis, namely, St. Thomas’s explicit designation of charity as the “form” of faith. This discussion will clarify further the relationship between faith and charity, as well as the roles of the intellect and the will in living and lifeless faith, and in particular, how charity is an extrinsic rather than an intrinsic form of faith. Ultimately, we shall see that even dead faith, faith without charity, heals the intellect of unbelief, allowing one to assent to God and the articles of faith, though, without the perfection brought by the advent of charity.

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is concerned only with the differences and similarities between the assents of living and lifeless faith. For a discussion of the former, see my essay “*Infideles et Philosophi*: Re-Reading *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 2 (2017): 653–73.

<sup>7</sup> D. Stephen Long makes similar claims. For instance, he states: “Without the theological virtues [charity among them], there is no knowledge of God because there is no conformity to God” (*Speaking of God*, 143). Also, Long argues, though less clearly, that “the defect in any knowledge of God that lacks the formal object and the will’s movement, finally lacks true knowledge of God altogether” (41). Admittedly, there is an ambiguity in Long’s language. What he means by “the will’s movement” is unclear. If he intends to identify the will’s movement with charity, then his claim is strong, and effectively the same as Preller’s. If, however, he simply means that the will is involved in the assent of faith, and not necessarily identical to charity, then his claim is weaker and potentially compatible with what follows.

### Christian Faith: Its Principles and Objects

In each of his major treatments of faith, in order to show what faith is, St. Thomas begins with a discussion of what faith is not. He offers more or less the same analysis in the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae* [ST], his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, his commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, and *De veritate*.<sup>8</sup> Although these treatments vary in length and in detail, certain aspects worthy of consideration appear in each. In particular, in each treatment, St. Thomas distinguishes at least three kinds of cognition or acts of assent to truth, namely, scientific knowing (*scire*), opining (*opinari*), and believing (*credere*).<sup>9</sup> The first kind of act of assent is knowledge in the strict sense. This is *scientia*, or the knowledge of vision, in which the intellect is moved to assent to the truth of the object by the object itself. One sees that it is so, either immediately or mediately through demonstration. In these instances, there is not, in the immediate context, an aspect of choice. The intellect sees and assents.<sup>10</sup> The truth is, in a sense, for forced upon it. As St. Thomas notes, in the case of demonstration, "The assent of science is not subject to free-will, because the scientist is obliged to assent by force of the demonstration."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the truth of science cannot be otherwise. It is necessary that it be the case. In his commentary on the *Posterior analytics*, he states, "What we know scientifically is necessary, i.e., . . . it cannot be otherwise."<sup>12</sup> In short, then, *scientia*, according to St. Thomas, names a kind of intellectual

<sup>8</sup> See: *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 2, a. 1, resp.; *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.; *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 558); *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

<sup>9</sup> In this context, St. Thomas sometimes discusses doubt (*dubitare*) and suspicion (*suspicere*), but they need not detain us here.

<sup>10</sup> The relationship between the intellect and the will, even in scientific knowing, is complex. The will plays a role, of course, in the intellect's attending to a given phenomenon or demonstration. The claim here is rather simple. Having attended to a phenomenon or demonstration, the intellect does not, at this point, assent to the relevant truths as a matter of choice. One may not have attended to this phenomenon or demonstration. This is a matter of the will. Also, one may choose to ignore the import of the phenomenon or demonstration. This is a matter of the will. This does not, for St. Thomas, implicate the will in the moment of vision, however. Much more could be said, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of the present essay.

<sup>11</sup> ST II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad 2. All English translations of ST come from *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981). See also: ST II-II, q. 1, a. 5, sc; q. 1, a. 4, resp.

<sup>12</sup> *In I ana. post.*, lec. 4. All English translations of *In ana. post.* come from *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, trans. Richard Berquist (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox, 2007).

assent that sees—because it is moved by the object itself (immediately or mediately through demonstration)—and certain—because such truths could not be otherwise.

*Opinari* is much different from *scientia*. For St. Thomas, one who merely opines about a truth has a tendency toward one side of a contrary, that is, the affirmation or denial of a truth. Consider the proposition “Thomas Aquinas is a saint.” To affirm this is to fall to one side of the contrary, while to deny it is to fall to the other. Now, the assent of opinion is given without vision or sight of its truth. One has seen the object of assent neither immediately nor mediately through demonstration. As such, opinion is a weak adherence that lacks the certainty of *scientia*. As St. Thomas states, “A man whose mind holds a conclusion without knowing how it is proved, has not scientific knowledge, but merely an opinion about it.”<sup>13</sup> Further, “The inclination [of opinion] does not move the understanding enough to determine it fully to one of the members [of a contrary]. . . . It accepts one member, but always has doubts about the other.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, “[The intellect] opines, if it has a reason for one side, not altogether resting the intellect, but with fear of the other side.”<sup>15</sup> Opinion, then, is a tendency toward assent, but involving neither certainty nor firm adherence.

A key difference between scientific knowledge and opinion is the role of the will. Because the intellect is not moved immediately—or mediately through demonstration—by the object itself, the intellect is not “obliged” to assent, as in the case of *scientia*. In order to assent, the intellect must be moved by a command of the will. As St. Thomas notes, in such cases, “[The intellect] turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other.”<sup>16</sup> In short, then, opinion names a kind of intellectual assent moved by the will to one side of a contrary, which is, because it lacks vision of the object itself, uncertain and held only tentatively, even fearfully. This makes it, for St. Thomas, an entirely distinct kind of cognition or intellectual assent from *scientia*.

*Crederere* is, for St. Thomas, a kind of middle position between scientific knowledge and opinion. In his various discussions, he makes a distinction between the general notion of believing and specifically Christian believing: “We distinguish the virtue of faith [i.e., Christian faith] from faith

<sup>13</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 3, resp.

<sup>14</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp. All English translations of *De veritate* come from *Truth*, trans. James V. McGlynn, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 558). All English translations of *Super Heb* come from *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). See also: *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 1, resp.; *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.

<sup>16</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, resp. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

commonly so called, which has no reference to the beatitude we hope for.”<sup>17</sup>

Before specifying Christian faith, let us first consider the general notion of believing. As a middle position, it shares characteristics with both the act of *scire* and the act of *opinari*. Like opinion but unlike scientific knowledge, *credere* or believing is an act of assent in which the intellect is not moved by the object itself. The believer does not see the truth in itself (immediately or mediately). Regarding this lack of vision, St. Thomas notes, “With opinion it [belief] shares the fact that it has to do with matters that are not clear to the mind, in which respect it differs from science and understanding.”<sup>18</sup> The believer “does not know it by demonstration.”<sup>19</sup> Because the object remains unseen, the intellect cannot be moved to assent by the object. Therefore, as with opinion, the intellect must be moved to assent by a command of the will. Regarding the role of the will, St. Thomas describes belief or faith in general as that “situation [in which] our understanding is determined by the will, which chooses to assent to one side definitely and precisely because of something which is enough to move the will, though not enough to move the understanding.”<sup>20</sup> As in opinion, then, in *credere*, the intellect is moved by the will to assent to something of itself unseen by the intellect.

As noted, according to St. Thomas, in an act of *credere*, the intellect is not moved by the will to assent for any reason whatsoever; rather it is moved on the basis of authoritative testimony. Believing the testimony of others is both good and reasonable. As St. Thomas notes, “This [belief] may happen when someone believes what another says because it seems fitting or useful to do so.”<sup>21</sup> Believing can, in certain cases, provide more certainty than one’s own knowledge is able to provide. St. Thomas observes, “Other things being equal, vision is more certain than hearing. But if the person from whom someone hears greatly surpasses the seer’s sight hearing is more certain than sight.”<sup>22</sup> One context in which St. Thomas helpfully emphasizes the act of *credere* is in teaching and learning. In his commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, he states, “We . . . see this in the liberal sciences, which, if a person wishes to learn them, he must first accept their princi-

<sup>17</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 1, resp.

<sup>18</sup> *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. All English translations of *In Boet. de Trin.* come from *Faith, Reason, and Theology*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5, resp.

<sup>20</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

<sup>21</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

<sup>22</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 8, ad 2.



ples, which he must believe when they are delivered to him by the teacher.<sup>23</sup> In order to learn, a student must assent to truths communicated by the teacher, not because the student sees their truth, at least, not initially, but because of the authoritative testimony of the teacher. The will is moved in such cases to trust that which is received, though without seeing the object in which assent terminates. In fact, according to St. Thomas, we believe a great deal about the world based on authority or the expertise of an authoritative witness: "Because in human society one person must make use of another just as he does himself in matters in which he is not self-sufficient, he must take his stand on what another knows and is unknown to himself, just as he does on what he himself knows. As a consequence, faith is necessary in human society, one person believing what another says."<sup>24</sup>

Having considered the ways *credere* is like opinion, let us consider the ways it is like *scire*. Like scientific knowledge but unlike opinion, believing is an act of assent that is relatively certain and firm. As noted above, in cases when our own knowledge is limited, believing the authoritative testimony of another can provide more certainty than one might otherwise have. Having such certainty, the intellect can adhere to the truths received from another more firmly than it can on the basis of what is personally known. St. Thomas notes that in belief "[the intellect] cleaves firmly to one side, in which belief has something in common with science and understanding."<sup>25</sup> Further, he describes *credere* as an act of assent given with "certainty and no fear of the other side."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, "With science and understanding it [belief] has in common unerring and firm assent."<sup>27</sup> The certainty and firmness with which one believes, of course, depends on the greater or lesser authority of the testimony on the basis of which the will moves the intellect to assent. The more reliable the authority, the more certain one can be, and consequently, the more firmly one can assent.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 557). Cf. *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.: "Every science has presuppositions which the learner must believe."

<sup>24</sup> *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. Josef Pieper notes, "A community in which men did not dare talk to one another with impunity or to meet each other in ordinary situations with trust and belief would be something inhuman. In such a community, men would be robbed of the uniquely human possibility of one man's participating, by listening, in another's possession of reality" (*Faith, Hope, Love* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], 82).

<sup>25</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 1, resp.

<sup>26</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 4, resp.

<sup>27</sup> *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.

<sup>28</sup> Of course, the reverse is true as well. The less reliable the authority, the less certain and weaker the assent.

According to St. Thomas, then, believing is an act of assent in which, as in opinion, the intellect is moved by the will. It is also like opinion insofar as the object remains unseen. On the other hand, insofar as the movement of the will is motivated by authoritative testimony, its act of assent is, like that in scientific knowing, certain and firm, at least in proportion to the reliability of the authority.

Christian faith, according to St. Thomas, is a specification of *credere* in general. Like faith in general, it is an act of assent to something unseen in which the intellect is moved by the will on the basis of authoritative testimony. In the case of Christian faith, however, the will does not move the intellect on the basis of just any authority, but rather, it moves the intellect to assent based on the authority of the revealing God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. As St. Thomas observes, “This choice [of faith] rests on God’s authority.”<sup>29</sup>

Now, as a kind of *credere*, or faith in general, for St. Thomas, Christian “faith is a mean between science and opinion.”<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, Christian faith assents to truths revealed by an authority who cannot deceive or be deceived, namely, God, and with certainty and firmness. As such, the assent of Christian faith is like scientific knowledge, but unlike opinion. As St. Thomas notes, “[The truths of Christianity are] delivered to them [believers] by way of faith, being told to them, as it were by God himself who cannot lie.”<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Christian faith is an act of assent in which the intellect is moved by the will and to an object that remains unseen. As such, the assent of Christian faith is like opinion, but not like scientific knowledge. St. Thomas states, “On God’s authority the intellect is convinced about things it does not see.”<sup>32</sup> Because, in Christian faith, the intellect does not see their truth in itself (immediately or mediately through demonstration), the intellect must be moved by the will to assent.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, lacking any compulsion, the intellect must, like opinion, be moved by a command of the will to assent to what remains

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<sup>29</sup> *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 558). See John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 162: “Propositions believed as part of faith are believed on the basis of divine authority.”

<sup>30</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 2, sc.

<sup>31</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4, resp. For further discussion of how the fact that God cannot lie places the reliability of God beyond reproach, see q. 6, a. 1, resp., and *In III sent.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 558).

<sup>33</sup> As Roger Aubert notes, “The truth of the propositions for belief do not impose themselves on the [believer]” (Roger Aubert, *Le problème de l’acte de foi* [Louvain, Belgium: Warny, 1958], 49 [translation mine]).

unseen, and based on the authoritative testimony of the revealing God, which, like scientific knowledge, provides grounds for certain and firm adherence.

Having established that Christian faith, as an act of *credere*, involves both the intellect and the will as its principles, it will be helpful to consider these principles (and their objects) in more detail. Following the tradition, and St. Augustine in particular, St. Thomas articulates the Christian account of *credere* as threefold. He observes that, because an act of *credere* involves both the intellect and the will, “The object of faith can be considered either on the part of the intellect, or on the part of the will that moves the intellect.”<sup>34</sup> Because the act of Christian faith involves both principles, however, it might be considered in three ways. St. Thomas states:

One of these is the material object of faith, and in this way an act of faith is *to believe in God* [*credere Deum*]. . . . The other is the formal aspect of the object, for it is as the medium on account of which we assent to such and such a point of faith; and thus an act of faith is *to believe God* [*credere Deo*], since . . . the formal object of faith is the First Truth, to Which man gives his adhesion, so as to assent for Its sake to whatever he believes. Thirdly, if the object of faith be considered in so far as the intellect is moved by the will, an act of faith is *to believe unto God* [*credere in Deum*]. For the First Truth is referred to the will, through having the aspect of an end.<sup>35</sup>

First, the act of faith concerns certain material content or the material object of faith, namely, God and all things as they relate to God and expressed in the articles of faith. This is what St. Thomas calls *credere Deum*: “to believe that God . . .” These articles include “God became incarnate,” “Christ redeemed us,” “Christ forgives sins,” and the like.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

<sup>35</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, resp. For similar discussions of these distinctions among *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*, see: *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 3 (Marietti no. 901); *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, ad 7; *Super Rom* 4, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 327); *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qc 2, resp. Assent might occur based on other circumstances. As Pieper observes, “Someone may accept the doctrines of Christianity as truth, *not* because they are witnessed and warranted by the revealing Logos of God, but because he is impressed by their ‘coherence,’ because the boldness and depth of the conception fascinate him, because those doctrines fit in with his own speculations on the mystery of the universe” (*Faith, Hope, Love*, 30–31). As we shall see, such assent is assent otherwise than by faith.

<sup>36</sup> See *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 1, resp.: “If . . . we consider materially the things to which faith

These are the truths to which the intellect assents.

Second, the act of faith, insofar as it is based on the authoritative testimony of God, is an act of assent to the revealing God. He is the formal object of faith, the motivation for which the will moves the intellect to assent. Or, as St. Thomas notes, God is the “medium on account of which” one assents to the material object of faith. The formal object is God alone, and under the aspect of First Truth. This is what St. Thomas calls *credere Deo*: “to believe God.” According to him, in this act, “the intellect is fixed, so that it clings firmly to the things of faith and assents to them with the greatest certainty.”<sup>37</sup> God is the revealer on the basis of which the intellect assents.

In order to clarify this distinction between the material and formal object of faith, consider an analogous instance of the general notion of faith. A good and trusted friend tells you that he saw Bob Dylan at the local fast-food restaurant today. Because it is a good and trusted friend who relays this information and you know that she is neither joking around nor hallucinating, one has good grounds for the will to move the intellect to assent to the truth of “Bob Dylan was at the local fast-food restaurant today.” *What* is believed is “Bob Dylan was at the local fast-food restaurant today.” This is the material object of your belief. It is the content or matter to which you give assent. Because you lack vision of its truth, however, your intellect must be moved to assent by a command of the will on the basis of something else, namely, the authoritative testimony of one you believe to be your good and trusted friend. They are the *medium* through which you come to believe. This is the formal object of your belief.<sup>38</sup> In short,

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assents, they include not only God, but also many other things, which, nevertheless, do not come under the assent of faith, except as bearing some relation to God, in as much as, to wit, through certain effects of the divine operation, man is helped on his journey towards the enjoyment of God.” A great deal more could be said here. The matters of faith are diverse, and St. Thomas is sure to distinguish between primary and secondary objects of faith, as well as certain presuppositions, namely, the so-called preambles. A complete discussion of these, while important, is beyond our concern here. For discussions of primary and secondary objects of faith in St. Thomas, see, for instance; *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 1, resp.; q. 2, a. 5, resp.; q. 8, a. 2, resp.; q. 11, a. 2, resp. For discussions of the preambles, see: *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.; *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 3, resp.; a. 4, sc.; I, q. 2, a. 2, resp.; *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 3, no. 2; *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti nos. 560 and 577); *In sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, sc; a. 2, sc.

<sup>37</sup> *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 558).

<sup>38</sup> There is, of course, the distinction between the formal object by which (*quo*) and the formal object which (*quod*). Here, my primary concern is the formal object *quo*. A discussion of the distinction between this and the formal object *quod* will

you believe what your friend has said (material object) on the basis of their authoritative testimony (formal object). Christian faith is something analogous to this. The believer assents to the truths of faith (material object) on the basis of the authoritative testimony of the revealing God (formal object.)

The first aspect and second aspect of the one act of faith primarily pertains to the intellect and its assent to its proper object, the true, but more specifically, in this case, the articles of faith. The third aspect of the act of faith, on the other hand, primarily concerns the will. More specifically, this third aspect pertains to the will's tendency toward God under the formal aspect of its object—namely, the good, and in this case, God as beatifying end.<sup>39</sup> This is what St. Thomas calls *credere in Deum*: “to believe unto God.” Although St. Thomas has not yet offered his discussion of the significance of the virtue of charity for this threefold understanding of the act of faith, it is clear that what he has in mind is living faith.<sup>40</sup> In “living faith,” which is to say, faith formed by charity, the will of the believer tends toward God in love as beatifying end. In order not merely to believe the object of faith, but to love that object as well, the will must be quickened by charity. As we shall see, because the perfection of the virtue of faith requires the perfection of both principles of faith—the intellect and the will—charity must be present in order that the threefold act of the perfect virtue of faith obtain.

In summary, for St. Thomas, the act of Christian faith is an act of *credere*. On the one hand, like opinion but unlike scientific knowledge, in faith, the intellect is moved by a command of the will on the basis of the authoritative testimony. In the case of Christian faith, the intellect of the believer assents to the truths of faith moved by the will on the basis of the authoritative testimony of the revealing God. Further, as in opinion but not in scientific knowledge, in faith, that to which assent is given remains unseen. The truths of faith, as supernatural and beyond the natural human capacities, are seen neither immediately nor mediately seen, and require the movement of the will in order for the assent of the intellect. On the other hand, as in scientific knowledge but not in opinion, the believer

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have to be left to another day.

<sup>39</sup> Mark D. Jordan describes this third aspect of the act of faith as “believing for the sake of attaining God as one’s last end, as the goal of one’s willing” (*On Faith: Summa Theologiae 2-2, qq. 1–16 of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Mark D. Jordan [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990], 69n14). See also Aubert, *Le problème*, 58.

<sup>40</sup> See below for a discussion of the significance or insignificance of the presence of charity for the essential notion of faith.

assents to truths that are certain and to which firm adherence is given. In the case of Christian faith, the believer assents to the truths of faith as certain and does so firmly, because they are revealed by the God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. The Christian act of *credere*, then, has two principles, namely, the intellect and the will. It is an act constituted by an act of the will moving the intellect to assent to the truths of faith (*credere Deum*)—which remain unseen—on the basis of the authoritative testimony of the revealing God (*credere Deo*)—and as such, with certainty and firm adherence—and as a perfect virtue, it is ordered to the attainment of beatitude, namely, loving and living unto God (*credere in Deum*).

### The Essential Notion of Faith

As an act of *credere*, again, the act of Christian faith involves two principles, namely, the intellect and the will. St. Thomas will articulate the essential notion of faith with this in mind. As such, he considers the role of both. Now, because any human act is specified by its object or end, and because there are two principles of action in the act of faith, we must consider the act of faith in relation to both principles and their respective ends, but under two distinct *rationes*. More specifically, because the object or end of the intellect is the true and the object or end of the will is the good, we must consider the human act of faith as it relates to both ends. As we shall see, though, only one end is essential, according to St. Thomas, to the notion of faith, while the other is not.

In order to help us here, let us consider the role of the will in faith. For St. Thomas, there are two acts of the will to consider. In the *ST* II-II, he notes, “Some act of the will is required before faith, but not an act of the will informed by charity. This latter act presupposes faith, because the will cannot tend to God with perfect love, unless the intellect possesses right faith about Him.”<sup>41</sup> In his commentary on the *Sentences*, St. Thomas maintains, “It should be said that faith, as such, precedes charity, since the act of will that is required for faith [namely, to be willing to believe] is able

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<sup>41</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 7, ad 5. Cf. *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 2, a. 5. Romanus Cessario observes, “Even though this initial will-act does not result in the grace of justification, this first movement of the will toward belief depends on divine help, which theological usage identifies as an actual grace” (Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996], 138). Cessario also notes, “Catholic teaching states that the initial act of belief as an effective assent to God’s word depends on a movement of divine grace, though in the adult this initial grace does not equal a full infusion of habitual or sanctifying grace that charity alone produces” (139).

to exist without charity.<sup>42</sup> Further, he notes, “Charity, when it comes, is said to form the preexistent faith,” and its preexistent will-act.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, St. Thomas observes, “But because nothing can be loved unless it is known, for the love of charity a knowledge of God is first required. And because this is above nature, there is required, first of all, faith which is concerned with things not seen.”<sup>44</sup> There is the act of the will by which the intellect is moved to assent to the truths of faith. This act of the will is essential to the notion of faith. It is not, however, identical to the charity, or the act of the will by which the believer tends toward God as beatifying end. The act of the will that is essential to the notion of faith is, in fact, presupposed by charity. Charity requires that this other act of the will preexist in faith, at least logically.

Whether or not it is accompanied by charity, and, according to St. Thomas, prior to it, an act of the will leads to the assent of the intellect to God as First Truth (*credere Deum* and *credere Deo*). Without charity, however, this faith does not tend toward God as beloved and beatifying end (*credere in Deum*). As Michael Sherwin states, “Faith’s act requires an act of the will. Charity elevates this voluntary component of faith

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<sup>42</sup> *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa 1, ad 1. Cf. a. 4, qa 3, resp.: “unformed faith preexists [charity].”

<sup>43</sup> *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 4, qa 3, ad 3. When discussing the relationship between faith and charity, there is a distinction between logical priority and chronological priority. The former obtains in every instance. Faith, and the will-act proper to it, is always logically prior to charity. Charity presupposes the will-act proper to faith, what Michael Sherwin calls an “appetitive component” in faith that, as I argue below, is healed and elevated, though not constituted, by charity. The latter (chronological priority) does not obtain in every instance. The effects of salvific grace, in which faith, hope, and charity, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are infused in the believer, occur simultaneously. In such cases, faith remains logically prior, as a presupposition of charity, though not chronologically prior. Nevertheless, faith is not constituted by charity, but infused *with* charity. Faith becomes chronologically prior in the case of those who, for instance, having previously received faith and charity, have fallen into mortal sin, but having repented, having done penance, receive anew the virtue of charity. In that case, faith, which is always logically prior, chronologically precedes charity as that which is lifeless receiving life, unformed receiving form. What follows is concerned with both, and the context should signal which aspect is being considered.

<sup>44</sup> *Super 1 Cor* 13, lec. 4 (Marietti no. 806). All English translations of *Super 1 Cor* come from *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 4: “Faith precedes charity in regard to the merely cognitional element of faith.”



and brings it to perfection.<sup>45</sup> Sherwin also observes, “In Saint Thomas’ view, charity’s act presupposes and depends on conceptual knowledge in the intellect. It presupposes faith’s knowledge of charity’s proper object, God.”<sup>46</sup> The act of the will essential to faith, then, is not charity. The command of the will in faith is presupposed by charity. The virtue of charity perfects this prior act of the will.

None of this suggests that the prior act of the will presupposed, elevated, and perfected by charity is not grace. It is quite the opposite. Because faith involves both the intellect and the will, there is a twofold grace. These graces that pertain to both the intellect and the will. Of course, faith concerns those things that are disproportionate to the capacities of the light of natural human reason. In order for the intellect to assent to the truths of faith, then, God must offer a further light beyond the natural light of reason. This is called the light of faith (*lumen fidei*). As St. Thomas states, “By the light of faith...a man assents to matters of faith and not to those which are against faith.”<sup>47</sup> By virtue of the grace of the light of faith, the intellect is healed and elevated such that it can now assent to truths that are beyond the reach of its natural capacities. Having been “enlightened by faith,”<sup>48</sup> the believer has the eyes to see the credibility of what has been proposed for belief, not by the sight of science and demonstration, but by the sight of the one in whom they believe, the authoritative and trustworthy God who reveals.

While the first aspect of preparation of grace in faith pertains to the intellect, a second involves the will. It too needs healing and elevation that it might rightly and effectively command the intellect to assent to the truths of faith based on the authoritative witness of God. The fallen will must be turned back toward God. More specifically, it must be given a divine instinct (*instinctus*) that it might tend toward the things of God.<sup>49</sup> As Sherwin states, “Aquinas describes God’s action on the will in faith as an *instinctus*, . . . ‘the interior *instinctus* to believe.’”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 163.

<sup>46</sup> Sherwin, 147. See also 161, 203, and 154: “Faith has priority in revealing the object [to charity].”

<sup>47</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2, resp.

<sup>48</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2.

<sup>49</sup> For an interesting discussion of the light of faith and the divine *instinctus*, especially vis-à-vis Max Seckler, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, vol. 2, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), esp. 32–58.

<sup>50</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 144. See also Cessario, *Christian Faith and*

In faith, the intellect, enabled by the grace of the *lumen fidei*, assents to the truths of faith by a command of the will, enabled by the grace of the “divine *instinctus*.” As Sherwin observes, “In Aquinas’s mature theology of faith, . . . faith both imparts a higher cognitive light, which is a fuller participation in the divine light, and a higher appetitive inclination, which is a fuller participation in the divine *instinctus*.”<sup>51</sup> We must be clear, again, that the *instinctus* of the will in faith is not identical with the theological virtue of charity. It is a prior act of the will present in faith that is presupposed by charity. Sherwin remarks, “Aquinas regards charity as perfecting the appetitive component of faith.”<sup>52</sup> This appetitive component is the graced divine *instinctus*. Sherwin continues, “Faith’s act requires an act of the will. Charity elevates this voluntary component of faith and brings it to perfection.”<sup>53</sup> According to Sherwin, and following St. Thomas, this “voluntary component of faith” is not charity, but rather, it is preexistent and presupposed by charity. It is that which charity elevates and perfects.<sup>54</sup>

In this context, it will be helpful to distinguish between the habit of faith and the perfect virtue of faith. The perfect virtue requires charity. The habit does not, however. The habit of faith is the same in both. St. Thomas states, “What pertains to the will [i.e., charity], does not pertain directly to faith, so as to be able to differentiate the habit of faith. But the distinction of living from lifeless faith is in respect of something pertaining to the will, that is, charity, and not in respect of something pertaining to the intellect. Therefore, living and lifeless faith are not distinct habits.”<sup>55</sup>

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*the Theological Life*, 134. Similarly, Benoit Duroux observes, “It is necessary to stop at this very important idea, namely, interior movement, and see how St. Thomas conceives and explains it. Among the terms employed to designate it, those of ‘interior motion,’ ‘instinct,’ ‘inclination of the heart,’ signify the impressed impulse on the affectivity” (Benoit Duroux, *La psychologie de la foi chez saint Thomas d’Aquin* [Paris: Têqui, 1963], 99 [translation mine]).

<sup>51</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 145. See *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 9, ad 3.

<sup>52</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 121.

<sup>53</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 163.

<sup>54</sup> Sherwin maintains, I think rightly, “Faith itself has an appetitive component. Thus, stated more accurately, charity’s priority consists in elevating the appetitive component of faith’s own act” (*By Knowledge and By Love*, 154n31).

<sup>55</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, resp. Here, St. Thomas also explicitly states, “Living and lifeless faith are one and the same habit.” For St. Thomas’s other discussions of living and lifeless faith, see *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qc 3; d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, qc 2, ad 2; q. 1, a. 2, ad 4; *ST III*, q. 49, a. 1, ad 5; q. 68, a. 4, ad 3. Recall, the act of faith, both living and lifeless, does involve an act of the will enabled by grace, namely, the divine *instinctus*. This act of the will, however, is not identical to the act informed by charity. Charity, again, presupposes the will-act or appetitive component already

The presence or absence of charity is not, for St. Thomas, the determining form of faith qua faith. Faith remains faith with or without charity.<sup>56</sup>

Recall that faith, according to St. Thomas, has two principles, namely, the intellect and the will. The habit of faith, and not the perfect virtue, perfects the former, though not (without charity) the latter. As St. Thomas states, “Faith resides in the speculative intellect.”<sup>57</sup> Also, he remarks, “To believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is ‘the true,’ which pertains properly to the intellect. Consequently, faith which is the proper principle of that act, must needs reside in the intellect.”<sup>58</sup> The intellect assents to the truths of faith by virtue of the habit of faith. In faith, the intellect is perfect with respect to its object, namely, the true. As St. Thomas observes, “Lifeless faith, though it is not simply perfect with the perfection of a virtue, is, nevertheless, perfect with the perfection that suffices for the essential notion of faith.”<sup>59</sup> Following St. Thomas, Joseph Wawrykow notes as much, saying that lifeless faith is “perfective of the intellect.”<sup>60</sup> It assents to the Trinity, the Incarnation, that Christ redeems, that in Christ we are forgiven, and so on. Because faith is immediately an act of the intellect, and not the will, even lifeless faith can assent to the true, which is its object, and in particular, the truths of faith. Both living and lifeless faith do this.

What difference does charity make, then? Faith formed by charity, namely, living faith, is a perfect virtue. It is perfective of both principles of faith, intellect and will. As such, it both assents to the truths of faith and loves that to which it assents. Nonetheless, lifeless faith is, according to St. Thomas, perfect in its primary subject, namely, the intellect. It has the

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present in the act of faith.

<sup>56</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 4, resp. St. Thomas also remarks, “Living and lifeless faith do not differ specifically, as though they belonged to different species” (a. 5, ad 3). Cf.: *De veritate*, q. 14, aa. 5–7; *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, aa. 1 and 4. See also *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa 3, sc 1: “Habits are diversified by acts and objects. But formed and unformed faith do not differ with respect to the proper object of faith, which is the first Truth. Therefore, formed and unformed faith do not differ in species.” Preller seems to admit that the habit of living and lifeless faith is the same. Yet, he also seems to overlook the significance of St. Thomas’s account of this identity (*Divine Science*, 262).

<sup>57</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>58</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 2, resp. Cf. *Super Heb* 11, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 558); *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>59</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 2, ad 1.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 292.

same habit of faith as living faith.

We must be careful here, however. In the case of lifeless faith, it is perfective of only one principle of faith, namely, the intellect, and not the other, namely, the will. The latter exists only in faith formed by charity. The relationship between living and lifeless faith is not, according to St. Thomas, the relationship between success and failure vis-à-vis the true. Rather, it is a relationship of perfect to imperfect. This is important to note. St. Thomas states, “For formed faith, assents to first truth with a perfect will, whereas formless faith *does the same* with an imperfect will.”<sup>61</sup> Also, “Living and lifeless faith do not differ specifically, as though they belonged to different species. But they differ as perfect and imperfect within the same species.”<sup>62</sup> Note, again, for St. Thomas, both formed faith (i.e., faith accompanied by charity) and unformed faith (i.e., faith without charity) do “the same” thing, namely, assent to God and the truths of faith. Because this “same” thing pertains only to one principle of faith, lifeless faith is imperfect. To be perfect, it requires charity. So, the issue is not about whether or not one is perfect with respect to both principles of faith, intellect and will, but rather, whether or not one is perfect with respect to that which enables the intellect to assent to God and the truths of faith. Both living and lifeless faith do this. They do they “same” thing, one perfectly and the other imperfectly.

The same habit is shared by living and lifeless faith. The acts of each, however, are different. One is perfect with respect to the intellect alone (lifeless faith), while the other is perfect with respect to both the intellect and the will (living faith). The former is imperfect absolutely, but perfect with respect to the intellect, namely, its attainment of its object or end, the true, such that its assents to God and the truths of faith. The latter is perfect absolutely, with respect to both the intellect and the will such that it both assents to God and the truths of faith and loves that to which it assents. This is the perfection of virtue.

The perfect virtue of faith, then, requires perfection in both the intellect and the will. Though it has what is required to be “perfective of the intellect,” lifeless faith does not have what is required for the perfection of both principles of faith. St. Thomas states, “The act of faith will be perfect, if the will is perfected by the habit of charity and the intellect by the habit

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<sup>61</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, resp. (emphasis added). See also q. 14, a. 7, ad 6: “They are as perfect [i.e., formed faith], which attains to the character of the genus, and the imperfect [i.e., formless faith], which has not yet attained to it.” Cf. *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa 3 and ad 1.

<sup>62</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 5, ad 3.

of faith, but not if the habit of charity is lacking. Consequently, faith formed by charity is a virtue, but not unformed faith.<sup>63</sup> Because lifeless faith lacks charity, it lacks the tendency toward God in love and as beatifying end. Because it does not love that to which it assents, which is to say, it is not perfect in both principles (intellect and will), it cannot be perfect as a virtue. Living faith, on the other hand, does love that to which it assents, and as such, is the perfect virtue of faith. Again, living faith is perfective of both principles, unlike lifeless faith, which is perfective, as faith, of only one, namely, the intellect with respect to the true.

This account seems to undermine Preller's claim that only living faith, or what he calls "live faith,"<sup>64</sup> conforms the intellect to the true—in this case, God and the truths of faith. St. Thomas maintains that even those with lifeless faith are perfect with respect to the intellect, and as such, they are able to assent to God and the truths of faith. He is able to make such claims because he distinguishes between the two principles and their respective objects or ends. St. Thomas has space to consider the possibility that the intellect attains its end—namely, the true—without the will being ordered toward or attaining its end, which is the good, as loved. Because Preller articulates it in terms of a packaged deal—in which case conformity obtains only if both the intellect and the will are perfected—he cannot admit an instance in which only one principle is perfected while the other is not. In the case of lifeless faith, which lacks perfection with respect to the will, because it does not love that to which it assents, it cannot count as conformity. It does not even seem to count as assent to truth. Preller cannot conceive of the possibility that lifeless faith might conform the intellect to truth—and as such, to God—while the will does not conform to God as beatifying end. And yet, St. Thomas clearly does conceive it and affirm it.

We should be clear here about what St. Thomas is not saying, however. He is not claiming that lifeless faith is meritorious or salvific. Lifeless faith is not. In *De veritate*, St. Thomas states very clearly, "No act can be meritorious and acceptable to God unless it proceeds from love [which is to say, charity]."<sup>65</sup> Lifeless faith is an act that does not proceed from love; it lacks charity. As such, it is neither meritorious nor salvific. One with

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<sup>63</sup> *Super Rom* 1, lec. 6 (Marietti no. 106). All English translations of *Super Rom* come from *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> Preller, *Divine Science*, 241.

<sup>65</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, sc 3. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad 1; *In 1 Cor* 8, lec. 1 (Marietti nos. 423 and 426).

lifeless faith believes, but they do not love what (and who) they believe. As Wawrykow observes, “It may be that the person never receives the charity that would form faith to God as beatifying end. That person will simply believe and do so on the basis of God’s authority, but to no good, saving effect.”<sup>66</sup> In claiming that charity is not determinative of faith’s assent to the truths of faith, then, the issue is not about the merit of lifeless faith, of which there is none. One is not justified apart from charity. Rather, it is about assent to the truths of faith, through grace, but in the case of lifeless faith, without loving and possibly attaining that which is believed.

At this point, in order to drive the point home, I would like to highlight an especially enlightening quote from St. Thomas regarding faith and charity: “He who receives faith from God without charity, is healed from unbelief [*sanatur ab infidelitate*], not entirely (because the sin of his previous unbelief is not removed) but in part, namely, in the point of ceasing from committing such and such a sin.”<sup>67</sup> He clearly affirms that even faith without charity heals from unbelief. That is to say, even lifeless faith attains truth, and in particular, the truths of faith.<sup>68</sup> Note, however, that he does seem to qualify this claim. The relevant healing is only “in part.” This might give us pause, but it need not. Insofar as the fault or blame (*culpa*) of previous unbelief remains, the healing is partial. The fault of previous unbelief is not, without charity and sanctifying grace, removed. This is true. With respect to the current assent of the intellect, however, those with lifeless faith are healed from unbelief, and moreover, it is a gift. Lifeless faith enabled by grace heals the believer such that they assent to God and the truths of faith. In this context, it is difficult to understand how, *pace* Preller, healing from unbelief could be taken seriously if lifeless faith did not conform the mind of the believer to the mind of God. Lifeless faith, for St. Thomas, heals from unbelief, conforms the intellect to the true, and as such, faith conforms the mind of the believer to the source of truth, namely, God.<sup>69</sup> Again, this alone does not remove the guilt of previ-

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<sup>66</sup> Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 293.

<sup>67</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>68</sup> Note that what it means to be healed from “unbelief,” which is to say, to no longer be an *infidels*, is simply what it means to have faith. Those healed from unbelief, have the grace of faith.

<sup>69</sup> The claim that lifeless faith conforms to the mind of God should not be surprising, nor problematic, as it seems to be for Preller and others, like D. Stephen Long. All cognition of truth, whether natural or supernatural, is a participation in God’s knowledge, because it is true, and God knows it. If natural cognition of truth is a participation in God’s own knowledge, which seems to entail a kind of conformity to the mind of God, then, the notion of graced (i.e., supernatural) cognition of

ous unbelief or mortal sin, but it does remove unbelief vis-à-vis God and the articles of faith. Those with lifeless faith remain Christian, it seems to me; they are believers.<sup>70</sup>

This claim about the relationship between faith and charity—namely, that faith (which assents to the truths of faith) can remain apart from charity—is both paralleled and confirmed by St. Thomas’s discussion of the relationship between faith and hope. First, much as he affirms in his considerations of faith and charity, St. Thomas maintains the priority or precedence of faith vis-à-vis hope. Faith precedes hope: “Absolutely speaking, faith precedes hope. For the object of hope is a future good, arduous but possible to obtain [in faith through charity]. In order, therefore, that we may hope, it is necessary for the object of hope to be proposed to us as possible.” He continues, “Now the object of hope is, in one way, eternal happiness, and, in another way, the Divine assistance: . . . and both of these are proposed to us by faith, whereby we come to know that we are able to obtain eternal life, and that for this purpose the Divine assistance is ready for us.”<sup>71</sup> If there were any doubt, at the end of the *respondeo* in the same article, he states, “Faith precedes hope.”<sup>72</sup> According to St. Thomas, one does not and cannot hope for the attainment of an end about which one has no cognition. Faith provides that cognition. As such, faith and its deliverances are presupposed by hope.

Furthermore, because faith precedes hope, the former can remain without the latter. That is to say, faith does not depend on hope in order to obtain. As St. Thomas notes, “If we remove that which follows, that which precedes remains. But hope follows faith. . . . Therefore when hope is removed, faith can remain; so that, not everyone who despairs, is an unbe-

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truth in lifeless faith, though without charity, is itself a participation in God’s own knowledge. That this is a kind of conformity to the mind of God, seems clear.

<sup>70</sup> The Council of Trent declares this. The canon 28 of the *Decree on Justification* states, “If anyone says that when grace is lost by sin, faith too is always lost; or that the faith that remains is not true faith, even if it is not a living faith [referencing James 2:26]; or that one who has faith without charity is not a Christian: let him be anathema” (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Norman P. Tanner [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 681). Along such lines, Cessario notes, “Such persons [who possess only unformed faith], in some sense, comprehend the truth about God and the divine mysteries of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, even of the entire sacramental economy of salvation, and this knowledge serves them in a way that eludes one who knows no saving truth about God” (*Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 145).

<sup>71</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 17, a. 7, resp.

<sup>72</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 17, a. 7, resp.



liever.<sup>73</sup> Because faith precedes hope, a lack of hope, namely, despair, does not necessarily remove the faith upon which hope depends. This account parallels and confirms St. Thomas's discussion of the relationship between faith and charity. Just as faith precedes hope, so too, faith precedes charity. As such, just as the presence or absence of hope is not determinative of the presence or absence of faith, so too, the presence or absence of charity is not determinative of the presence or absence of faith. Further, just as hope might be removed and yet faith remain, so too, as we have shown, charity might be removed and yet faith remain.

That faith, and as such, the assent to God and the truths of faith, might remain without either hope or charity is made even clearer when St. Thomas discusses the implications of mortal sin: "A man, while retaining in the universal, the true estimate of faith, viz., that there is in the Church the power of forgiving sins, may suffer a movement of despair, to wit, that for him, being in such a state, there is no hope of pardon, his estimate being corrupted in a particular matter. In this way there can be despair, *just as there can be other mortal sins, without unbelief.*"<sup>74</sup> This seems straightforward. There can be despair without unbelief. Said differently, there can be faith without hope. This is true, as St. Thomas maintains, of "other mortal sins" as well. Now, mortal sin removes charity. It is clear, then, that mortal sin, which is to say, the absence charity, does not lead to unbelief or a lack of faith. As Wawrykow observes, according to St. Thomas, "Charity can be lost by mortal sin, while faith remains—as unformed."<sup>75</sup>

I think it is appropriate, here, to offer a more concrete illustration of the import of these claims. Consider the sacrament of penance. When the believer is in the state of mortal sin, which is to say, without charity, they are in need of forgiveness and reconciliation. Though in such a state, they might seek reconciliation through the sacrament of penance, or at least, believe in faith that forgiveness is offered in Christ and through the sacrament. They do so, it seems to me, because they, though lacking charity (at least those in the state of mortal sin), believe certain truths of the faith, namely, that Christ forgives, and that forgiveness might be obtained through the sacramental means provided by Christ and in the Church. Otherwise, why believe that forgiveness is offered and might be obtained, such that one might seek reconciliation?<sup>76</sup> As Romanus Cessario remarks,

<sup>73</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 20, a. 2, sc.

<sup>74</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 20, a. 2, resp. (emphasis added).

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Wawrykow, *A-Z of Thomas Aquinas* (London: SCM, 2005), 56–57.

<sup>76</sup> Of course, such claims are not uncontroversial, at least ecumenically. The very notion of "mortal sin" is not acceptable in all Christian traditions. Moreover, the

“The person who assents to this truth with unformed faith remains better disposed to receive the grace of justification than the person who does not believe that Christ himself—in the human person of the priest—stands ready to welcome personally the contrite sinner.”<sup>77</sup>

St. Thomas’s account of the relationship between faith and hope both parallels and confirms his account of the relationship between faith and charity. Just as faith might remain without hope, so too, faith might remain without charity. The presence or absence of hope is not determinative of the presence or absence of faith, nor is the presence or absence of charity. Even dead faith heals the believer from unbelief. In lifeless faith, the believer has the same habit. They can still assent to the truths of faith (material object) and on the basis of the authoritative testimony of the revealing God (formal object), though, without charity, not in love. The act that flows from lifeless faith remains perfective of the intellect, enabling the assent to God and the truths of faith. It remains, however, imperfect with respect to its other principle, namely, the will. In short, though lifeless faith is not the living faith that orders the believer toward their beatifying end and in love, it still involves faith according to its essential notion, as articulated by St. Thomas. Moreover, this faith is enough to believe that we have access to forgiveness in Christ and through the sacrament of penance.

### An Interpretive Difficulty

There is a specific interpretive difficulty that arises quickly. St. Thomas quite explicitly affirms that “the love of charity is the form of faith.”<sup>78</sup> If charity is the form of faith, and a form is that which specifies what something is, how can we maintain that lifeless faith, which lacks this form, is the very same habit as living faith? How is charity the form that specifies

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precise relationship between believing in the possibility and seeking that forgiveness raises the question of “when” charity or sanctifying grace enters the picture. Does the very fact that one seeks absolution already indicate the reception of charity and sanctifying grace, to which the sacrament merely attests (as might be the case in some Lutheran traditions), or is lifeless faith, accompanied by the hope of forgiveness, not yet charity or sanctifying grace apart from absolution through the sacrament. These things are obviously complicated. A full account of them is beyond the scope of this essay. Let me simply say, from a Roman Catholic perspective, taking the necessity of the sacraments seriously, that lifeless faith seems necessary, as a ground, for any movement toward the reception of absolution and sanctifying grace, no matter whether that occurs, in some cases, prior to the sacrament (by a kind of desire) or in the sacrament itself.

<sup>77</sup> Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 143.

<sup>78</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, sc.

what faith is and yet lifeless faith, which lacks charity, still be the same habit or, further, attain the essential notion of faith? Is St. Thomas inconsistent here?

I think St. Thomas is being consistent. In order to show this, let us step back. For St. Thomas, anything that specifies something does so “after a manner of a form.”<sup>79</sup> As he states, “Each thing works through its form.”<sup>80</sup> Human acts are specified by the object or end to which they are ordered. In the act of faith, the end is God. Because faith has two principles, however, that object or end is, as we have seen, twofold. On the one hand, with respect to the intellect, the end of faith is God considered as First Truth. This pertains to the first two aspects of the threefold act of faith, namely, the material and the formal object. On the other hand, with respect to the will, the end of faith is God considered as Ultimate Good. This pertains to the third aspect of the act of faith, namely, tending toward God in love as beatifying end. What is the form, then, that enables the attainment of each of these ends? Are they the same form? To the latter, St. Thomas says not quite.

St. Thomas makes a key distinction, here, between the intrinsic and the extrinsic form of faith. The intrinsic form is that which specifies faith as faith. The extrinsic form, though it adds something to faith, does not do this: “That which gives faith its form, or makes it live, is not essential to faith.”<sup>81</sup> He continues, “Now the lifelessness of faith is not essential to the species of faith, since faith is said to be lifeless through the lack of an extrinsic form.”<sup>82</sup> Note that neither the life nor the lifelessness of faith is essential or intrinsic to faith. Each is non-essential and extrinsic. As such, faith obtains, insofar as it is present, whether or not it is living or lifeless. More to the point, according to St. Thomas, charity is both extrinsic and non-essential—we might say accidental—to faith qua faith. He states, “That which faith receives from charity is accidental to faith in its natural constitution.”<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere, St. Thomas maintains, “But charity is outside of the essence of faith. Therefore, the habit of faith is not differentiated

<sup>79</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, resp.

<sup>80</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, sc.

<sup>81</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 2. Cf.: *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 1 (“Charity is not called the form of faith in the way in which a form is part of an essence. . . It is called form in so far as faith acquires some perfection from charity”); *In III sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa 3, sc 2 (“But charity is a habit separate from faith in essence”); q. 3, a. 4, qa 3, sc 1 and resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 4; and *Super Rom* 1, lec. 6 (Marietti no. 107).

<sup>82</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 2, resp.

<sup>83</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 6, ad 1; cf. a. 5, ad 4.

because it has or does not have charity.”<sup>84</sup> As an extrinsic form, charity does not constitute faith as faith, nor is it necessary that faith be faith. In short, the presence or absence of charity is not determinative of the presence or absence of faith, which is to say, the presence or absence of charity is not determinative of the capacity to assent to God and the truths of faith.

Charity enables faith to assent to the truths of faith with more promptitude and in love. Charity is not, though, the intrinsic form that makes faith the habit of faith, but the extrinsic form. It merely quickens or enlivens faith. Intrinsic to the habit and act of faith is the essential notion, which pertains to the perfection of the intellect and with respect to the true. Insofar as it has the one same habit and act of faith, lifeless faith is, again, “perfective of the intellect.”<sup>85</sup> The extrinsic form, which is charity, allows the same habit of faith to be perfect with respect to the other principle of faith, namely, the will. Charity does not determine the species of faith, but it supervenes on the faith that is prior, perfecting it by quickening it or making it living. That is to say, as shown above, charity makes faith love and live for what it already believes. As a perfect virtue, faith is “perfected and formed by charity.”<sup>86</sup>

Insofar as charity is the extrinsic form, it is not an aspect of the essential notion of faith. Faith might obtain or remain regardless of the presence or absence of charity. Contrary to Preller and others, “live faith” is not required in order that the mind might assent to God, that it might, however imperfectly, conform to the truth of God. Lifeless faith does this. Faith without charity still heals from unbelief. It is still perfective of the intellect with respect to its object, namely, the true. It still assents to God and the truths of faith, though not in love.

### *Résumé*

In summary, according to St. Thomas, Christian faith is an act of *credere*. On the one hand, like opinion but unlike scientific knowledge, it involves the movement of the intellect by a command of the will, and to an object that remains unseen. On the other hand, like scientific knowledge but unlike opinion, insofar as it rests on the authoritative testimony of the revealing God who cannot deceive or be deceived, the assent of faith is certain and firm. Faith assents to the articles of faith (material object) on

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<sup>84</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, sc 2; cf. *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 3, obj. and ad 2.

<sup>85</sup> Wawrykow, “Theological Virtues,” 292. See also Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 137: “Theological faith—as a distinctive *habitus* in the human person—shapes principally the mind of the believer.”

<sup>86</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 3, resp.

the basis of the authority of God (formal object), and when accompanied by charity, it is ordered toward union with the triune Lord (beatifying end). The essential notion of faith, however, the faith shared by both living and lifeless faith, does not require charity. Even lifeless faith is perfective of the intellect with respect to its proper object, namely, the true. Even lifeless faith, enabled by the graces of the *lumen fidei* and the divine *instinctus*, can assent to God and the truths of faith, though without love. Charity elevates and perfects faith—and its prior will-act—such that faith becomes living and meritorious. Said differently, charity enables faith to attain and love that which is believed. Charity is not, then, constitutive of faith as its intrinsic form. Rather, charity is an extrinsic form that adds to the faith that precedes it. That which precedes it, nonetheless, remains what it is, namely, the grace of faith by which the believer assents to God and the articles of faith. Can dead faith assent to God? According to St. Thomas, the answer is yes. N·V



## Saint Thomas Aquinas Exegete of the Hexameron: Bible and Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

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“BY FAITH WE UNDERSTAND that the universe was formed by the word of God” (Heb 11:3). Thus opens the “hymn to faith,” of chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews, with a reference to the fundamental work of creation. The verse highlights the relationship of radical dependence that the whole of reality—“universe, eons”—has with the Word of God. The Word of God is an “effective” Word that gives existence, but also an “exemplary” Word, because by participating in the Divine Ideas, whose *Logos* or Word is the Place par excellence, creatures “objectify” divine Wisdom<sup>2</sup> as much as possible. A formally philosophical approach to the topic of creation is certainly possible. It is even necessary, since creation, as the radical ontological dependence of all things on subsisting Being itself, constitutes the keystone of the entire metaphysical structure and its ultimate explanatory principle. Nevertheless, the full, integral, meaning of creation is revealed only to faith in the light of the Word of God. The book of creation therefore reveals its full meaning only in relation to the book of Scriptures which records the Word of God, the very one that presides over creation. Hence the decisive place of Sacred Scripture in the theological teaching of St. Thomas on creation. It is particularly evident in questions 65–74 of the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by John Martin Ruiz, O.P., of “Saint Thomas d’Aquin exégète de l’*Hexaëmeron*: Bible et philosophie.”

<sup>2</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Heb* 11, lec. 2 (Marietti no. 564). See also Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Études Thomasiennes* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2018), 597–601.



[ST].<sup>3</sup> Here, Aquinas, who undertakes as a theologian to account for the creation of the corporeal world, makes his own the patristic literary genre of commentary on the Hexaemeron, that is, of the first story of creation in Genesis (1:1–2: 4).<sup>4</sup> He makes this literary genre of commentary on the Hexaemeron his own while adapting it to the formal requirements of Scholasticism.

According to the general prologue of question 44 of the *prima pars*, the procession of creatures from God (the theme that constitutes the third moment of the “consideration of God” that is the subject of the *prima pars*<sup>5</sup>) comprises three aspects: the production of creatures, their distinction, and, finally, their conservation and government.<sup>6</sup> Among the Fathers of the Church, the “distinction of creatures” corresponds to the second phase of the divine work of the six days: after the initial creation, signified by verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1, the result of which still presents itself under a certain confusion or indistinction (indistinction, whose nature itself remains rather confused), it is the separating action of God that structures what is created by “distinguishing” day from night, the waters above from the waters below,

<sup>3</sup> The role of Scripture is also decisive in qq. 44–46 of the *prima pars*, devoted to creation in general. For example, since the question of the temporal beginning of the world (q. 46) is philosophically undecidable and the duration of the universe is the sole sovereign will of God, only Scripture can reveal to us that the created world actually had a beginning.

<sup>4</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, qq. 65–74; French trans. with notes and appendices by Henri-Dominique Gardeil in *L'œuvre des six jours* (Paris: Desclée, 1960); Latin text and English trans. with introduction, notes, appendices, and glossary in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 10, *Cosmogony* (I, qq. 65–74), ed. William A. Wallace (London: Blackfriars, 1967). Concerning patristic commentary on the Hexaemeron as a literary genre, see: F. E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912); E. Manganot, “Hexaméron. Les diverses interprétations du récit,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 6 (Paris: 1920), cols. 2335–39; Yves Congar, “Le thème de Dieu-Créateur dans les explications de l’Hexaëmeron dans la tradition chrétienne,” in *L’Homme devant Dieu. Mélanges H. de Lubac*, vol. 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1963), 189–222; J. Pépin, “Exégèse de *In Principio* et théorie de l’*Exameron*,” in *Ambrosius episcopus* (Milan: Pubblicazioni dell’Università del Sacro Cuore, 1976), 427–82; P. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); P.-M. Hombert, *La Création chez les Pères de l’Eglise* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2015), 71–77.

<sup>5</sup> See ST I, q. 2, prol.

<sup>6</sup> See ST I, q. 44 prol.: “Post considerationem divinarum personarum, considerandum restat de processione creaturarum a Deo. Erit autem haec consideratio tripartite, ut primo consideretur de productione creaturarum; secundo, de earum distinctione; tertio, de conservatione et gubernatione.”

and so on. St. Thomas knows this meaning of the term, but in him the study of the distinction of creatures takes on a different, broader, and frankly metaphysical meaning.

On the one hand, it refers to the fundamental reflection on the origin and meaning of the diversity, and thus the multiplicity of creatures; and, on the other hand, it refers to the presentation, from a formally theological point of view,<sup>7</sup> of the main types of creatures in connection with their institution or original establishment by creative action: angels (qq. 50–64), the cosmos (qq. 65–74), and man (qq. 75–102). The commentary on the Hexaemeron is the form taken by the theological view on the cosmos as such.

These ten questions of *ST* have a precedent in his commentary on distinctions 12–15 of book II of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (the *Scriptum*), a place that invited theologians of the thirteenth century to examine the work of the six days, and they present several common themes with question 4 of the *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, devoted to the creation of formless matter. They have often been neglected, because of the undeniable outdated nature of the scientific knowledge they use. Yet they contain a rich teaching, always valid in its broad outlines, on the Word of God, on the principles that govern its interpretation in the Church, and on the right relationship between exegesis

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<sup>7</sup> In the prologue that opens the section devoted to the human creature, St. Thomas points out that the theologian takes a very specific look at human nature. He considers it from the point of view of the soul more than from the point of view of the body, and he considers the body only insofar as it relates to the soul, which has a direct relationship with God, the formal object of theology. See *ST* I, q. 75, prol.: “Post considerationem creaturae spiritualis et corporalis, considerandum est de homine, qui ex spirituali et corporali substantia componitur. . . . Naturam autem hominis considerare pertinet ad theologum ex parte animae, non autem ex parte corporis, nisi secundum habitudinem quam habet corpus ad animam.” A similar observation applies to the study of bodily creatures. They are only considered by the theologian in their relationship to God see *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, proem. (ed. Mandonnet, 299): “In parte praecedenti determinavit Magister de natura pure corporali, quantum pertinet ad theologi considerationem, scilicet secundum quod a Deo in operibus sex dierum primitus instituta est” (all Latin from *In sent.* is from the Mandonnet-Moos ed.). G. Lafont believes that the theological study of the cosmos in the *prima pars* is somehow absorbed by the perspective of theological anthropology (*Structures et méthode dans la “Somme théologique” de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. [Paris: Cerf, 1996], 164–65). It is clear that in Christian theology man occupies a privileged place in the cosmos, but it seems to me that the reduction of the theological view of the cosmos to an annex of anthropology betrays the options of an anthropocentric theology that had its hour of glory in the middle of the twentieth century but whose limits have since become apparent.

and philosophy.<sup>8</sup> It is this teaching that this study proposes to explain somewhat.

First, taking note of the fact that, according to Aquinas, the Hexaemeron is properly speaking a prophecy, we will draw, from the teaching of St. Thomas on prophecy, some principles of interpretation of the text of Genesis. Secondly, we shall examine the way in which St. Thomas conceives of the relationship between exegesis and philosophy, with “philosophy” being understood in the broad sense of the thirteenth century as the body of rational knowledge, which in some way includes our current “sciences.”

## Interpreting Prophecy

### *The Hexaemeron as a Prophecy*

In the debate raging in the middle of the thirteenth century on the possibility of an eternal created universe, St. Thomas holds, as we know, a middle ground position. He holds that creation as such, that is to say, as a radical ontological dependence of creatures on the *Ipsium Esse subsistens*, is a truth accessible (at least by right) to reason,<sup>9</sup> but the complete integral concept, that is, the theological concept of creation, which includes, among other things, the idea of a temporal beginning (that is to say, the impossibility of going back to infinity in the past) is an article of faith, which is of itself indemonstrable.<sup>10</sup> Now, in support of this last thesis, St.

<sup>8</sup> The commentary on the Hexaemeron had already been the occasion for St. Augustine to develop a fundamental reflection on the exegetical method. See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* [*Gn. litt.*] 1.18.37–21.41 (all Latin from *Gn. Litt.* is from *Bibliothèque augustinienne* vol. 48). Saint Thomas is very much inspired by it and he takes up the essential themes. On St. Augustine, see R. J. Teske, “Récits de la Genèse sur la création,” in *Encyclopédie Saint Augustin: La Méditerranée et l’Europe, IV<sup>e</sup>–XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald and M.-A. Vannier (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 1220–24.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *In II sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2 (17): “Quod creationem esse non tantum fides tenet, sed etiam ratio demonstrat”; see also F. Moreno Narvaez, *Demostrabilidad racional de la creación según santo Tomás de Aquino* (Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. in Urbe, 1960).

<sup>10</sup> On the conflict over the eternity of the world in the thirteenth century, see among others: *The Eternity of the World in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas and his Contemporaries* ed. J. B. M. Wiskink (Leiden: Brill, 1990); R. C. Dales, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); *Thomas d’Aquin et la controverse sur L’Éternité du monde: Traités sur L’Éternité du monde de Bonaventure, Thomas d’Aquin, Peckham, Boèce de Dacie, Henri de Gand et Guillaume d’Ockham*, trans. C. Michon with notes, in collaboration with O. Boulnois and N. Dupré La Tour (Paris: G. F. Flammarion, 2004); W. E. Carroll, “Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle, the Eternity of the World, and the Doctrine of Creation,” in *Tomás de Aquino comentador de*

Thomas invokes, in the *sed contra* of article 2 of question 46, an authority drawn from the *Homilies on Ezekiel* of St. Gregory the Great, which explicitly presents the beginning of *Genesis* as a prophecy of Moses, that is, as a revelation.<sup>11</sup> The same authority of St. Gregory the Great is cited in the “treatise” on prophecy of *ST II-II* to establish, precisely, that the object of prophetic revelation is not limited to future contingents, even though they constitute its privileged object.<sup>12</sup> We are therefore invited to understand the Thomasian exegesis of the Hexaemeron in light of his theology of prophecy (its essence, its object, its species, its modalities, etc.). As participation (occasional, not habitual) in the very light of divine knowledge, prophecy extends to everything that is knowable by means of this light.<sup>13</sup>

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*Aristóteles*, ed. H. Velázquez Fernandez (Mexico City: Panamerican University Press, 2010), 13–42. The debate on the possibility of an eternal created world was, in the thirteenth century, the place par excellence for reflection on the problem we now call “faith and science.”

- <sup>11</sup> See *ST I*, q. 46, a. 2, sc: “Fidei articuli demonstrative probari non possunt, quia fides de non apparentibus est, ut dicitur ad Hebr. XI. Sed Deum esse creatorem mundi, sic quod mundus incoeperit esse, est articulus fidei, dicimus enim, credo in unum Deum et cetera. Et iterum, Gregorius dicit, in Homil. I in Ezech., quod Moyses prophetizavit de praeterito, dicens in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram; in quo novitas mundi traditur. Ergo novitas mundi habetur tantum per revelationem.” See also *In II sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5 (33): “Tertia positio est dicentium, quod omne quod est praeter Deum, incepit esse; sed tamen Deus potuit res ab aeterno produxisse; ita quod mundum incepisse non potuit demonstrari, sed per revelationem divinam esse habitum et creditum. Et haec positio innititur auctoritati Gregorii, qui dicit quod quaedam prophetia est de praeterito, sicut Moyses prophetizavit cum dixit Genes. 1: ‘In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram.’ Et huic positioni consentio: quia non credo, quod a nobis sumi ratio demonstrativa ad hoc; sicut nec ad Trinitatem, quamvis Trinitatem non esse sit impossibile; et hoc ostendit debilitas rationum quae ad hoc inducuntur pro demonstrationibus, quae omnes a philosophis tenentibus aeternitatem mundi positae sunt et solutae: et ideo potius in derisionem quam in confirmationem fidei vertuntur si quis talibus rationibus innixus contra philosophos novitatem mundi probare intenderet.” Cf. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1.1.
- <sup>12</sup> See *ST II-II*, q. 171, a. 3: “Sed contra est quod Gregorius dicit, super Ezech., quod prophetia quaedam est de futuro, sicut id quod dicitur Isaiae VII, ‘Ecce, virgo concipiet et pariet filium’; quaedam de praeterito, sicut id quod dicitur Gen. I, ‘In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram’; quaedam de praesenti, sicut id quod dicitur I ad Cor. XIV, ‘Si omnes prophetent, intret autem quis infidelis, occulta cordis eius manifesta fiunt.’ Non ergo est prophetia solum de contingentibus futuris.”
- <sup>13</sup> See *ST II-II*, q. 171, a. 3: “Manifestatio quae fit per aliquod lumen, ad omnia illa se extendere potest quae illi lumini subiiciuntur, sicut visio corporalis se extendit ad omnes colores, et cognitio naturalis animae se extendit ad omnia illa quae subduntur lumini intellectus agentis. Cognitio autem prophetica est per lumen divinum, quo possunt omnia cognosci, tam divina quam humana, tam spiritualia

Even our past, just like our future, is always present in the eternity of the divine knowledge.<sup>14</sup> The Hexaemeron is therefore a prophecy or revelation about the beginning of the world, more precisely about “the institution of nature,” that is, the establishment, destined to last, of nature and its structures. It is based on a “prophetic” participation of Moses, the prophet par excellence,<sup>15</sup> in the divine knowledge. This prophecy is first of all a subjective noetic experience of Moses (*revelatio*), which was then objectified and transmitted in the Genesis account (*annuntiatio*).

### *The Hexaemeron Calls for an Adherence of Faith*

The creation account in Genesis, like all Sacred Scripture, participates in the certainty proper to the knowledge of God, the first author of Scripture, who communicated to Moses, through the gift of prophecy, a participation in his knowledge. Therefore, the teaching of the Hexaemeron calls for an adherence of faith. This is the very first principle that guides its reader and its exegete: according to the expression of St. Augustine taken up by St. Thomas, it is necessary to hold without hesitation (*inconcusse*) the truth expressed in Scripture.<sup>16</sup> The authority of the Word of God prevails over all mere human considerations: it precedes (and gives rise to) all interpretation. Thus, on several occasions in his Hexaemeron, St. Thomas establishes, in the *sed contra*, the truth, whose understanding he then seeks, by the simple formula “sed in contrarium sufficit auctoritas Scripturae.”<sup>17</sup> For example, when Genesis refers to the (rather problematic) existence of waters above the (no less problematic) firmament, St. Thomas states the following: “As Augustine says in Book II of the *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, the authority of this Scripture is greater than the capacity of any human genius.” Therefore, “in whatever way and by whatever nature these waters are, we do not doubt for a moment that they are there.”<sup>18</sup> The same princi-

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quam corporalia. Et ideo revelatio prophetica ad omnia huiusmodi se extendit.”

<sup>14</sup> See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13.

<sup>15</sup> On the place of Moses among the prophets, see Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 14, and *ST II-II*, q. 174, a. 4. See also A. Wohlman, *Thomas d'Aquin et Maimonide: Un dialogue exemplaire* (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 294–304.

<sup>16</sup> See *ST I*, q. 68, a. 1: “Sicut Augustinus docet, in huiusmodi quaestionibus duo sunt observanda. Primo quidem, ut veritas Scripturae inconcusse teneatur.” On the absolute necessity to hold the truth of Scripture in the exegesis of the Hexaemeron, see also Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, sc 4: “Praeterea, quod Scriptura sacra dicit fuisse aliquando, non est dicendum non fuisse; quia ut Augustinus dicit, contra Scripturam sacram nemo Christianus sentit” (all Latin from *De potentia* is from the Marietti edition, 8th ed.).

<sup>17</sup> See *ST I*, q. 69, a. 1, sc; q. 70, a. 1, sc; a. 2, sc; q. 71, a. 1, sc.

<sup>18</sup> *ST I*, q. 68, a. 2: “Sicut dicit Augustinus, II super Gen. ad Litt., ‘Maior est Scrip-

ple applies to the existence of a formless matter, implied by Genesis 1:2, in whatever way one would then need to interpret it.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Hexaemeron Calls for Interpretation*

That said, even if he requires a subjective adherence of faith to the entire scriptural data, Aquinas does not put all the teachings of Scripture on the same objective level. At the school of St. Augustine, again,<sup>20</sup> he distinguishes between what concerns the very substance of faith (first and foremost: the very mystery of God who reveals himself, the first and formal object of faith) and what is related to faith only indirectly, by accident, by the mere fact of being included in Scripture, which, being inspired, cannot contain any error.<sup>21</sup> The faithful must always adhere to the *veritas Scripturae*, otherwise they risk falling into heresy, even when it is only about the indirect object of faith,<sup>22</sup> but, as the diversity of patristic exegesis testifies, there are in

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turae huius auctoritas quam omnis humani ingenii capacitas. Unde quomodo et quales aquae ibi sint, eas tamen ibi esse, minime dubitamus. Quales autem sint illae aquae, non eodem modo ab omnibus assignatur." Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2.5.9: "Quoquo modo autem et qualeslibet aquae ibi sint, esse eas ibi minime dubitemus: maior est quippe Scripturae huius auctoritas, quam omnis humani ingenii capacitas." We find the same reference to Saint Augustine in *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2, arg. 7 (305); d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 1; *Quodlibet VII*, q. 6, a. 1, arg. 4.

<sup>19</sup> See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, sc 4: "Scriptura autem divina dicit, terram aliquando fuisse inanem et vacuum. Ergo non est dicendum quin aliquando fuerit inanis et vacua. Hoc autem pertinet ad informitatem materiae, quocumque modo exponatur. Ergo aliquando substantia materiae praecessit formationem; alias nunquam informis fuisset."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 1.1.1: "In Libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet quae ibi aeterna intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura praenuntientur, quae agenda praecipiantur vel admoneantur. In narratione ergo rerum factarum quaeritur utrum omnia secundum figurarum tantummodo intellectum accipiuntur, an etiam secundum fidem rerum gestarum asserenda et defendenda sint."

<sup>21</sup> On the distinction between the direct and indirect object of faith, see: *In III sent.*, d. 24, a. 1, q. 1; q. 2, ad 4 and ad 5; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 8, ad 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Super 1 Cor 11*, lec. 4 (Marietti no. 627): "Pertinet autem aliquid ad disciplinam fidei dupliciter. Uno modo directe, sicut articuli fidei, qui per se credendi proponuntur. Unde error circa hos secundum se facit haereticum, si pertinacia adsit. Non possunt autem a tali errore propter simplicitatem aliquam excusari, praecipue quantum ad ea, de quibus Ecclesia solemnizat, et quae communiter versantur in ore fidelium, sicut mysterium Trinitatis, nativitatis Christi, et alia huiusmodi. Quaedam vero indirecte pertinent ad fidei disciplinam, in quantum scilicet ipsa non proponuntur, ut propter se credenda, sed ex negatione eorum sequitur aliquid contrarium fidei: sicut si negetur Isaac fuisse filium Abrahae, sequitur aliquid contrarium fidei, scilicet sacram Scripturam continere aliquid falsi. Ex talibus autem non iudicatur aliquis haereticus, nisi adeo pertinaciter perse-



the latter case several ways of doing justice to the *veritas Scripturae*:

In things that are a matter of faith, we must distinguish between them. Some are indeed the very substance of faith, such as that God is Triune and One and things of that sort. In this area, it is not permitted to have a different opinion. . . . Other things belong to faith only by accident, that is to say, insofar as they are transmitted in Scripture, whose faith presumes that it was promulgated under the dictation of the Holy Spirit. Those who are not required to know the Scriptures can safely ignore these things, for example the many stories, and on these things the saints [Fathers] had various ideas, explaining Scripture differently. . . . Thus, concerning the beginning of the world, there is something that belongs to the substance of faith, namely, that the world has begun when it was created, which all the saints [Fathers] affirm in unison. In what way and according to what order it was made belongs to faith only by accident, insofar as it is transmitted by Scripture. The Saints [Fathers], while safeguarding the truth of Scripture by different explanations, introduced different commentaries.<sup>23</sup>

Without going into all the complexity of St. Thomas's teaching on the different meanings of Scripture,<sup>24</sup> let us simply recall that, for him, the

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veret, quod ab errore non recedat, etiam viso quid ex hoc sequatur.”

<sup>23</sup> *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2: “Quae ad fidem pertinent, dupliciter distinguuntur. Quaedam enim sunt per se substantia fidei, ut Deum esse trinum et unum, et hujusmodi: in quibus nulli licet aliter opinari; unde Apostolus ad Gal. 1, dicit, quod si angelus Dei aliter evangelizaverit quam ipse docuerat, anathema sit. Quaedam vero per accidens tantum, in quantum scilicet in Scriptura traduntur, quam fides supponit Spiritu sancto dictante promulgatam esse: quae quidem ignorari sine periculo possunt ab his qui Scripturas scire non tenentur, sicut multa historialia: et in his etiam sancti diversa senserunt, Scripturam divinam diversimode exponentes. Sic ergo circa mundi principium aliquid est quod ad substantiam fidei pertinet, scilicet mundum incepisse creatum, et hoc omnes sancti concorditer dicunt. Quo autem modo et ordine factus sit, non pertinet ad fidem nisi per accidens, in quantum in Scriptura traditur, cujus veritatem diversa expositione sancti salvantes, diversa tradiderunt.” The legitimate diversity of interpretations does not preclude their ranking. See *ST I*, q. 73, a. 2, ad 3: “Est ergo conveniens expositio, ut dicatur Deus requievissse, quia nos requiescere facit. Sed non est haec sola ponenda, sed alia expositio est principalior et prior.”

<sup>24</sup> On the senses of Scripture according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, see, e.g.: M. Aillet, *Lire la Bible avec s. Thomas: Le passage de la littera à la res dans la Somme théologique* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires 1993); T. Prügl, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*,



first and fundamental meaning, the one that supports the whole edifice of interpretation, is the literal meaning. The literal meaning is the one that the author wanted to express and communicate through the text. Note, however, that this literal meaning does not necessarily coincide with the letter of the text understood “literally” in a very superficial way. For example, to understand the six days of Genesis as six days of twenty-four hours seems more in conformity with the letter of the text “as to the surface [*quantum ad superficiem*]”; but St. Thomas prefers, in the *Scriptum*, the Augustinian thesis according to which the sacred author wanted to signify six aspects of a single creative act.<sup>25</sup> Superficial literality can even be misleading and lead to error.<sup>26</sup> Interpretation is therefore required to determine the literal meaning.<sup>27</sup> To this end, St. Thomas resorts to literary

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ed. R. Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 386–415; I. M. Manresa Lamarca, *La exégesis en el Espíritu según santo Tomás de Aquino* (Toledo, Spain: San Ildefonso, 2018).

- <sup>25</sup> See: *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2: “Haec quidem positio est communior, et magis consona videtur litterae quantum ad superficiem; sed prior [=Augustini] est rationabilior, et magis ab irrisione infidelium sacram Scripturam defendens.” See also *In II sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 4, ad 1: “Alii vero dicunt, quod prius tempore fuit opus creationis, et postea per aliquod intervallum temporis formata est lux, et tunc dies primo inceptit; unde dicunt creationis opus ante omnem diem fuisse. Et hoc quidem magis consonat litterae Genesis secundum suum sensum planum; statim enim posita creatione, tenebras super faciem abyssi commemorat, et postmodum de lucis productione dicit.”
- <sup>26</sup> See *In II sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1: “In hoc nihil auctoritati Scripturae derogatur, si diversimode exponatur, dummodo hoc firmiter teneatur quod sacra Scriptura nihil falsum contineat. Constat tamen in Scriptura sacra multa metaphorice tradita, quae secundum planam superficiem litterae intelligi non valent.” See also *ST I*, q. 68, a. 3: “Aliquis, considerando superficie tenus litteram Genesis, posset talem imaginationem concipere . . .”
- <sup>27</sup> Saint Thomas does not exclude a plurality in the literal sense itself, whether it is related to Moses or must be attributed to God himself. See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1: “Aliud est, ne aliquis ita Scripturam ad unum sensum cogere velit, quod alios sensus qui in se veritatem continent, et possunt, salva circumstantia litterae, Scripturae aptari, penitus excludantur; hoc enim ad dignitatem divinae Scripturae pertinet, ut sub una littera multos sensus contineat, ut sic et diversis intellectibus hominum conveniat, ut unusquisque miretur se in divina Scriptura posse invenire veritatem quam mente conceperit; et per hoc etiam contra infideles facilius defendatur, dum si aliquid, quod quisque ex sacra Scriptura velit intelligere, falsum apparuerit, ad alium eius sensum possit haberi recursus. Unde non est incredibile, Moysi et aliis sacrae Scripturae auctoribus hoc divinitus esse concessum, ut diversa vera, quae homines possent intelligere, ipsi cognoscerent, et ea sub una serie litterae designarent, ut sic quilibet eorum sit sensus auctoris. Unde si etiam aliqua vera ab expositoribus sacrae Scripturae litterae aptentur, quae auctor non intelligit, non est

criticism:<sup>28</sup> the context (*circumstantia litterae*) sets the limits within which the pluralism of interpretations can be deployed. Indeed, to be legitimate, an interpretation must be compatible with the logical coherence of the entire text.<sup>29</sup> The interpreter must also take into account the consistency in the use of a term throughout the entire Scripture (*consuetudo Scripturae*), considered as a single work.<sup>30</sup> Finally, and this is the point on which I would like to dwell more deeply, the exegete must take into consideration the specific nature of a prophetic text.

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dubium quin spiritus sanctus intellexerit, qui est principalis auctor divinae Scripturae. Unde omnis veritas quae, salva litterae circumstantia, potest divinae Scripturae aptari, est eius sensus.”

<sup>28</sup> There are also some observations of textual criticism; see *ST I*, q. 73, a. 1, ad 2: “Et ideo consummatio operum, secundum nostram translationem, attribuitur diei septimae. Sed secundum aliam translationem, attribuitur diei sextae. Et utrumque potest stare.”

<sup>29</sup> The context (*circumstantia litterae*) may allow several interpretations. See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1: “Ne aliquis ita Scripturam ad unum sensum cogere velit, quod alios sensus qui in se veritatem continent, et possunt, salva circumstantia litterae, Scripturae aptari, penitus excludantur”; *Ibid.* (apropos of the interpretation of the formlessness of matter which pits St. Augustine against other Fathers): “Quia ergo neutrum a veritate fidei discordat, et utrumque sensum circumstantia litterae patitur; utrumque sustinentes ad utrasque rationes respondeamus.” But it also excludes some of them; see ad 5: “Alii dicunt, quod nomine firmamenti intelligitur caelum aereum nobis vicinum. . . . Et huic etiam expositioni concordat Rabbi Moyses. Sed hanc non videtur pati litterae circumstantia. Nam postea subditur in littera, quod fecit Deus duo luminaria magna, et stellas; et posuit eas in firmamento caeli.” Saint Thomas also rejects, as incompatible with the literal meaning, an interpretation that makes little sense of the cosmic and material dimension of the creative act, and in fact contradicts the logic of the text; see *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: “Quidam namque dixerunt, aquas illas esse spirituales naturas, quod imponitur Origeni. Sed hoc quidem non videtur ad litteram posse intelligi, cum spiritualibus naturis situs non competat; ut sic inter eas et inferiores aquas corporeas dividat firmamentum, ut Scriptura tradit.” On the importance of considering the literary context, see Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 1.19.38.

<sup>30</sup> See, apropos of the “spirit/wind” that hovers over the waters: *ST I*, q. 66, a. 1, ad 2 in cont. (“Spiritus domini in Scriptura non nisi pro Spiritu sancto consuevit poni. Qui aquis superferri dicitur, non corporaliter, sed sicut voluntas artificis superferretur materiae quam vult formare”) q. 74, a. 3, ad 4 (“Rabbi Moyses per spiritum domini intelligit aerem vel ventum, sicut et Plato intellexit. Et dicit quod dicitur spiritus domini, secundum quod Scriptura consuevit ubique flatum ventorum Deo attribueret. Sed secundum sanctos, per spiritum domini intelligitur spiritus sanctus”); *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 2 (“Sed quia, ut dicit Basilius in Hexaemeron, non est consuetudo sacrae Scripturae, ut per spiritum domini aer intelligatur. . .”).

### The Condescension of Moses

The prophetic charism, as St. Thomas describes it in question 12 of *De veritate* or in *ST II-II*, qq. 171–74, has two distinct acts: vision (*visio*) and proclamation (*denuntiatio*).<sup>31</sup> Vision or revelation is the cognitive act by which the prophet personally comes into possession of the truth that God communicates to him. Proclamation is the activity by which the same prophet transmits to others the knowledge he has received. Although second to the vision itself, proclamation is intrinsically part of the prophetic charism. Now, this prophetic proclamation has modalities which the exegete must take into account in order to interpret correctly the text that objectifies it. The most decisive modality is the adaptation of the message to the public to whom it is addressed,<sup>32</sup> an adaptation which in a way reduplicates that by which God himself, in instructing the prophet, addresses to him in “the language of the tribe.” The resulting exegetical principle has not escaped either the Fathers of the Church or St. Thomas Aquinas, who frequently use the theme of “the condescension of Moses” when interpreting the Hexaemeron. Addressing a people who are both “rough,” that is, culturally poor, and spiritually inclined to idolatry, Moses must adapt his discourse of revelation.<sup>33</sup> All these principles must be taken into account for the correct interpretation of the text.

First of all, whatever the state of his personal knowledge, Moses adapts

<sup>31</sup> See: *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 9 (“Prophetia habet duo actus: unum principalem, scilicet visionem; alium secundarium, scilicet denuntiationem”); a. 13 (“Est autem duplex actus prophetiae, scilicet visio et denuntiatio”); *ST II-II*, q. 171, a. 1 (“Prophetia primo et principaliter consistit in cognitione, quia videlicet cognoscunt quaedam quae sunt procul remota ab hominum cognitione. . . . Sed quia, ut dicitur I ad Cor. XII, ‘Unicuique datur manifestatio spiritus ad utilitatem’; et infra, XIV, dicitur, ‘Ad aedificationem Ecclesiae quaerite ut abundetis’, inde est quod prophetia secundo consistit in locutione, prout prophetae ea quae divinitus edocti cognoscunt, ad aedificationem aliorum annuntiant”); *Super Isa* 1 (“Prophetia addit supra visionem actum exterioris denuntiationis, et visio erit materialis respectu prophetie” [Leonine ed., vol. 28]).

<sup>32</sup> See *ST II-II*, q. 174, a. 3, ad 3 (“[Denuntiatio] fit secundum dispositionem eorum quibus denuntiat id quod prophetae revelatum est”); *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 13, ad 5 in cont. (“[Denuntiatio] fit secundum dispositionem eorum quibus denuntiat”).

<sup>33</sup> The theme is common among the theologians of the thirteenth century. See, for example, Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 13, a. 1, q. 1, ad 2: “Quia Scriptura tradebatur genti rudi, quae versabatur circa sensibilia; ideo primo in operibus sex dierum conditionem sensibilibium insinuat” (Quaracchi ed.). However, continues Bonaventure, Moses, as a good teacher, does not neglect to lay stepping stones for the most advanced: “Nihilominus tamen praebens viam per haec sensibilia ad intelligenda spiritualia; hoc enim fecit ad illa insinuanda. . . . Et sic patet, qualiter processus Scripturae, quamvis videatur esse vulgaris, tamen est sufficiens et rationalis.”

his discourse to the common cultural and “scientific” representations of a “rough” people whose cognitive activity does not yet transcend the order of sensible knowledge. As we know, for St. Thomas, the progress of humanity as a whole is comparable to that of the individual: at the initial stage, sensible knowledge prevails, an obligatory point of departure for all human knowledge; and then one rises to the properly intellectual knowledge, which finally reaches its perfection in metaphysical knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Moses keeps to the description of sensible realities, and among them the most visible and palpable. This is why the Hexaemeron says nothing explicit, for example, about the creation of angels, a silence that the Fathers did not fail to question.<sup>35</sup> As for prime matter, a principle perceptible only

<sup>34</sup> The “history of fundamental philosophy,” that is, the progress of human knowledge, is set out in several texts in the Thomasian corpus, the parallel of which is illuminating: *Summa contra gentiles* II, ch. 37 (nos. 1129–30) (dated ca. 1261–1262); *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5 (ca. 1265–1266); *ST I*, q. 44, a. 2 (ca. 1266–1268); *Sententia super Physicam*, In VIII phys., lec. 2 (ca. 1268–1269); *De substantiis separatis*, ch. 9 (after 1271). See: J. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 196–201; R. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), ch. 8 (“The Progress of Philosophical Reason towards Creation”); G. Dahan, “*Ex imperfecto ad perfectum*: Le progrès de la de la pensée humaine chez les théologiens du XIIIe siècle,” in: *Progrès, réaction, décadence dans l’Occident médiéval* (Geneva: Droz, 2003), 171–84.

<sup>35</sup> See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 11.19: “In the passage where the Holy Scriptures speak of the creation of the world, they do not clearly say whether the angels were created or in what order [Ubi de mundi constitutione sacrae litterae loquuntur, non evidenter dicitur utrum vel quo ordine creati sint angeli]” (Latin from vol. 35 of *Bibliothèque augustinienne*; translation mine). In *ST I*, q. 67, a. 4 (see also *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 18, ad 4), Saint Thomas reports Saint Augustine’s opinion that the creation of the angels is signified in encrypted form by the creation of “heaven” (Gen 1:1) and their formation through the original production of light. Then he points out the opinion of the Fathers who believe that Moses deliberately omitted to speak of the production of the angels, either because the angels were created before the corporeal world, whose creation is recorded in Genesis (Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 16.38), or in condescension for the people (John Chrysostom): “Chrysostomus autem assignat aliam rationem. Quia Moyses loquebatur rudi populo, qui nihil nisi corporalia poterat capere; quem etiam ab idololatria revocare volebat. Assumpsissent autem idololatriae occasionem, si propositae fuissent eis aliquae substantiae supra omnes corporeas creaturas, eas enim reputassent deos, cum etiam proni essent ad hoc quod solem et lunam et stellas colerent tanquam deos; quod eis inhietur Deut. IV.” Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homelias in Genesin* 2.2: “And see with what condescension [Moses] speaks to us; he says nothing of the invisible Virtues, he does not express himself in this way: In the beginning God created angels and arch-angels. It is not suddenly and without preparation that he transmits his doctrine to us. As he spoke to Jews, to men immersed in material things, unable to perceive a point of the intellectual world, it is through the objects that strike the senses that he

to the intellect, Moses speaks of it metaphorically and hastens to multiply the images in order to prevent us from attaching ourselves to any of them in an exclusive and therefore erroneous way:

Moses could only speak of prime matter to an ignorant people under the images of things he knew. He therefore speaks of it in multiple figures (not only calling it “earth” or “water”) so that prime matter does not seem to be either earth or water. However, it has a similarity to the earth insofar as it stands in forms and to water insofar as it is likely to be informed by different forms.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, concerning the sensible world itself, Moses speaks “according to their appearance.” He avoids mentioning realities too far removed from immediate knowledge: he speaks of the earth and water, but not of the air and fire, which are more subtle elements and whose existence he merely suggests to the most educated.<sup>37</sup> He says nothing about minerals, because they are buried underground.<sup>38</sup> He brings no divine approval on

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brings them to the knowledge of the supreme Craftsman, through the creatures that he manifests to them the Creator, in order to summon upon Him alone the worship and to prevent them from stopping at the creatures themselves. And yet, despite these wise precautions, they have divinized matter, they have prostrated themselves before the most vile animals” (*PG* 53, col. 29; translation mine).

<sup>36</sup> *ST* I, q. 66, a. 1, ad 1: “Non enim poterat Moyses rudi populo primam materiam exprimere, nisi sub similitudine rerum eis notarum. Unde et sub multiplici similitudine eam exprimit, non vocans eam tantum aquam vel tantum terram, ne videatur secundum rei veritatem materia prima esse vel terra vel aqua. Habet tamen similitudinem cum terra, inquantum subsidet formis; et cum aqua, inquantum est apta formari diversis formis.”

<sup>37</sup> See: *ST* I, q. 66, a. 1, ad 2 in cont. (“Aerem autem et ignem non nominat, quia non est ita manifestum rudibus, quibus Moyses loquebatur, huiusmodi esse corpora, sicut manifestum est de terra et aqua”); q.68, a. 3 (“Moyses rudi populo loquebatur, quorum imbecillitati condescendens, illa solum eis proposuit, quae manifeste sensui apparent. . . . Et ideo Moyses de aqua et terra mentionem facit expressam, aerem autem non expresse nominat, ne rudibus quoddam ignotum proponeret. Ut tamen capacibus veritatem exprimeret, dat locum intelligendi aerem . . . ”); q. 74, a. 1, ad 2 (“Ignis et aer, quia non distinguuntur a vulgo, inter partes mundi non sunt expresse nominata a Moysse”); *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 2 (“ . . . et praecipue quia aquam et terram sensui manifestum est corpora esse, aer vero et ignis non ita sunt simplicibus manifesta, quibus etiam instruendis Scriptura tradebatur”).

<sup>38</sup> See *ST* I, q. 69, a. 2: “Moyses ea tantum proposuit quae in manifesto apparent, sicut iam dictum est. Corpora autem mineralia habent generationem occultam in visceribus terrae. Et iterum, non habent manifestam distinctionem a terra, sed quaedam terrae species videntur. Et ideo de eis mentionem non fecit.”

the second day for the distinction of waters above from the waters below, because the latter completely escapes the people.<sup>39</sup> He mentions the obvious movement of the stars but says nothing about the movement of the spheres which, however, according to the cosmology of Aristotle, bear them, because the latter, whose knowledge results from rational deduction alone, remains imperceptible to the senses.<sup>40</sup>

All these pedagogical adaptations also have, in the final analysis, a moral and religious aim: to prevent or even to remove the idolatry to which the Hebrew people are supposed to be so prompt. For example, by mentioning the lights, the sun, and the moon only on the fourth day, Moses rejects the temptation to grant them a superior status to other creatures or even a divine status.<sup>41</sup>

But, between Moses and St. Thomas, the cultural context has evolved. St. Thomas is not speaking to an ignorant people but to a cultured elite, trained in Aristotelian philosophy and who thinks to be henceforth in possession of a rational knowledge of nature. What consequence does this entail? How does the exegesis of the Hexaemeron take into account a “philosophy” that too intends to tell the truth about the cosmos?

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<sup>39</sup> See *ST I*, q. 74, a. 3, ad 3: “In opere secundae diei non ponitur ‘Videt Deus quod esset bonum’ . . . quia distinctio quae ponitur secunda die, est de his quae non sunt manifesta populo, ideo huiusmodi approbatione Scriptura non utitur.”

<sup>40</sup> See *ST I*, q. 70, a. 1, ad 3: “Secundum Ptolomaeum, luminaria non sunt fixa in sphaeris, sed habent motum seorsum a motu sphaerarum. . . . Sed secundum opinionem Aristotelis, stellae fixae sunt in orbibus, et non moventur nisi motu orbium, secundum rei veritatem. Tamen motus luminarium sensu percipitur, non autem motus sphaerarum. Moyses autem, rudi populo condescendens, secutus est quae sensibilibiter apparent, ut dictum est. Si autem sit aliud firmamentum quod factum est secunda die, ab eo in quo posita sunt sidera, secundum distinctionem naturae, licet sensus non discernat, quem Moyses sequitur, ut dictum est; cessat obiectio.”

<sup>41</sup> See *ST I*, q. 70, a. 1, ad 1 (“Ideo tamen non fit mentio a principio de eis, sed solum quarta die, ut Chrysostomus dicit, ut per hoc removeat populum ab idololatria, ostendens luminaria non esse deos, ex quo nec a principio fuerunt”); ad 4 (“Sicut dicit Basilius, praemittitur productio plantarum luminaribus, ad excludendam idololatriam”); a. 2 (“Creatura aliqua corporalis potest dici esse facta vel propter actum proprium, vel propter aliam creaturam, vel propter totum universum, vel propter gloriam Dei. Sed Moyses, ut populum ab idololatria revocaret, illam solam causam tetigit, secundum quod sunt facta ad utilitatem hominum. Unde dicitur Deut. IV, ‘Ne forte, elevatis oculis ad caelum, videas solem et lunam et omnia astra caeli, et errore deceptus adores ea et colas, quae creavit dominus Deus in ministerium cunctis gentibus”).

## Exegesis and Philosophy

### *Autonomy of Philosophy: Against Theologism*

In the final analysis, all truth comes from God who is subsisting truth, and therefore according to the principle of causality of the maximum, source, and model of all created truth. But communication to men of a participation in this divine truth can be done either through the heavy mediation of the work of human reason or in a more direct way by revelation, through prophecy.<sup>42</sup> Prophecy is essentially about supernatural truths that are of themselves inaccessible to human reason left to itself. It also includes, for reasons which keep recurring in St. Thomas, truths of a natural order which are theoretically accessible to reason but which in fact benefit from being confirmed by revelation.<sup>43</sup> Prophecy does not, however, involve the whole realm of natural truths. In fact, there are many rational truths which are not the subject of any revelation and are therefore not found in Scripture, because they have no necessary and immediate connection with the salvific purposes of *sacra doctrina*.<sup>44</sup> They are part of a philosophy that is autonomous from faith. Yet they are precious for a correct interpretation of revelation, precisely because theology needs as interlocutor an epistemologically autonomous philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

But, at the time of St. Thomas, this model of collaboration in differentiation was not self-evident. Affirming the autonomy of philosophy implied a distance from the widely held view that all authentic science was contained, at least implicitly, in Sacred Scripture, the “complete book.” This was the opinion, for example, of the Franciscan Roger Bacon (†1294), who, in a letter to Pope Clement IV (1265–1268), wrote the following:

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<sup>42</sup> See Serge-Thomas Bonino, “La théologie de la vérité dans la *Lectura super Ioannem* de saint Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Études thomasiennes*, 23–49.

<sup>43</sup> See P. Synave, “La révélation des vérités divines naturelles d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Mélanges Mandonnet*, vol. 1 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1930), 327–70.

<sup>44</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibet* VII, q. 6, a. 1: “*Sacra Scriptura ad hoc divinitus est ordinata ut per eam nobis veritas manifestetur necessaria ad salutem.*”

<sup>45</sup> See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §77: “Theology needs philosophy as interlocutor in order to confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims. It was not by accident that the Fathers of the Church and the medieval theologians had recourse to non-Christian philosophers for this explanatory function.” See also §75: “The demand for a valid autonomy of thought should be respected even when theological discourse makes use of philosophical concepts and arguments. Indeed, to argue according to rigorous rational criteria is to guarantee that the results attained are universally valid.”



Perfect wisdom is one, it is contained in Scripture and must be explained by canon law and philosophy, and I include civil law and all human wisdom. For it is necessary that all useful, necessary, and worthy wisdom of the sons of God, which has God as its author, be exposed in Sacred Scripture. This brings together, as in the fist, what is explained more broadly, as in the extended hand, by canon law and philosophy. Thus, in Sacred Scripture, all truth is contained as in a source that goes forth in many streams in canon law and philosophy. And it is concentrated as in the root, what is found in canon law and philosophy as elegant branches, bright leaves, beautiful flowers and abundant fruits.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Roger Bacon, *Lettre à Clement IV*, no. 12 (Latin text ed. E. Bettoni with notes [Milan, 1964]; French trans. in *Philosophes médiévaux: Anthologie de textes philosophiques (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)*, ed. R. Imbach and M.-H. Méléard (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1986), 131–48, at 139. For Roger Bacon, all sciences, starting with philosophy, are oriented toward theology, which is also understood as an explanation of Scripture. See Roger Bacon, *Compendium studii theologiae* I, prol., no. 16: “Although the study of theologians had to deal mainly with the sacred text, it must be known . . . that, however, for fifty years, theologians have been mainly concerned with *quaestiones*. It is obvious to everyone by seeing the treatises, the summas and horseloads composed by many (Quamvis autem principalis occupatio studii theologorum deberet esse circa textum sacrum, sciendum est . . . tamen a quinquaginta annis theologi principaliter occupati sunt circa questiones, quod patet omnibus per tractatus et summas et honera equorum a multis composita)” (English and Latin in Bacon, *A Compendium of the Study of Philosophy*, ed. Thomas S. Maloney [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], 48). The sciences therefore have meaning only if they are integrated into theology: “Philosophy is dead and useless, and even harmful and reprehensible, unless theology deems it worthy to use it” (no. 10 [p. 137]). This conception of the organization of knowledge, all oriented toward and unified by theology, is inseparable in Bacon’s work from the Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination. It states that all true knowledge presupposes a special action, an illumination, of God-Truth with regard to the human intellect. This Augustinian theory of divine illumination is combined in Bacon with the original Avicennian theory of illumination by a separate agent Intellect, identified with God. It is essential for Bacon that all philosophy comes directly from God through illumination. Theological knowledge and secular knowledge have the same immediate origin. Does he not explain, according to a pattern reminiscent of traditionalism, that philosophy was originally revealed to patriarchs and prophets? It is of them that the ancient philosophers are the heirs. See P. Vignaux, *Philosophie au Moyen Âge*, ed. R. Imbach (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 168–73. However, this reduction of philosophy to theology can also be understood, through a kind of dialectical inversion, as a reduction of theology to philosophy. On the difference between the Baconian reduction and the Bonaventurian reduction, see C. Bérubé, “La réduction des sciences à la théologie selon Roger Bacon et St. Bonaventure,” in *San Bonaventura*

There is only one perfect wisdom: that which derives from divine illumination and is contained in Scripture. Philosophy is part of it. St. Thomas Aquinas rejected this *reductio artium ad theologiam*. A little-known text from the *De veritate* is very revealing on this subject. Aquinas rejects the idea that says prophecy is the communication by God of a perfect knowledge but which remains of a natural order. It is aimed specifically at Muslim and Jewish thinkers for whom the figure of the prophet, Moses or Mohammed, is first and foremost that of a legislator par excellence. The prophet assumes the figure of Plato's philosopher-king, and prophecy has the primary function of founding politics. Prophecy is therefore necessary for the formation of the natural order of the city.

Humankind cannot be preserved without life in society. Indeed, a man alone is not sufficient for the necessities of life; therefore man is "by nature a political animal," as stated in Book VII of the *Ethics*. However, society cannot be maintained without justice and the rule of justice is prophecy. Human nature has therefore been given the opportunity to achieve prophecy in a natural way.<sup>47</sup>

To which St. Thomas responds with a clear distinction between the common good of the civil society, which falls under the natural order, and the supernatural order, ordained to eternal life:

The society of men as it is ordained for this purpose, which is eternal life, can only be preserved by the justice of faith, whose principle is prophecy. Therefore, it is said in Proverbs 27: "If prophecy is lacking, the people will scatter." But since this end is supernatural, the justice ordered for this end and the prophecy that is its principle will also be supernatural. On the other hand, the justice by which human society is governed in order for the good of the City [*in ordine ad*

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*maestro di vita francescana e di sapienza cristiana: Atti del Congresso internazionale per il VII Centenario di san Bonaventura da Bagnoregio*, ed. A. Pompei, vol. 3 (Rome: Pontificia facolta teologica san Bonaventura, 1976), 19–39.

<sup>47</sup> *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 3, arg. 11: "Divina providentia rebus in esse productis tribuit ut in se habeant ea sine quibus conservari non possunt; sicut in humano corpore posuit membra quibus sumitur et decoquitur cibus, sine quo mortalis vita non conservatur. Sed humanum genus non potest sine societate conservari: unus enim homo non sufficit sibi in necessariis ad vitam, unde homo naturaliter est animal politicum, ut dicitur VIII Ethic. Societas autem conservari non potest sine iustitia; iustitiae vero regula est prophetia. Ergo naturae humanae est inditum ut ad prophetiam naturaliter homo pervenire possit."

*bonum civile*], can be obtained as much as it is necessary by means of the principles of natural law implanted in man [*sufficienter potest haberi per principia iuris naturalis homini indita*] and, in this case, it is not necessary that there be a natural prophecy.<sup>48</sup>

Sacred Scripture, which collects and transmits the prophetic revelation ordained to eternal life, and philosophy (which includes the “sciences”), the result of the exercise of natural reason, are therefore two areas that must be distinguished, especially if we also want to unite them.

### *Exegesis before Philosophy*

When he addresses “the institution of nature” with the Hexaemeron, that is to say, the establishment by God’s creative work of the structures that define nature and its laws, the exegetical theologian necessarily encounters philosophical questions, some of which today would be called “scientific.” According to Aquinas, many of these questions are not directly related to revelation. He did not neglect them, however, and even showed interest in them when he encountered them, as he explained the Hexaemeron. Thus he pauses at length on the nature of light,<sup>49</sup> or on the disputed question of the possible animation of celestial bodies.<sup>50</sup>

When the exegete encounters a philosophical question which, on the philosophical level, remains open and so belongs to the realm of simple opinion, which is generally manifested by the existence of a plurality of positions among philosophers, he is invited to adopt a certain pluralism, at least when revelation is not engaged (as is the case in the question of the eternity of the world). He must try to explain the biblical text according to the various philosophical hypotheses.<sup>51</sup> If he has a preference for one of

<sup>48</sup> *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 3, ad 11: “Societas hominum secundum quod ordinatur ad finem vitae aeternae, non potest conservari nisi per iustitiam fidei, cuius principium est prophetia; unde dicitur Proverb. XXVII, 18: ‘Cum defecerit prophetia, dissipabitur populus.’ Sed cum hic finis sit supernaturalis, et iustitia ad hunc finem ordinata, et prophetia, quae est eius principium, erit supernaturalis. Iustitia vero per quam gubernatur societas humana in ordine ad bonum civile, sufficienter potest haberi per principia iuris naturalis homini indita; et sic non oportet prophetiam esse naturalem.”

<sup>49</sup> See *ST I*, q. 67, aa. 2 and 3. There is no scriptural reference in these two articles.

<sup>50</sup> *ST I*, q. 70, a. 3: “Circa istam quaestionem apud philosophos fuit diversa opinio. [. . .] Similiter etiam apud doctores fidei, fuit circa hoc diversa opinio. [. . .]. Sic igitur patet quod corpora caelestia non sunt animata eo modo quo plantae et animalia, sed aequivoce. Unde inter ponentes ea esse animata, et ponentes ea inanimata, parva vel nulla differentia invenitur in re, sed in voce tantum.”

<sup>51</sup> See *ST I*, q. 68, a. 1 (on the nature of the star-bearing firmament): “Hoc quod

them, he must avoid tying it to the authority of the Word of God as if it were a revealed truth.<sup>52</sup> In truth, noting the distinction between philosophy and revelation, Aquinas, invites the theologian as theologian to keep a prudent distance from the various philosophical theories: unless there is evidence to the contrary, he must neither affirm them as if they were truths of faith nor deny them as if they were contrary to faith. Indeed,

It is very harmful to affirm or deny as if they belonged to sacred doctrine things that do not belong to the doctrine of piety. . . . It seems to me more certain, apropos the things that philosophers commonly think and which do not contradict our faith, not to affirm them as dogmas of faith, even if sometimes they are introduced under the name of philosophers, and not to deny them as contrary to faith, so as to not to give the wise of this world the opportunity to despise the doctrine of faith.<sup>53</sup>

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legitur firmamentum secunda die factum, dupliciter intelligi potest. Uno modo, de firmamento in quo sunt sidera. Et secundum hoc, oportet nos diversimode exponere secundum diversas opiniones hominum de firmamento." See also q. 70, a. 1, ad 1 (apropos the time of the creation of the lights, incorruptible bodies): "Secundum Augustinum, nulla difficultas ex hoc oritur. Non enim ponit successionem temporis in istis operibus, et ideo non oportet dicere quod materia luminarium fuerit sub alia forma. Secundum etiam eos qui ponunt caelestia corpora ex natura quatuor elementorum, nulla difficultas accedit, quia potest dici quod sunt formata ex praeiacenti materia, sicut animalia et plantae. Sed secundum eos qui ponunt corpora caelestia esse alterius naturae ab elementis et incorruptibilia per naturam, oportet dicere quod substantia luminarium a principio fuit creata; sed prius erat informis, et nunc formatur; non quidem forma substantiali, sed per collationem determinatae virtutis."

<sup>52</sup> See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1: "Duo sunt vitanda [. . .] aliud est, ne quidquid verum aliquis esse crediderit, statim velit asserere, hoc ad veritatem fidei pertinere; quia, ut Augustinus dicit: 'Obest, si ad ipsam doctrinae pietatis formam pertinere arbitretur falsum, scilicet quod credit, et pertinacius affirmare audeat quod ignorat.'"

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Responsio de 43 Arcutulis*, prol.: "Hoc tamen in principio protestans, quod plures horum articulorum ad fidei doctrinam non pertinent sed magis ad philosophorum dogmata. Multum autem nocet talia que ad pietatis doctrinam non pertinent vel asserere vel negare quasi pertinentia ad sacram doctrinam. . . . Unde michi videtur tutius esse ut huiusmodi que philosophi communiter senserunt et nostre fidei non repugnant neque sic esse asserenda ut dogmata fidei, etsi aliquando sub nomine philosophorum introducantur, neque sic esse neganda tamquam fidei contraria, ne sapientibus huius mundi contempnendi doctrinam fidei occasio prebeat" (Leonine ed., vol 42, p. 327; translation mine). In this expert report requested by the Master of the Order of Preachers, Saint Thomas is very careful not to make theological judgments on matters that are exclusively philosophical.

If, on the other hand, philosophy has reached certainty in its own order, the theologian must take it into account in his exegesis, at least in a negative way: he must never propose an interpretation of the sacred text that would directly contradict a philosophical thesis regarded as certain.

Although divine Scripture may be expounded in various ways, no one should attach himself to an interpretation so exclusively that, if it is established by a certain reason that it is false, he dares to affirm that it is the meaning of Scripture, so that Scripture may not be derided by unbelievers and the way of salvation should not be closed to them.<sup>54</sup>

According to the principle of the unity of truth, which has its source in God himself, subsisting Truth, the interpretation of the sacred text that communicates the divine truth must be compatible with certain scientific knowledge (*certa ratio*). Transgressing this principle would lead to two harmful consequences against which St. Thomas, following Augustine, warns. The first would be to expose the truth of Scripture to slander,<sup>55</sup> in the sense that statements contrary to the truth would be falsely attributed to it, which would reflect on its first author, the Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup> The second consequence follows from the first: to give Scripture a teaching clearly opposed to scientific certainties would lead to the *irrisio infidelium*, that is to say, would provoke the mockery of unbelievers, with the dreadful effect, contrary to the evangelizing mission of the Church, of closing to them the path of salvation.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *ST I*, q. 68, a. 1: "Sicut Augustinus docet, in huiusmodi quaestionibus duo sunt observanda. . . . Secundo, cum Scriptura divina multipliciter exponi possit, quod nulli expositioni aliquis ita praecise inhaereat quod, si certa ratione constiterit hoc esse falsum, quod aliquis sensum Scripturae esse asserere praesumat, ne Scriptura ex hoc ab infidelibus derideatur, et ne eis via credendi praecludatur." Cf. *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5 ("Sed haec expositio in hoc videtur deficere, quod asserit quaedam per Scripturam sacram intelligi, quorum contraria satis evidentibus rationibus probantur"), and *ST I*, q. 68, a. 3 ("Sed quia ista positio per veras rationes falsa deprehenditur, non est dicendum hunc esse intellectum Scripturae").

<sup>55</sup> See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: "Et ideo aliter videtur dicendum ad hoc quod Scripturae veritas ab omni calumnia defendatur . . ."

<sup>56</sup> See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, corp.: "Ne aliquis id quod patet esse falsum, dicat in verbis Scripturae, quae creationem rerum docet, debere intelligi; Scripturae enim divinae a spiritu sancto traditae non potest falsum subesse, sicut nec fidei, quae per eam docetur."

<sup>57</sup> The theme of the *irrisio infidelium* in the context of the interpretation of Genesis comes from St. Augustine. See Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 1.19.39: "Turpe est autem nimis

Still following in the footsteps of St. Augustine, St. Thomas rejects another strategy to reconcile exegesis and philosophy at a lower cost, which consists in exempting the work from the beginning from the requirements of philosophy under the pretext of its miraculous character in order to justify the points that are scientifically difficult in the Hexaemeron, such as the presence of water above the firmament. Now, St. Augustine wrote that the exegete of Genesis seeks to “know how God constituted the nature of things, not what he likes to do in them or from them to miraculously manifest his power.”<sup>58</sup> An appeal to divine omnipotence cannot be a substitute for philosophical explanation. In the same vein, St. Thomas denounces the unjustified use of a kind of “Planck’s Wall” which would make the ordinary laws of nature not apply in the beginning. On the contrary, creation establishes nature, that is a structure whose laws remain stable:

The Scriptures at the beginning of Genesis is a reminder of the institution of nature, which continues thereafter. Therefore, we should not pretend that something was done then that ceased thereafter.<sup>59</sup>

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et perniciosum ac maxime cavendum, ut christianum de his rebus quasi secundum christianas litteras loquentem ita delirare audiat, ut, quemadmodum dicitur, toto caelo errare conspiciens risum tenere vix possit. Et non tam molestum est, quod errans homo deridetur, sed quod auctores nostri ab eis, qui foris sunt, talia sensisse creduntur, et cum magno eorum exitio, de quorum salute satagimus, tamquam indocti reprehenduntur atque respuuntur.” It is very present in the Thomasian commentaries on the Hexaemeron: *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2 (“Haec quidem positio est communior, et magis consona videtur litterae quantum ad superficiem; sed prior est rationabilior, et magis ab irrisione infidelium sacram Scripturam defendens; quod valde observandum docet Augustinus super Genes. ad Litt. libro 1, cap. 19, ut sic Scripturae exponantur, quod ab infidelibus non irrideantur”); *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1 (“Ab infidelibus veritas fidei irridetur, cum ab aliquo simplici et fideli tamquam ad fidem pertinens proponitur aliquid quod certissimis documentis falsum esse ostenditur, ut etiam dicit I super Genes. ad litteram”); *ST I*, q. 46, a. 2 (debate on the eternity of the world). In other contexts, the need to avoid the *irrisio infidelium* is used to justify the discipline of the arcane or the difficulty of the Scriptures; see *Quodlibet VII*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 2. On the theme of the *irrisio infidelium*, see V. Serverat, “Irrisio infidelium: Encore sur Raimond Lulle et Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 90 (1990): 436–48.

<sup>58</sup> Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2.1.2: “Nunc enim quemadmodum Deus instituerit naturas rerum, secundum Scripturas eius nos convenit quaerere; non quid in eis vel ex eis ad miraculum potentiae suae velit operari.”

<sup>59</sup> *ST I*, q. 67, a. 4, ad 2: “Quia Scriptura in principio Genesis commemorat institutionem naturae, quae postmodum perseverat, unde non debet dici quod aliquid tunc factum fuerit, quod postmodum esse desierit.” Cf.: *In II sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3

*The Contrast with St. Bonaventure*

The importance that St. Thomas gives in biblical exegesis to the criterion of non-contradiction with philosophy is clearly evident from the contrast with St. Bonaventure on how to evaluate the Augustinian exegesis of the Hexaemeron. The medieval exegesis of the Hexaemeron is meant to be an extension of the authoritative patristic exegesis.<sup>60</sup> However, sometimes the Fathers disagree on the interpretation of one aspect or another of the Hexaemeron. St. Thomas reports several of these discrepancies and generally tries to mitigate them.<sup>61</sup>

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(“Et ideo oportet quod semper illuminet corpora sibi directe opposita . . . nisi ponatur hoc virtute divina fieri, et quasi miraculose; et hoc non convenit ponere in prima institutione naturae, ut Augustinus dicit”); d. 14, q. 1, a. 1 (347): (“Alii vero dicunt, aquas de natura hujus elementi quod apud nos est, super caelos virtute divina contineri. Sed hoc removet Augustinus ubi supra, quia in operibus sex dierum, quibus natura instituta est, non quaeritur quid Deus facere possit sua virtute, sed quid rerum natura patiatur”); d. 18, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 5; *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: (“Nec est sufficiens responsio, quod omnipotentia Dei aquas illas contra earum naturam supra caelum sustinet; quia nunc quaeritur qualiter Deus instituerit naturas rerum, non quod ex eis aliquod miraculum potentiae suae velit operari, ut Augustinus in eodem libro dicit”); ad 14 (“Nihil cogit nos dicere, nec Scripturae Genesis auctoritas, nec aliqua ratio, quod alio modo in illo rerum principio materia formis elementaribus subesset quam modo”); q. 6, a. 1, arg. 9; *ST I*, q. 68, a. 2, ad 1 (“Quibusdam videtur ratio illa solvenda per hoc, quod aquae, quamvis sint naturaliter graves, virtute tamen divina super caelos continentur. Sed hanc solutionem Augustinus excludit, II Lib. super Gen. ad Litt., dicens quod nunc quemadmodum Deus instituit naturas rerum convenit quaerere; non quid in eis ad miraculum suae potentiae velit operari”).

<sup>60</sup> In his work of interpreting the Word of God, the exegete is part of a tradition which, according to the epistemology of Catholic theology, has the value of authority and which gives a central place to the Fathers of the Church. In his commentary on the Hexaemeron, St. Thomas therefore constantly refers to the Fathers of the Church, both in terms of the principles of the method to be implemented and in terms of the concrete interpretations of the text. The authority of the Fathers is of course totally subordinated to that of Scripture itself.

<sup>61</sup> Without ever renouncing a certain concordism, St. Thomas points out, for example, the difference between Basil and John Chrysostom on the uniqueness or plurality of the heavens, which he strives to reduce to a simple difference of expression. See *ST I*, q. 68, a. 4: “Circa hoc videtur esse quaedam diversitas inter Basilium et Chrysostomum. Dicit enim Chrysostomus non esse nisi unum caelum; et quod pluraliter dicitur, ‘caeli caelorum,’ hoc est propter proprietatem linguae Hebraeae, in qua consuetum est ut caelum solum pluraliter significetur; sicut sunt etiam multa nomina in latino quae singulari carent. Basilium autem, et Damascenus sequens eum, dicunt plures esse caelos. Sed haec diversitas magis est in voce quam in re.” He also points out the difference between Strabo and Bede, on the one hand, and Basil on the other, on the reasons that suggest the (debatable) existence of an empyrean heaven, the abode of the blessed. See *ST I*, q. 66, a. 3:



But there is a more fundamental difference between the general exegesis of the Hexaemeron by St. Augustine and that of the other Fathers of the Church. The heart of the dispute concerns the meaning to be given to the six days of creation that structure the Genesis account.<sup>62</sup> For St. Augustine, creation was simultaneous and the six days are in fact only a pedagogical explanation of the different aspects of the unique moment of creation. On the other hand, for most other Fathers, the six days correspond to six time periods.<sup>63</sup> St. Thomas, of course, strives to minimize the differences

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“Caelum empyreum non invenitur positum nisi per auctoritates Strabi et Bedae, et iterum per auctoritatem Basilii. In cuius positione quantum ad aliquid conveniunt, scilicet quantum ad hoc quod sit locus beatorum. Dicit enim Strabus, et etiam Beda, quod statim factum angelis est repletum. Basilium etiam dicit, in II Hexaem., sicut damnati in tenebras ultimas abiguntur ita remuneratio pro dignis operibus restauratur in ea luce quae est extra mundum, ubi beati quietis domicilium sortientur. Differunt tamen quantum ad rationem ponendi. Nam Strabus et Beda ponunt caelum empyreum ea ratione, quia firmamentum, per quod caelum siderum intelligunt, non in principio sed secunda die dicitur factum. Basilium vero ea ratione ponit, ne videatur simpliciter Deus opus suum a tenebris inchoasse; quod Manichaei calumniantur, Deum veteris testamenti Deum tenebrarum nominantes. Hae autem rationes non sunt multum cogentes.”

<sup>62</sup> Other differences between St. Augustine and the other Fathers were added to this central dispute. For example, on the question of whether the creation of formless matter preceded chronologically its formation in creatures. But, as St. Thomas observes, the definition of formless matter is not the same for St. Augustine and for others. See *ST I*, q. 66, a. 1: “Circa hoc sunt diversae opiniones sanctorum. Augustinus enim vult quod informitas materiae corporalis non praecesserit tempore formationem ipsius, sed solum origine vel ordine naturae. Alii vero, ut Basilium, Ambrosius et Chrysostomus, volunt quod informitas materiae tempore praecesserit formationem. Et quamvis hae opiniones videantur esse contrariae, tamen parum ab invicem differunt, aliter enim accipit informitatem materiae Augustinus quam alii.” See also *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1. There are still other points of detail on which St. Augustine goes at it alone. He believes, for example, that on the third day, the plants were created in matter in power and not in act. See *ST I*, q. 69, a. 2: “Sed tamen circa productionem plantarum, aliter opinatur Augustinus ab aliis. Alii enim expositores dicunt quod plantae productae sunt actu in suis speciebus in hac tertia die, secundum quod superficies litterae sonat. Augustinus autem, V Sup. Gen. ad Litt., dicit quod causaliter tunc dictum est produxisse terram herbam et lignum, idest producendi accepisse virtutem.”

<sup>63</sup> See *ST I*, q. 74, a. 2: “In hac quaestione Augustinus ab aliis expositoribus dissentit. Augustinus enim vult, et super Gen. ad Litt., et XI de Civ. Dei, et ad Orosium, quod omnes qui dicuntur septem dies, sunt unus dies septemplex rebus praesentatus. Alii vero expositores sentiunt quod fuerunt septem dies diversi, et non unus tantum.” See also q. 69, a. 1: “Hic oportet aliter dicere secundum expositionem Augustini, et aliorum sanctorum Augustinus enim in omnibus his operibus non ponit durationis ordinem, sed solum originis et naturae. . . . Sed secundum alios

in order to reconcile the Fathers according to the traditional principle of *diversi non adversi*.<sup>64</sup> The difference, he says, is not about doctrinal background (things are produced into existence by way of creation) that engages faith and requires unity, but only about how to explain the letter of Genesis.<sup>65</sup> In any case, even if he is perhaps more reserved in *ST*, in the *Scriptum* St. Thomas did not hide his preference for the Augustinian interpretation on the grounds that it was more rational and better able to defend Scripture from the mockery of unbelievers.<sup>66</sup>

Now, on the same question, St. Bonaventure adopts a diametrically opposed position.<sup>67</sup> The Seraphic Doctor understands very well the stakes of the choice between the two exegeses: nothing less than the correct way of articulating faith and reason, exegesis and philosophy.

On this issue, some Fathers followed the theological path, drawing reason towards the things of faith. But others, among whom the principal was Saint Augustine, have followed more of the philosophical path that poses things that seem more in tune with reason. He therefore drew the interpretation of Scripture in the sense of confirming and certifying reason.<sup>68</sup>

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sanctos, in his operibus etiam ordo durationis attenditur, ponunt enim quod, informitas materiae tempore praecessit formationem, et una formatio aliam.”

<sup>64</sup> See Henri de Lubac, “À propos de la formule: ‘diversi, sed non adversi,’” *Recherches de science religieuse* 40 (1952): 27–40.

<sup>65</sup> See *ST* I, q. 74, a. 2: “Hae autem duae opiniones, si referantur ad expositionem litterae Genesis, magnam diversitatem habent. . . . Sed si istae duae opiniones referantur ad modum productionis rerum, non invenitur magna differentia. . . . Ut igitur neutri sententiae praeiudicetur, utriusque rationibus respondendum est.”

<sup>66</sup> See *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2: “Haec quidem positio [=aliorum sanctorum] est communior, et magis consona videtur litterae quantum ad superficiem; sed prior [=i.e. Augustini] est rationabilior, et magis ab irrisione infidelium sacram Scripturam defendens.” George Zammit (“Principles of Hexameron interpretation according to St. Thomas,” *Melita Theologica* 2, no. 1 [1949]: 5–16) believes, on the basis of the evolution between the *Scriptum* and *ST*, that, in the end, St. Thomas did not adopt the position of St. Augustine. But the stated and explicit objective of Zammit’s article, which is to show that St. Thomas meets all the requirements of the decree of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, including the defense of the “literal historical sense” of the first chapters of Genesis, urge him to accentuate somewhat the interest of St. Thomas for “literal historical” exegeses.

<sup>67</sup> On the stakes of the difference between St. Bonaventure and St. Albert and St. Thomas on this point, see Gilles Emery, *La Trinité créatrice, Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses précurseurs, Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 235–37.

<sup>68</sup> Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: “Circa hanc quaestionem diversae fuerunt

This is followed by a brief presentation on the Augustinian thesis, at the end of which Bonaventure acknowledges: “This position was very rational and quite subtle.”<sup>69</sup> Then comes the Parthian arrow:

Yet the meaning of Scripture seems forced to fit that position. It is therefore safer and more meritorious to submit our intellect and reason completely to Scripture than to force Scripture in one way or another. That is why the other doctors, in common, and those who preceded Augustine and those who followed him, understood and held what the text and the letter of the Sacred Scripture of Genesis seem to indicate [*sonare*].<sup>70</sup>

Rather than St. Augustine’s overly philosophical exegesis, Bonaventure therefore prefers a pious exegesis, more literal, and made more reliable by the broad consensus of the Fathers on its subject. “Even if this position seems less rational than the other, it is not irrational to hold it,” says Bonaventure, who then distinguishes two regimens of reason: reason can rely on itself or accept itself only as a “captive” of faith, wholly devoted to its service. One of the possible applications of the theme of *reductio artium ad theologiam*, especially the Franciscan doctor’s critique of separate reason and the project of an autonomous philosophy, is easily recognized. Only reason “captive” in obedience to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), not closing itself to the higher light, can perceive the rationality of the more literal interpretation: “Even if reason does not perceive the correctness of this position inso-

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Sanctorum opiniones. Quidam enim Sancti in hac quaestione magis secuti sunt viam theologiam, trahentes rationem ad ea quae sunt fidei. Quidam vero, inter quos praecipuus fuit Augustinus, magis secuti sunt viam philosophicam, quae illa ponit, quae magis videtur rationi consona: unde et intellectum Scripturae traxit ad rationis confirmationem et attestationem.”

<sup>69</sup> Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: “Unde cum videatur rationabilis, a summa potentia omnia produci simul, et mora temporis interiacentis nullius videatur esse utilitatis vel necessitatis; posuit, omnia simul esse producta, suam positionem confirmans per auctoritates sacrae Scripturae, et exponens illud quod videtur sibi contraire, videlicet de dierum distinctione, ostendens, quod illi dies non fuerunt dies materiales, sed potius spirituales, qui omnes simul potuerunt esse.—Et haec positio multum fuit rationabilis et valde subtilis.”

<sup>70</sup> Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: “Verumtamen, quia ad hanc positionem videtur intellectus Scripturae distrahi, et securius est et magis meritorium, intellectum nostrum et rationem omnino Scripturae supponere, quam ipsam aliquo modo distrahere: ideo communiter alii doctores, et qui praecesserunt Augustinum, et qui secuti sunt, sic intellexerunt et posuerunt, sicut textus et littera sacrae Scripturae Genesis sonare videtur.”

far as it relies on its own consideration, it perceives it when it is a prisoner under the light of faith.”<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

Without ever questioning the fundamental unity of Christian wisdom, St. Thomas Aquinas is more attentive than Roger Bacon or St. Bonaventure to its organic character of unity in diversity, and he insists on the epistemological distinction between biblical revelation and philosophical rationality, whose autonomy he enshrines. For this reason, the principles of biblical exegesis that St. Thomas applies in his reading of the Hexaemeron will subsequently play an important role when Catholic exegesis of Genesis at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is confronted with the full force of secularization, that is to say, on the one hand, the rise of “independent” biblical criticism, and on the other hand, the new scientific worldview. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Pierre Benoit, and many others were able to benefit from the Thomasian treatise on prophecy, as well as from principles established in the questions we have just studied, in order to develop the principles of Catholic exegesis.<sup>72</sup> In this context, it was above all a question

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<sup>71</sup> Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: “Hanc positionem, etsi minus videatur rationabilis quam alia, non tamen est irrationabile sustinere. Quamvis enim ratio non percipiat huius positionis congruitatem, prout considerationi suae innitur, percipit tamen, prout sub lumine fidei captivatur.” But Bonaventure here grants the Augustinian interpretation by presenting it as the anagogical meaning of the text: “Ratio autem anagogica est, ut in illa dierum distinctione intelligatur perfectio cognitionis in angelica natura beatificata, secundum quod plane ostendit Augustinus super Genesim ad litteram quasi per totum, quod ideo vocat ad litteram, quia expositionem istam, quam alii reputabant anagogicam, dixit Legislatorem intendisse ad litteram.” While emphasizing the prudence shown by St. Augustine, who makes no categorical statements, Bonaventure insists here on the motivations, ultimately extrinsic, apologetic, that led Augustine to present this interpretation: “Nihil tamen ibi asserendo dicit, sed protestatur ipse, modo inquisitorio se ibi procedere. Et sicut patet ex eius intentione ibidem magis volebat intellectum ex Scriptura elicere, ex quo Scriptura non posset a viris philosophicis derideri, nec propter hoc aliquis, naturali philosophia imbutus, a fidei veritate retardari, sicut ipse aliquando fuerat retardatus, magis, inquam, quam intellectum principalem exponere quem ibi habuit Legislator: et magis intendit ostendere, quid congruum fuerit vel tunc esse potuerit, quam quid factum fuerit. Et in duodecimo Confessionum ostendit, quod una et eadem Scriptura multipliciter potest intelligi, et in omnibus sensibus vere, quorum nullus Spiritum sanctum latuit, ex cuius inspiratione Scriptura edita fuit. Et in hoc manifeste ostendit, quod aliis non contradicit.”

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, the “Renseignements techniques” of Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit in Thomas Aquinas, *Somme théologique, La prophétie, 2a-2ae, Questions 171–178*, trans. Paul Synave, O.P., and Pierre Benoit, O.P., 2nd ed. updated by

of going beyond hasty concordisms to better distinguish between what was revelation and what was “science,” historical or physical. This is now a given. Today, it is a somewhat different challenge that St. Thomas can help us meet. It is a question of overcoming the dualism that has been introduced into Christian theology, under the guise of an anthropological turning point, by the massive absorption of the Kantian separation between the realm of nature and the realm of human subjectivity, which has condemned nature and the cosmos to theological insignificance.<sup>73</sup> The Thomasian exegesis of the Hexaemeron then comes as a timely reminder that, with respect for epistemological distinctions, the Word of God still has something to say about nature and the cosmos. Moreover, the meta-

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Jean-Pierre Torrell (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des jeunes, 2005 [original ed. 1947]).

<sup>73</sup> This marginalization of creation finds an exemplary expression in Rudolf Bultmann: “Only statements about God that express the existential relationship between man and God are legitimate. Illegitimate are the statements that speak of God’s action as a cosmic event. The affirmation of God as creator cannot be understood as a theoretical statement about God, grasped in a general sense as *creator mundi*. This assertion can only be a personal confession signifying that I understand myself as a creature that owes its existence to God” (*Jésus: Mythologie et démythologisation* [Paris: Seuil, 1968; originally 1926], 232; English translation mine). In the perspective of modern philosophies of subjectivity, nature is not only marginalized but also often perceived as the “other” of the mind, of subjectivity, sometimes its enemy. In any case, it is only an insignificant framework (since meaning appears only with man), an amorphous material at man’s disposal. It is up to man to inject meaning into a nature that has no meaning, to “rationalize” it through technology, to thus confer on it a “value.” And, since the body is the nature within us, the ultimate stage in this process is the transformation of the human body according to the projects of subjectivity alone (transhumanism). In this context, theology, when it has become subservient to the philosophies of subjectivity, has tended to neglect the doctrine of creation (often under the biblical pretext of the primacy of the covenant over creation) and to abandon the corporeal world to the sole gaze of “science” to reduce faith to a relationship of subjectivity to Subjectivity. See Joseph Ratzinger, “Transmission de la foi et sources de la foi,” *La Documentation Catholique* 80 (1983): 260–67, at 266: “From time to time, there is a fear that too much emphasis on this aspect of faith [creation] may compromise Christology. Considering some presentations of neo-Scholastic theology, this fear may seem justified. Today, however, it is the opposite fear that seems justified to me. The marginalization of the doctrine of creation reduces the notion of God and, consequently, Christology. The religious phenomenon can no longer be explained outside the psychological and sociological space; the material world is confined to the field of physics and technology. But it is only if being, including matter, is conceived of as having come out of God’s hands, that God is also really our Savior and our Life, the true Life” (translation mine).

physical perspective of the theology of St. Thomas, capable of embracing the order of nature as well as that of subjectivity, and of illuminating them both with the Word of God properly understood, is a prime resource for an integral theology of nature as a created reality. N.V

## God's Passions: Unfitting Attributes? Aquinas on the Biblical God

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IN BOOK 5 OF HIS *ETHICS*, Baruch Spinoza dismisses the passions and emotions (or affects) of God, because they are inconsistent with his perfection.

Proposition 17 : God is without passions, and he is not affected with any emotion of pleasure or pain.

Proof: All ideas, insofar they are related to God, are true, that is they are adequate. Thus, God is without passions. Again, God cannot pass to a state of greater or lesser perfection, and so he is not affected with any emotions of pleasure or pain.

Corollary: Strictly speaking, God does not love or hate anyone for God is not affected with any emotion of pleasure or pain, and consequently, he neither loves nor hates anyone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, bk. 5, prop. 17, in *Complete Works*, trans. S. Shirley, ed. M. L. Morgan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), 371 (translation slightly adjusted). An earlier version of this article was given to participants of the “Theological Exegesis Conference” held by the Thomistic Institute of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rome, February 22–23, 2019. This paper articulates some key arguments drawn from my recent book *Les Émotions de Dieu: indices d’engagement* (Paris: Cerf, 2019).



We could spend much time, I suspect, refining the interpretation of this statement within the framework of Spinoza's own system. It might be an attempt to prune the biblical character of God to match the requirements of rational theism or a more radical denial dressed in a soft cloth of some gentle atheism. Radically, adequate ideas entail actions, whereas inadequate ideas entail passions.<sup>2</sup> God has only adequate ideas, which exclude passions as such. Moreover, the passage from passivity to activity provides joy, whereas the passage from activity to passivity entails sadness. A perfect God cannot go through such changes. At first sight, this contention makes sense. If we accept the impassive God, how do we approach the somehow "passionate" God of Scripture? Let me just use Spinoza's statement as an intellectual provocation. We could find similar radical critics in contemporary atheistic literature.<sup>3</sup>

One linguistic precaution has to be taken into account. Passions and emotions are not exactly the same. We may argue for a clear distinction of their descriptions—as Kant did for instance, stating that emotions shake us and are very limited in time whereas passions last much longer and are much more powerful.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the biblical narratives reveal a God who has both passions and emotions. Therefore, I will treat both at once here, while distinguishing between them.

At least two basic reasons should restrain us from dismissing too easily the emotions of the biblical God: first, by himself and through prophets, God spoke a human language to human beings, addressing not only their intellect and will, but also their appetites and emotions; and, secondly, God the Son became man. Consequently, the emotions of the Son may have something unique to reveal regarding God's disposition toward us.

This will be one of my underlying assumptions: human emotions are not just perceptions of bodily changes and animal reactions;<sup>5</sup> they demonstrate and signify specific modes of engaging with others and with the world. Thus, when the biblical God reveals himself as having emotions, we learn something about the unique manner of God's engagement with his beloved creation and creatures.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Spinoza, *Ethics* 3, props. 3–15.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Valerie Tarico, "God's Emotions: Why the Biblical God is Hopelessly Human," in *The End of Christianity*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011), 155–77.

<sup>4</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, bk. 3, nos. 73–87, especially no. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike reductionist views inspired by William James, "What is an Emotion?," *Mind* 9 (1884): 188–205.

<sup>6</sup> I have unfolded this insight in *Les Émotions de Dieu*.

I suggest beginning with Aquinas's treatment of the problem of God's passions, in *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] I, which leads to a different outcome from Spinoza's (part 1 of the present essay). I will highlight the linguistic dimension of Aquinas's interpretation of God's improper passions. He uses two different constructions of metaphors, giving way to two very different strategies of interpretation (part 2). I will then suggest this innovative insight of Aquinas can be unpacked thanks to Paul Ricoeur's twofold characterization of metaphor, in rhetoric or in semantic. Regarding God's emotions, the semantic frame should be extended to include narrativity (part 3). I will eventually suggest one possible application of this line of investigation, to be applied to God's sadness. Overall, my approach requires slowing down the process of interpreting God's emotions (part 4).

### **Aquinas on the Limited and Significant Fittingness of God's Passions**

Chapters 89–91 of *SCG* I are a short treatise on God's passions. Aquinas starts by listing sound and compelling arguments which should impede us of attributing any passion to God:

- Passions require senses and are rooted in sensible knowledge;
- Passions entail bodily modifications of many kinds;
- Passions draw people out of their natural and calm dispositions;
- Each passion is directed toward *one* specific object;
- Passions affect beings who are in potency.

For all these reasons, passions as such, according to the generic dimension of the concept, are inconsistent with the nature of God.

Aquinas then moves from the genus of the passions to their species, to investigate further possibilities. The proper meaning of a specific passion is drawn from its proper object and from the mode through which a patient or a subject relates to this object. For instance, an angry man relates to some present disturbing evil by way of confrontation, disapproval, and possibly revenge. The loving woman relates to the object of her love through inner adequacy, attraction, tenderness, delight, or excitement. Nowadays, we call this mode of reference the "intentionality" proper to such or such passion. Abstracting passions from their common genus and considering them according to their specific intentionality opens new possibilities of fittingness.

According to Aquinas, most of the passions, even if we leave aside the genus and consider only their specificity, do not properly suit God. He excludes the following ones:

Sorrow and pain, whose object is some present evil;  
 Hope whose relation to its object is unmastered non-possession;  
 Fear, whose object is a threatening evil;  
 Regret (literally “penance”), a sadness entailing a change of the will;  
 Envy, a sadness built on the perception that the other’s good is an evil  
 for the one who perceives;  
 Anger, an appetite for revenge following a sadness about an injury from  
 others.

Nevertheless, a few passions can be properly attributed to God in respect of their specific mode of relation to their proper objects: joy (*gaudium*), delight (*delectatio*), and love (*amor*). Only these three are properly attributed to God.

Two further developments deserve particular notice here. First, among human beings, each of the passions of joy, delight, and love have a corresponding specific act of the will. In our experience, the two registers (sensible passions and rational will) are so entwined that the same names are used to label both complex passions of the sensible appetite and simple acts of the will when it rejoices in, delights at, or loves someone or something. Thus, when applied to God, these passions signify simple acts of the divine will.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, Aquinas provides a shrewd observation about human love, which is a unitive power:<sup>8</sup> the more extended are the activities shared by the lovers, the more intense is their love; and the more deeply rooted (in nature or in habits) is the source of some love, the stronger is this very love, as in familial bounds.<sup>9</sup>

Let me suggest a possible benefit of this observation. Most of the time, intensity and stability do not get along together in human experiences of love. Intensity is often a property of some passion, whereas the will is usually more determined, reasonable, and stable. As a consequence, once we deal with God’s love in human language, it might be fitting to use both the register of passions and the register of the will, in order to signify the completeness of divine love: it is both intense and stable, because it is entirely actual. We know that God’s love for his Son and for his creatures goes far beyond any passion, but this very love combines some properties,

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] I, ch. 90, no. 3, and *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 22, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>8</sup> This classical definition of love was drawn from Ps.-Dionysius Areopagite, *On Divine Names* 4, which Aquinas commented on at length early in his career.

<sup>9</sup> See Aquinas, *SCG* I, ch. 91, no. 4.

like intensity and stability, which are somehow divided along passions and acts of the will among human beings. Out of experience, we also know that a human love is more integral, durable, and perfect when it combines both the intensity of passion and the stability of the will. So we might need these two distinct perfections of created love to signify properly the fullness and uniqueness of divine love.

According to this broad theological analysis of the limited fittingness of divine passions, which could be disputed in some of its anthropological assumptions,<sup>10</sup> most of the passions or emotions attributed to God in biblical narratives, such as sorrow, anger, regret, or envy, are not to be understood as properly signified. It does not mean that they are irrelevant, but that their mode of attribution is of a different kind. Improper attributes might be highly valuable and revelatory, as well as proper attributes.

My main interest is now to highlight two different schemes of metaphorical attributions made available by Aquinas to receive and value the price of unfitting passions of the biblical God. One of them is traditional among Aquinas's predecessors. The other one seems to be quite new. Let us consider this intriguing novelty.

### **Aquinas on the Twofold Use of Metaphors, of Which One Is Intriguing**

Regarding biblical affections of God, which cannot be attributed properly to him, because they contradict his perfection—as Spinoza will later assert—Aquinas proposes to interpret them *metaphorice*:

It must be noted . . . that the other affections which in their species are repugnant to divine perfection, are also said of God in Sacred Scripture, not indeed properly, as has been proved, but metaphorically, because of a likeness either in effects or in some preceding affection.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I think of the discontinuous distinctions among passions and the object/patient conception of emotions, compared to contemporary psychology more concerned with continuity of emotional valences, appraisal, and cognitive components of the emotions. See Gerald L. Clore and Andrew Ortony, "Appraisal Theories: How Cognition Shapes Affect into Emotions," in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, and Lisa Feldman Barrett, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2008), 628–42, to be contrasted with Paul Ekman, "Basic Emotions," in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Tim Dalgleish and Mick J. Power (Sussex: UK, John Wiley, 1999), 45–60. Elementary emotions are listed by Ekman as follows: amusement, contentment, disgust, embarrassment, excitement, fear, guilt, pride in achievement, relief, sadness/distress, satisfaction, sensory pleasure, and shame.

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, *SCGI*, ch. 91, no. 15, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 281.

Aquinas's understanding of metaphors is subtle and not perfectly defined.<sup>12</sup> Most of the time, his notion of metaphor is qualified by reference to some similitude, a proportion which is imperfect and limited, yet relevant and true. Regarding God's passions, the metaphorical attribution is said to operate in the following ways.

*Primo*, it operates because of a similitude between God's acts and some effects of the passion mentioned by Scripture to signify such actions.<sup>13</sup> In this way, God's anger might signify some just and wise punishment; God's sadness when confronted by his creatures' misery might signify the action of relieving them of such burdens; and God's repentance might signify that he restores or destroys what he had previously done (or announced). The similitude on which the metaphorical attribution is built may apply not only to effects but also to properties. For instance, the audacity and strength of the lion justifies using that image for God in Scripture. This line of explication is often used in Aquinas's writings, as it was among his predecessors.<sup>14</sup>

*Secundo*, metaphorical attribution operates because of a similitude between such or such passion mentioned by Scripture in a specific passage and another passion which is not expressed but precedes the one attributed to God in the text under consideration. Here is Thomas's exposition of this kind of metaphorical attribution:

And I say *in some preceding affection* since love and joy, which are properly in God, are the principles of others affections, love in the manner of a moving principle, joy in the manner of an end. Hence, those likewise who punish in anger rejoice as having gained their end. God, then, is said to be saddened in so far as certain things take place that are contrary to what He loves and approves; just as we experience sadness over things that have taken place against

<sup>12</sup> See Gilbert Dahan, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la métaphore: Rhétorique et herméneutique" (1992), in *Lire la Bible au Moyen Âge. Essais d'herméneutique médiévale* (Geneva: Droz, 2009), 249–82. Dahan has revealed that the notion of metaphor has three constitutive elements: *similitudo*, *convenientia*, and *analogia*.

<sup>13</sup> See Aquinas, *SCG* I, ch. 91, no. 16.

<sup>14</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *In I sent.*, d. 34, q. 3, a. 1, resp. and ad 2; a. 2, ad 4; d. 45, q. 1, a. 4, resp.; *In II sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 2, resp.; *In III sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 1 and ad 1; *SCG* I, ch. 91, nos. 11–12; *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9, resp.; q. 20, a. 1, ad 2; q. 33, a. 3, resp. [1]; I-II, q. 37, a. 2, resp.; q. 46, a. 5, ad 1. See also Gilbert Dahan, "Les émotions de Dieu dans l'exégèse médiévale," in *Émotions de Dieu: Attributions et appropriations chrétiennes (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, ed. Chrystel Bernat and Frédéric Gabriel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 97–121.

our will. This is apparent in Isaiah (59:15–16): God “saw, and it appeared evil in His eyes, because there is no judgment. And He saw that there is not a man, and he stood astonished, because there is none to oppose Himself [Douai-Rheims].”<sup>15</sup>

In such occurrences, God’s sorrow might be deciphered by taking into account another passion, here the simple passion of love, properly applied to God. Consequently, sorrowfulness becomes a metaphorical expression of God’s disapproval in front of the disfiguration (by sins or other damages) of those he deeply loves. The quotation of Isaiah hints at some astonishment on the part of God when faced with evil, a sorrowful reversal of his prior amazement in front of goodness.

In such a case, sadness is not to be interpreted according to the first configuration of metaphorical attribution mentioned earlier. In theory, sadness could have been interpreted according to some actions or effects we usually do or endure when we are saddened by something or someone: we tend to withdraw from reality or we feel overwhelmed. But God does not do so.

To clarify the second possibility of metaphorical attribution, which may be more fitting and sound than the first one, we may have to introduce the category of narrative. Searching for an antecedent passion that is not identified in the text but nevertheless remains explanatory for an explicit passion entails some element of temporality and, therefore, a subtextual plot. The literary structure is somehow of a narrative kind.

We may also assume that the reference to an antecedent passion might be to one that is improper to God (anger, sorrow, or repentance) or to one that remains proper (love, joy, or delight). But it seems to me that, at some point, we would end up with love and joy, which are radical and final among the passions. In this way, metaphorical attributions would eventually be explained by reference to some proper attribution of simple passions signifying divine acts of will.

From the start, the main concern of Aquinas was to avoid confusion between these two registers, proper and metaphorical, as he thought that certain Jewish scholars were fostering confusion. These are the last words of his short treatise on God’s passion in *SCG*. We have to recall that the theological issue coincided with a heated historical sequence of Christian–

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* I, ch. 91, no. 17, trans. Anton C. Pegis, 282. On the genealogy of love in Aquinas’s writings, one might see E. Durand, “Au principe de l’amour: *formatio* ou *proportio*? Un déplacement revisité dans l’analyse thomasiennne de la *voluntas*,” *Revue thomiste* 104 (2004): 551–78.

Jewish theological controversies. They led to a form of trial, sadly ended by the burning of copies of the Talmud in Paris, around 1242.<sup>16</sup>

### **Metaphors, Plain or Unending? Rhetoric *versus* Semantic and Narrative**

I would like now to move further in the direction of the narrative use of biblical metaphors related to God. When metaphorical attributions are not just made according to effects or properties, it might be difficult to figure out what proper signification they both deliver and conceal. This problem can be clarified by calling upon contemporary philosophical qualifications of metaphors.

Ricoeur shed light on two typical metaphorical constructions in language.<sup>17</sup> The first one was defined by Aristotle in his *Rhetorics* and *Poetics*.<sup>18</sup> Let us call it a “rhetorical” use. For the sake of convincing or charming, a proper word or expression is replaced by an improper one, having some imaginative power and connection with the term for which it is substituted. Some of these metaphors are so well-known and commonly used that we do not pay any attention to them. “This man is a shark” means that he is so greedy that he will have no scruple swallowing your small familial company. Most of the time, rhetorical metaphors can be immediately translated in our hearing or our reading. There would be no difficulty agreeing with others on the proper word or expression which would restore the proper meaning of the metaphorical terms.

Some metaphors, however, are much more intriguing and difficult to grasp. Let us think of a poem where a metaphor cannot be matched with a unique clear and proper meaning. We have to let it echo in our mind through interactions between the different allusions of the poem—and other more subjective words and emotions of ours. Ricoeur calls this kind of metaphors, out of which no one can claim to hold a definitive and

<sup>16</sup> See: Thomas Aquinas, *SCG I*, ch. 91, no. 18; Gilbert Dahan, “Textes et contextes de l’affaire du Talmud,” in *Le Brûlement du Talmud à Paris, 1242–1244*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 7–20; André Tuilier, “La condamnation du Talmud par les maîtres universitaires parisiens, ses causes et ses conséquences politiques et idéologiques,” in Dahan, *Le Brûlement du Talmud à Paris*, 59–78. Albert the Great, Master at the university of Paris at that time, was one of the signatories of the condemnation. Aquinas was his student.

<sup>17</sup> See: Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics,” *New Literary History* 6 (1974): 95–110; Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 143–59.

<sup>18</sup> See Aristotle, *Rhetorics* 3.2. 1405a3–1405b19; 3.10.1411a1–b21; *Poetics* 21.1457b6–33. Aristotle explains the notion of metaphor by the one of analogy. For a counter statement, see Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 31–47.



settled meaning, “semantic.” They may retain substitutions, but interpreting them has almost nothing to do with restoration. It is a matter of uncertain echoes. Think of Constantine P. Cavafy’s poem entitled “The City”:

You said: “I’ll go to another country, go to another shore,  
find another city better than this one.  
Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong  
and my heart lies buried as though it were something dead.  
How long can I let my mind moulder in this place?  
Wherever I turn, wherever I happen to look,  
I see the black ruins of my life, here,  
where I’ve spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them totally.”

You won’t find a new country, won’t find another shore.  
This city will always pursue you. You will walk  
the same streets, grow old in the same neighborhoods,  
will turn gray in these same houses.  
You will always end up in this city. Don’t hope for things elsewhere:  
there is no ship for you, there is no road.  
As you’ve wasted your life here, in this small corner,  
you’ve destroyed it everywhere else in the world.<sup>19</sup>

What does the “city” signify? We have many open possibilities, which are not random and are yet difficult to spell out. My home city? My inability to settle? My restless quest? My inner self? And so on. If we move from a poem to a narrative, some kind of plot or story becomes the frame for interpreting specific metaphors.

### Slowing Down in Interpreting God’s Emotions

In the *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine states that an obscure sentence of Scripture should, at the end of the day, mean something which is stated plainly elsewhere in Scripture. In the first question of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas, following Augustine, applies this rule specifically to metaphorical terms compared to proper language.<sup>20</sup> This equation is true in the large frame of the *analogia fidei* applied to the whole canon. But the cost

<sup>19</sup> Taken from Constantin P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> See Augustine of Hippo, *De doctrina christiana* 2.6.8–9 and 2.6.14; Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 1, a. 9, ad 2; *Quodlibet VII*, q. 6, ad 3.

of applying this ultimate resource too hastily to singular items could be to lose some pearls of biblical revelation. Explication is always an attempt to enlighten some unknown territories or uncertain enigmas by starting from a clearer ground, but being too impatient in this kind of natural process would be unwise when the nature of God is at stake.

If we deal with biblical narratives involving God's passions or emotions, we come close to the kind of investigation that Aquinas proposed: we may have to search for something which is not immediately at hand in the text and which allows us to interpret such or such unfitting emotions as expressing God's own and true dispositions within the logic of some complex narrative. As sorrow could be interpreted as a kind of disapproval grounded in amazing love, some of God's anger might be interpreted as his inability to accept evil as such, a radical incompatibility between God and sin.

However, I suggest that we should not move too fast in interpreting God's passions. We should pay attention to each occurrence of sorrow or anger, as they may have very different roles in diverse biblical narratives or sequences. Aquinas indicated that we should search for some precedent passion, simple and proper, as being explanatory for the one which is improper and metaphorical. He mentioned two possibilities: love as being the radical passion and joy as being the final one. Therefore, joy may not precede improper passions in the same way that love does. There is room for many different plots, here, I suspect. We may also imagine other configurations. The preceding passion may be an underlying passion, concealed through the echoes and tricks of the words.

For instance, what does God's sadness hint at in Genesis 6? This cannot be known by assuming that we know exactly beforehand what sadness is in its essence, its properties, or its effects. Dealing with God's sadness, we have to slow down in order to hold together what we experience in human sadness and the unusual sequence of divine action (love, amazement, sadness, repentance, and so on) in which this very sadness of God is enshrined as a deep mystery to be approached with awe and wonder.

### **Sketching the Metaphor of Sorrow in Proper Terms**

To capture the proper signification of God's sadness in conceptual terms, I will suggest that God's sorrow is a compassionate love related to the self-disfiguration of his creatures.

If God were not immutable, his sorrow would belong to the same genus as human sadness. The difference would be merely one of degree, not nature. It is his immutability that renders a deep mystery of his sorrow. God's passions provoke our amazement, as they seem to contradict his

immutable nature and magnitude, but this awe and wonder of ours presuppose that we do not dismiss immutability from God.<sup>21</sup>

According to our human experience, sadness is a secondary passion, which presupposes a love invested in something or someone. This occurs in such a way that obstacles, hindrances, losses or injuries become harmful for the one who loves, because they harm or remove the one who is loved. God invests an overflowing love in his creatures through creation and election. His love creates its objects and their proper goodness, as unique and singular as they might be. This divine intentionality of love is the ground for attributing sorrow to God.

Even though God remains inalterable in himself, vulnerability in love is a human perfection derived from God's exceeding perfection. Pure act, God embodies in himself the fullness of what we experience as fragmented positive affective dispositions: sensibility, benevolence, attention, care, vulnerability, and compassion. All these qualities of ours preexist in God as simple, unified and perfect.

Since he is pure act, God is not disfigured in himself by the evils, sins, and sufferings which affect his free creatures. When a human being is betrayed in his/her love, two aspects might be taken into account: the humiliation of the one who is offended and the self-disfiguration of the offender. When we endure such situations, we experience a mixed sorrow: for ourselves and for the other. Most of the time, the personal wound overcomes the concern for the offender. In some cases, human parents are capable of being almost exclusively concerned with their son's self-destruction, leaving aside for a while their own anger, distress, and hurts, for the sake of rescuing their child drawn in addiction, for instance. This kind of experience is imputed to God in Hosea 11, where he overcomes his own anger and offense when confronted by a rebel son, in order to let his compassion and love overflow. In this way, God appears exclusively saddened by the self-disfiguration of his creatures, rather than sad in himself. His sorrow proves to be exceeding love, pure compassion.

Divine love is continually exposed to refusal, denial, betrayal, and irrational hatred that originate in the inner will of his creatures, whom he has

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<sup>21</sup> With others (more qualified in this field than I am), I think that this is the right reading of the amazement of Origen at the *passio caritatis* of the Son and the one of the Father, prior to the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ; see: Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 6.6; Samuel F. Eyzaguirre, "'Passio caritatis' according to Origen in *Ezechielem Homiliae* VI in the light of *DT* 1,31," *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006): 135–47; Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 99–100.

endowed with freedom. The self-destruction is theirs. Nevertheless, God's sorrow is a metaphorical expression of an overflowing compassionate love. It remains proportionate to the amazement of love that God experiences as their Creator. N.V

## Between Poetic Justice and Poetic Mercy: God in the Flood Narrative (Genesis 6–7)

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“FOR I, THE LORD, do not change [*kī ’ānī Yhwh lō’ šānītī*].”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the centuries, the five words of God’s oracle in Malachi 3:6 have played a prominent role, as a *locus theologicus*, in the debate about God’s immutability.<sup>2</sup> God’s words in the next verse, however, could provide a fulcrum for the converse doctrine of God’s mutability, since the divine speaker now enjoins the people of Israel: “Return to me, and I will return to you [*šūbū ’ēlay wā’āšūbā ’ālēkem*]” (v. 7). God’s return represents, if anything, a reversal of the direction he had previously taken, and thus a move of freedom in the Godhead. The tension these two verses encapsulates also finds narrative embodiment in the Hebrew Bible. Taking the Flood narrative (Gen 6–9) as proof text, I will show that God’s “repentance”—expressed in most cases by the triliteral verbal root *n-h-m*—paradoxically represents the linchpin of God’s character. Amid a subtle interplay of suspense, curiosity, and surprise, the narrative sets God’s dramatic changes against a background of human changes. Yet, in so doing, the Bible pays extreme attention to the divine difference. Far from being lost in human consequentiality, God is God, more than ever, in his way of changing. Responding to human ethical inconstancy, God vindicates, from reversal to reversal, a paradoxical faithfulness to himself and to his overall design for creation and humankind.

<sup>1</sup> All translations are based in the NRSV, which I sometimes adapt for my purposes.

<sup>2</sup> The first proof text to which Thomas Aquinas appeals in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 9, a. 1, in favor of God’s immutability is Mal 3:6 (cf. *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 14); see also Hilaire de Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 7.27, and John Cassian, *Collationes* 6.14.

### God as *Dramatis Persona*

The present inquiry requires a preliminary intellectual conversion: it calls for a *conversio ad dramatis personam*. “The Bible,” Erri de Luca writes, “is at least literature, and the God of Israel is, to say the least, the greatest literary character of all time.”<sup>3</sup> Whoever wants to develop a theological and critical discourse about God in the Bible’s founding narratives has primarily to deal with him as a narrative character. God, it can be objected from a religious perspective, is much more than a literary character, yet it is *as a literary character* that, in the narrative corpus of Scripture, he acts and reacts, speaks and listens, feels and decides. A tenet of Jewish traditional interpretation states that “no Scripture gets out of its literal meaning [*’yn mqr’ yws’ mydy pšwtw*].”<sup>4</sup> The literal, or better, contextual meaning (since the word *pšt* connotes a form of extension and thus of inscription in the flow of narration) is the home of all further elaboration, be it midrashic, theological, or spiritual. What is true for “Scripture” is true for Scripture’s main protagonist, the divine *persona*. Whatever the theological elaboration, the deity of biblical faith is never other than the biblical character who acts—“God said,” “God saw,” “God repented.”

To approach God as a *dramatis persona* is to take the measure of the limitations that affect such a *persona*. The drama is represented through the vehicle of language, and the limits of human language—conventional by necessity, by force sequential—thoroughly pervade the representation in question. Moreover, the particular limitations of biblical Hebrew compound the general limitations of language: its articulation of time and space, its way of contrasting or mixing genders, the declination of time and aspect in its verbal system, and so on. These limitations could threaten the representation of God as transcendent and presumably unbound to any human system of signs. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s aphorism that “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” has a special relevance when it comes to the character whose “greatness no one can fathom” (Ps 145:3).<sup>5</sup>

Another aspect of literariness, however, makes up for such limitations: the dramatic resources of narrative representation. When it comes to the

<sup>3</sup> Erri De Luca, *Una nuvola come tappeto* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1991), 9 (my translation).

<sup>4</sup> The rule is mentioned three times in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Šabb. 63a; b. Yebam. 11b, 24a), yet it gained full relevance in the exegetical project of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki; 1040–1105), which was continued by the school of the *Pashtanim*, the masters of the *peshaṭ*.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 149 (5.6; my translation).

characterization of God, none of the resources in question is ignored; all of them are brought into play. Suspense, curiosity, and surprise—the three universals of narrativity<sup>6</sup>—join forces in a story marked at every turn by reversals and recognitions, monologues and dialogues, gaps and repetitions. Because of his uniqueness as a “character,” God actually “begs” for dramatic narrative, and dramatic narrative at its best. As Meir Sternberg points out, “most dimensions associated with character—physical appearance, social status, personal history, local habitation—do not apply to him at all.”<sup>7</sup> God radically differs from any other character in the biblical word, and this radical difference necessitates a subtler art of narration, one able to convey dramatically God’s paradoxical features, “not in orderly form at the start but piecemeal and in their dramatic manifestations.”<sup>8</sup> In this process, the pressure exercised by God’s character brings narrative to its very limits. So it is in the Flood narrative, which presents a stunning dramatization of God’s attributes in the context of the moral deprivation of early humanity.

### The Flood Narrative and God’s Attributes

One of the functions of the Flood story in the overall pentateuchal narrative is to herald God’s way in his dealings with humankind: a double way, actually, swinging between justice and mercy. Confronted with the

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<sup>6</sup> The model of the three universals has been formulated by Meir Sternberg in *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); the incidence of the universals in question in the Bible is set out in Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 264–320. The following summary of Sternberg’s theory is worth quoting in full: “Suspense arises from rival scenarios about the future: from the discrepancy between what the telling lets us readers know about the happening (e.g., a conflict) at any moment and what still lies ahead, ambiguous because yet unresolved in the world. Its fellow universals rather involve manipulations of the past, which the tale communicates in a sequence discontinuous with the happening. Perceptibly so, for curiosity: knowing that we do not know, we go forward with our mind on the gapped antecedents, trying to infer (bridge, compose) them in retrospect. For surprise, however, the narrative first unobtrusively gaps or twists its chronology, then unexpectedly discloses to us our misreading and forces a corrective rereading in late re-cognition. The three accordingly cover among them the workings that distinguish narrative from everything else, because they exhaust the possibilities of communicating action: of aligning its natural early-to-late development with its openness to untimely, crooked disclosure” (Sternberg, “How Narrativity Makes a Difference,” *Narrative* 9, no. 2 [2001]: 115–22, at 117).

<sup>7</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics*, 323.

<sup>8</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics*, 323.



evil created by humankind, God, in his justice, sentences his creation to destruction (Gen 6:7). Yet the same God, in his merciful grace, singles out Noah to establish an everlasting covenant with him for the sake of the created world (Gen 6:18; 8:21; 9:9–11).

This double perspective efficiently anticipates what will be revealed at Sinai: in his innermost identity, God unites two dispositions: “For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the parents on the children, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exod 20:5–6). These attributes reveal the nucleus of God’s portrait. In the text, one comes before the other because so is the law of language, perforce sequential. Yet in a portrait (in any portrait), the subject’s features are meant to coexist, rather than to succeed each other. Is this the case when it comes to the biblical God? It is, of course, always possible to construe such a succession as purposeful and to suppose, for instance, that it signals a hierarchy in God’s attributes, with his justice always coming before his other attributes. A further revelation of God’s attributes, however, belies such an interpretation. In Exodus 34:6–7, after Moses’s intercession in the episode of the golden calf, God reformulates his attributes, giving pride of place to mercy, which is further emphasized:

The Lord, the Lord, a god merciful and gracious [*Yhwh ’el raḥûm wəḥannûn*], slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.

Against the background of God’s self-revelation in Exodus 20, it becomes clear that God’s freedom lies in his way of ordering and reordering his attributes.<sup>9</sup> He does so in the context of Moses’s intercession, and so, presumably, he is free to do at any given point of the story (see chart 1).

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<sup>9</sup> The phenomenon is pointed out by Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 737–38; see also Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “Justice et miséricorde: Les attributs divins dans la dynamique narrative du Pentateuque,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 138, no. 1 (2016): 3–22.

Chart 1 (reversal between A and B)

Exodus 20:5–6	Exodus 34:6–7
<p>A For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,</p> <p>B but showing steadfast love [<i>hesed</i>] to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.</p>	<p>B The Lord, the Lord, a god merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [<i>hesed</i>] and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love [<i>hesed</i>] for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,</p> <p>A yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and the sons of sons, to the third and the fourth generation.</p>

This revelation of divine attributes ushers in correlative divine actions: it is God's prerogative to switch from one attribute to the other, in reaction to human choices in history and according to his secret wisdom. God will punish (and educate) now and will forgive later, or the other way around, he will exonerate now and will castigate later. A verb is attached to this divine shifting, the verb *n-h-m* in the *niphal* stem/*binyan*, which means "to change one's mind, to repent." Not, of course, that God would have to repent from an evil committed. Rather, God constantly readjusts, resetting his behavior to humankind, to his people, or to individuals, switching from justice to compassion and from compassion to justice in successive reversals (and according to various tropes).<sup>10</sup> As Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman point out, "divine repentance can move in either of two directions: from judgment to clemency or the other way around. It can also move in both directions sequentially."<sup>11</sup> The prophetic variations are

<sup>10</sup> See Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), 285. See also Hans Walter Wolff's paraphrase of the meaning of *n-h-m* in the *niphal* stem, "to repent": "A change of mind prompted by the emotions, a turning away from an earlier decision on the part of someone deeply moved" (*Joel and Amos* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 298). See Exod 32:12 and Jonah 3:9, where the verb *n-h-m*, "to repent," is associated with *š-w-b*, "revert."

<sup>11</sup> Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 659. For instance, God retracts from punishment in Jer 18:7–8, while he retracts from blessing, the other way around, in Jer 18:9–10.

countless, ranging from one extreme (“I will not repent,” announces God in Jer 4:28 and Ezek 24:14) to the other, the repentance against all odds: “‘As I purposed to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and I did not relent, so again have I purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah’” (Zech 8:14–15). No less than its prophetic speech, the Bible’s narrative episodes feature variegated divine reversals at key junctures in its macro-plot.<sup>12</sup> Repentance, in the sense of *n-h-m*, lies at the core of God’s sovereign self and is the dramatic pivot between his justice and his mercy.<sup>13</sup>

### God’s Double Answer to the Crisis of the Creation

The Flood narrative opens with a major scene of such repentance. The opening “The Lord saw . . .” (Gen 6:5) echoes the refrain of Genesis 1: “God saw that is was good.” Yet what God sees is no longer the goodness of creation, but the pervasive (human) wickedness on the earth. The distressing spectacle triggers God’s initial repentance. The narrator first reports the divine change (“And the Lord repented [*wayyinnāhem*] that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” [Gen 6:6]), before giving access to God’s (antecedent) inner monologue: “I repent [*nihamtî*] that I have made them” (v. 7). God’s rethinking is radical and reveals God’s radical aversion to evil.<sup>14</sup> An orientation to good accompanied God’s creation, but it remained unfulfilled. God’s inner reversal emphasizes his ethical character: the divine being is a fulcrum of moral consciousness and the present *peripeteia* reveals the issue at stake in the overall biblical drama.

The radical corruption of the earth calls for a radical treatment that, in biblical fashion, replicates the human behavior:

<sup>12</sup> See Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “God’s Repentance and ‘False Starts’ in Biblical History (Genesis 6–9; Exodus 32–34; 1 Samuel 15 and 2 Samuel 7),” in *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007*, ed. A. Lemaire (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 469–94.

<sup>13</sup> Referring to “the articulation of the character of Yahweh in Ex. 34:6–7,” Walter Brueggemann points to “a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject’s life” (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis, MI; Fortress, 1997], 268–69). To my view, the “disjunction” in question is better approached in the phenomenon (and the term) of God’s *n-h-m* repentance.

<sup>14</sup> Compare this to the Akkadian epic Atrahasis, in which the cause of the flood is a case of disturbing the peace at night. At the opening of the story, the great gods complain: “Oppressive has become the clamor of mankind. By their uproar they prevent sleep” (Old Babylonian Version, II, 7–8, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969], 104).

## Chart 2

Verse 11: The earth was corrupt in God's sight [*š-h-t* in the *niphal* stem].  
 Verse 12: God saw that the earth was corrupt [*š-h-t* in the *niphal* stem].  
 Verse 12: for all flesh had corrupted its way [*š-h-t* in the *hiphil* stem].  
 Verse 13: I am going to destroy them [*š-h-t* in the *hiphil* stem].

As Bill Arnold aptly points out, the recurrence of the root *š-h-t*, “to corrupt,” plays within a logic of poetic justice:

In a way difficult to express in English, the use of this Hebrew verb illustrates that God's actions are both unavoidable and just. Humanity has corrupted itself and therefore God declares humanity corrupt (i.e., “destroyed”). The Old Testament often uses such word plays to illustrate a sort of ‘poetic justice,’ meaning the penalty inflicted matches repayment in kind for the harm done, or a sort of commensurate form of justice. God's actions are measured and just, never reckless or unmerited, and God's punishment does not go beyond the ability of God's grace to restore.<sup>15</sup>

What the repetition of the root *š-h-t* makes clear is that God, in his justice, has entered human consequentiality. God's reaction to humanity's universally appalling behavior stands out as a *post hoc* response, in terms of both chronology and causality. The phenomenon, however, raises a question of theodicy: could God be caught in the strict logic of consequentiality, his actions determined by the human behaviors to which they are a response? Actually a counter-momentum accompanies God's straightforward resolution of justice. In verse 8, the narrator adds: “But Noah had found grace in the eyes of the Lord [*wənōaḥ māšā' ḥēn bə'ēnē Yhwh*].” A movement of grace thus accompanies God's calibrated justice. The temporal relation of the two moves, however, calls for closer attention.

<sup>15</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99. See also: Murray H. Lichtenstein, “The Poetry of Poetic Justice: A Comparative Study in Biblical Imagery,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973): 255–65; John L. Barton, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 30, no. 1 (1979): 1–14. On the general issue of poetic justice, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). See in particular Meir Sternberg, “Universals of Narrative and Their Cognitive Fortunes (II),” *Poetics Today* 24, no. 3 (2003): 517–638, at 621, who considers the ins and outs of poetic justice and poetic art in Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and the Bible.

The syntactic construction *wənōah māšā' hēn* is a typical *we-x-qatal* interrupting a previous concatenation of actions expressed in *wayyiqtol*. In such a context, the *we-x-qatal* construction usually expresses a contrast, simultaneity, or in many cases, anteriority in the past.<sup>16</sup> Translations and commentaries usually construe the construction as a contrast: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” The narrative dynamic of the passage, however, suggests more than a simple contradistinction. Up to this point in chapter 6, the references to human persons, in the discourse of the narrator (vv. 5–6) as well as in God’s discourse (v. 7), have been general: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind [*hā’ādām*] was great in the earth” (v. 5); “And the Lord repented that he had made humankind [*hā’ādām*] on the earth” (v. 6); “I will wipe humankind [*hā’ādām*], whom I have created, from the face of the earth—from humankind [*mē’ādām*] to animals” (v. 7). What verse 8 signals is thus that a *single* man, Noah, has been made the exception. Such a twist is characteristic of narrative surprise, which unexpectedly exposes to the reader an *already* present contingency that has eluded him—by reason of an artful gapping by the narrator. The dynamic of surprise thus suggests associating contrast with anteriority in the past: “But Noah *had found* grace in the eyes of the Lord.”<sup>17</sup> In verse 8 we suddenly realize that God, who has decided to wipe

<sup>16</sup> See particularly: Alviero Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 86 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 188; Ziony Zevit, *The Anterior Construction in Classical Hebrew*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 50 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> The translation in question is adopted in several versions, such the Jerusalem Bible (1986), the New English Bible (1970), the Revised English Bible (1989), and the *Zürcher Bible* (2007); it is also opted for in the commentaries by John A. Skinner, *Genesis: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 2nd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969 [originally 1910]), 151, and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 388. See also: *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. Emil Kautzsch, trans. Arthur Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), no. 142b; Zevit, *Anterior Construction*, 16–17; Françoise Mirguet, *La Représentation du divin dans les récits du Pentateuque: Méditations syntaxiques et narratives*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 123 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 75–76. For a survey of the past anterior constructions in the Hebrew Bible using *we-x-qatal*, see Zevit, *Anterior Construction*, 15–32. Among the listed occurrences, the following cases are worth mentioning (the narrator is speaking, with God as subject): Gen 1:5; 6:7–8; 13:14; 19:24; 21:1; 24:1; Exod 9:23; 10:13; 1 Sam 1:5; 9:15; 2 Kgs 20:4. Two significant cases are to be added: 1 Sam 15:35 (with *n-h-m*) and 2 Sam 17:14 (“For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring ruin on Absalom”). See also the case of anteriority in the past in Gen 20:18 (expressed with a *qatal*) construed as a narrative

out perverted humankind, has also singled out a man, Noah, and adopted him as the man of his favor.<sup>18</sup> Punishment, we realize, is neither the first nor the last word in God's design; it is *already* accompanied by a movement of grace. The narrator reports afterwards a factor—the judgment of grace on Noah—that occurs in concert with the told action. What the narrator makes perceptible here is the wisdom of the divine character, a wisdom capable of artfully holding together two answers to the crisis that affects creation.

### Noah Paronomasia

When Noah enters the stage at the end of Genesis 5, his name is immediately involved in a trope that will extend through the four chapters of the Flood narrative, the trope of paronomasia.<sup>19</sup> In three short verses (vv.

surprise in Sternberg, *Poetics*, 315–16. Commenting on Gen 6:8, Mirguet explains that the *we-x-qatal* structure points to “a new element in the background of the narration, susceptible to signal a change in the course of action, or even an anteriority, this is to say, a slightly anterior event, throwing a new light on what precedes” (*Représentation du divin*, 75; translation mine).

- <sup>18</sup> What comes before and after the revelation of Gen 6:8 points to Noah's past and present: his election does not derive from future meritorious acts. In 5:32, Noah's life is already well engaged: “After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” Noah's portrait in 6:9 describes him in what amounts to a proven behavior: “Noah was [*hāyāb*] a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.”
- <sup>19</sup> For the pervasiveness of paronomasia in the Hebrew Bible, see S. B. Noegel, “Paronomasia,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3:26. The phenomenon is often associated with the Latin byword *nomen omen* (e.g., *nomen atque omen* in Plauto's *Persa*, 4.3): someone's name is a harbinger of his/her destiny (which, in the Hebrew Bible, does not mean his/her fate, given the biblical aversion to any form of determinism). “In cases of *nomen omen*, the paronomasia unlocks or reveals meanings that the biblical authors thought were embedded or incipient in the names being played upon” (Jonathan G. Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2016], 16). On the characters' names, a wealth of material is present in Andrzej Strus, *Nomen-Omen: La stylistique sonore des noms propres dans le Pentateuque*, *Analecta Biblica* 80 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), and Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1986). See also: Yair Zakovitch, “Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980): 167–81; Zakovitch, “A Study of Precise and Partial Derivations in Biblical Etymology,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 15 (1980): 31–50; and Herbert Marks, “Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 1 (1995): 21–42. The early rabbis referred to the device as *lāšōn nōpēl* ‘al *lāšōn* (“language falling upon language”) (see Genesis Rabbah 18:6; 31:8). The inter-



28–30) we hear of his birth and of the name given to him by Lamek, his father, accompanied by an etymological couplet: “Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall comfort/console us [*yānahāmēnū*; the *piel* stem of *n-h-m*] from our work and from the toil of our hands” (v. 29). Strangely enough, Lamek, in his etymological midrash, does not elaborate upon the root that actually lies behind or beneath the name of his son; the name *nōah*, Noah, derives from the verbal root *n-w-h*, meaning “to rest.” Instead, he makes use of another root, *n-h-m*, here conjugated in the *piel* stem, which means “to console, to comfort.” “The verb [*n-h-m*] (‘to console’ or ‘bring relief’),” Herbert Marks writes, “evokes the name Menahem, not Noah, for which one rather requires a form of the verb [*n-w-h*] (‘to rest’)—the reading found in the Septuagint [*dianapausei*] (‘he will afford an interval of rest’).”<sup>20</sup> By preferring the divergent root *n-h-m*, “to console,” Lamek, one can imagine, desires for himself some sort of immediate consolation—a type of wish emblematically fulfilled in the wine Noah will be the first to produce (see Gen 9:20–21). The surprise, however, is that God avails himself of the root *n-h-m* introduced by Lamek and makes the most of it.

When God says, “I repent [*nīhamtī*] I have made them” (v. 7), he appropriates the root introduced by Lamek, conjugating it now in the *niphal* stem (as does the narrator in v. 6, mirroring God’s use in first person). Used by Lamek apropos of a certain comfort, the root *n-h-m* is now associated by God with a dramatic personal reversal, a repentance, which is the prelude to a punishment. The divine rephrasing is an instance of a recurrent phenomenon in the biblical corpus: God works in history by working out previously uttered human words.<sup>21</sup> The phenomenon is encapsulated in a biblical proverb: “To man belong the plans of the heart,

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est for paronomasia has known a scholarly renewal in Ferdinand de Saussure’s research about the “anagrams” (1906–1909). The Swiss linguist intended to show that the Greek and Latin poets were composing from a given theme word, using its phonemes according to certain rules. On de Saussure, see: J. Starobinski, *Les Mots sous les mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Pierre-Yves Testenoire, *Ferdinand de Saussure: à la recherche des anagrammes* (Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2013). In case of Noah’s name in Gen 6–9, see essentially Marks, “Biblical Naming,” 25–29, and secondarily: Strus, *Nomen-Omen*, 9, 66, 158–62; Zakovitch, “Precise and Partial Derivations,” 38–41; Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 203–4.

<sup>20</sup> Marks, “Biblical Naming,” 25. About the Menahem (or Nahman) hypothesis, see Genesis Rabbah 25:2 and Zakovitch, “Precise and Partial Derivations,” 38.

<sup>21</sup> For God’s strategies in his restating of human words, see Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “Dieu sauve l’histoire comme en sous-main: La rhétorique des amendements divins,” in *Raconter Dieu: entre récit, histoire et théologie*, ed. Christian Dionne and Yvan Mathieu, *Le livre et le rouleau* 44 (Brussels: Lessius, 2014), 173–96.



but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue” (Prov 16:1), reformulated by Thomas à Kempis in his notorious maxim: “Homo proponit, sed Deus disponit.”<sup>22</sup> The root introduced by Lamek in order to “coin” Noah’s role in history (providing some sort of consolation) is used by God to express his desolation and repentance, a repentance bringing about judgment and punishment. Yet, a close reading of the text reveals that God’s re-use of the root *n-ḥ-m*, which encapsulates Noah’s very name, *nōah*, is just the first step in the protracted paronomasia on Noah’s name that characterizes the Flood narrative.

As the medieval Jewish commentator Bekhor Shor (Orléans; twelfth century) noticed, the name Noah (*nōah*) is the palindrome of the word *ḥēn*, “grace.”<sup>23</sup> The word *ḥēn* consists of the two consonants of the name *nōah*, but reverses their sequence. The initial portrait of Noah (“But Noah had found grace in the eyes of [the Lord]”), W. Lee Humphreys writes, presents him as God’s “perfect other”:<sup>24</sup> he mirrors God’s grace. Thus in the narrated world Noah’s name and Noah’s person represent a token of God’s alternative logic, his logic of grace. Whereas a process of divine justice and punishment occupies the forefront of the story, Noah reflects, in his person and in his name, God’s alternative disposition of grace.

Moreover, as James C. Vanderkam has observed, the sequence that runs from verse 7 to verse 8 integrates a significant echoing:

Chart 3 (resonating letters *n*, *ḥ*, and *m* in bold)

Verse 7: I repent that I have made them.	<i>niḥamtī kī ‘āšītim</i>
Verse 8: But Noah had found grace.	<i>wānōah māšā’ ḥēn</i>

After the divine utterance *niḥamtī kī ‘āšītim*, “I repent that I made them” (v. 7), the narrator’s statement *wānōah māšā’ ḥēn*, “but Noah had found grace” (v. 8), contains in sequence the consonants of the verb *n-ḥ-m*.<sup>25</sup> It

<sup>22</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi* 1.19.2.

<sup>23</sup> Bekhor Shor contrasts the euphoric instance in Gen 6:8, associating *nōah*, “Noah,” and *ḥēn*, “grace,” and the dysphoric case in Gen 38:7: “But Er [‘ēr], Judah’s first-born, was wicked [ra’] in the sight of Yhwh.” See also Marks, “Biblical Naming,” 26. For a survey of analogous cases, see: Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 88–93; Noegel, “Paronomasia,” 26 (under the heading “Anagramic Paronomasia”).

<sup>24</sup> W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2001), 68.

<sup>25</sup> See James C. Vanderkam, *From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 62 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 403.

is as if another, surprising, “repentance” (of grace, this time) was looming in the name (and the person) of Noah. The signal is subtle—a kind of filigree—but it reveals to what lengths biblical narrative can go to reveal the intricacies of God’s design.<sup>26</sup> When God acts in history, a plot of grace can run alongside a plot of judgment. God can enact his mercy (in a repentance of mercy) precisely when he enacts his justice (in a repentance of justice). By combining narrative surprise (“Noah had found grace”) and astute reverberations of the key words *hēn*, “grace,” and *n-h-m*, “to repent,” the narrative reveals not only that God coordinates apparently opposite designs, but also that he begets a temporality of his own, combining antecedency and teleology. The anteriority in the past—the election of Noah—prepares the *telos* of the entire story, the covenant promised in 6:18, before Noah’s entry into the ark and before the Flood: “But I will establish my covenant with you.” The reader thus realizes that the God who changed his mind in front of the corrupted creation *already* had in mind (in Noah’s election and in the promise he makes to Noah) another purpose: a covenant of grace. The making of the covenant, however, will not happen without a dramatic turn in God’s *dramatis persona*: a repentance of repentance.

### Repentance of Repentance

At the climax of the water rise, we learn that “God remembered Noah” (Gen 8:1). “God remembering Noah,” Joseph Blenkinsopp writes, “is not the reaction of an absent-minded God who suddenly recalls what he had done”; it is rather an expression of his providential care.<sup>27</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, God’s remembering of someone indeed expresses his timely “keeping in mind” of one of his human partners at moment of crisis, for whose sake he is about to act.<sup>28</sup> God’s faithful remembering of Noah—a further expression of his initial “grace” in his regard—will prompt an act of faithfulness by Noah once the waters have receded. When Noah leaves the ark, his first reflex is to offer

<sup>26</sup> The Biblical text multiplies anagrammatic “figures in the carpet” enhancing the power and pervasiveness of verbs and names. To give but one example: in Gen 15:1, God’s promise to Abraham—“Abram, . . . your reward shall be very great”—tightly associates the patriarch’s name with the overabundance of the reward in question; the three phonemes *bēt* [b], *rēš* (r), and *mēm* (m) appearing in that order in the name “Abram” (‘*abrām*) are echoed in the sequence of *rēš-bēt-mēm* distributed over the two words “very great,” *harbēh mō’ōd* (cf. v. 13). See Strus, *Nomen-Omen*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 142.

<sup>28</sup> See in particular: Gen 19:29 (God remembers Abraham); 30:22 (Rachel); Exod 2:24 (Israel); 1 Sam 1:1,19 (Hannah).

holocausts to his God: “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Gen 8:20).<sup>29</sup> The initiative of the sacrifice emanates from Noah, but the offering immediately pleases God. Noah has actually perceived the reason for the presence in the ark of extra clean animals: they were meant for sacrificial offering. The effect the holocausts produce on God is remarkable. It returns us to the theme of God’s repentance and reveals (by reactivating the running paronomasia) how Noah’s acting is interior to God’s own.

An analogy first requires attention. Noah’s sacrifice in chapter 8 triggers a divine interior monologue, the second in the narrative. The first monologue took place in chapter 6, when God saw the human wickedness on the earth: “And the Lord saw [*wayyar*] [wickedness on the earth] . . . and it grieved him to his heart” (vv. 5–6). This was a monologue of disappointment, ending in a repentance (of justice and punishment): “I repent that I have made them.” The second monologue, in chapter 8, is triggered by what God smells: “The Lord smelled [*wayyārah*],” and what he smells prompts a new soliloquy: “And when the Lord smelled the odor of appeasement, the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done’” (Gen 8:21). In other words, God, in his second monologue, repents of what he had decided in his first.

Chart 4

Genesis 6:5–6	Genesis 8:21
The Lord saw [ <i>wayyar</i> ], . . . and it grieved him to his heart → interior monologue → repentance	The Lord smelled [ <i>wayyārah</i> ] the odor of appeasement, the Lord said in his heart → interior monologue → repentance of repentance

<sup>29</sup> In Jean Louis Ska’s genetic hypothesis about the Flood narrative, the scene of Noah’s sacrifice belongs to a series of post-P supplements whose first function was “to justify the function of worship in Israel by giving it a foundation in the history of the universe. It is the sacrifice of Noah, the just one, that brought about a change of attitude on God’s part (8:21–22) and thus made the survival of the universe secure. It may be thought that Israel’s worship was to play a similar role in the life of the people” (*The Exegesis of the Pentateuch*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 20).

The overall plotline of the Flood narrative thus culminates in a repentance of repentance: a dramatic climax. “The wheel is come full circle,” as Shakespeare has Edmund put it in *King Lear* (5.3.175), but in an auspicious, readjusted, and everlasting perspective. God’s global measure of grace is all the more surprising because of the motivation behind it: the fact that humankind is prone to evil—“I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth” (8:21). The human heart is prone to evil exactly, the reader will remember, as it was before the Flood: “Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (6:5).

Chart 5

Genesis 6:5	Genesis 8:21
Every inclination [ <i>yēšer</i> ] of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil [ <i>ra’</i> ] continually.	For the inclination [ <i>yēšer</i> ] of the human heart is evil [ <i>ra’</i> ] from youth.

In other words, mankind has not changed; it is rather God who changes in his relation to them. Whereas a single, unilateral, orientation characterizes the human heart, before and after the Flood, God’s heart demonstrates a stunning reversibility between his justice and his grace. The God who decided in chapter 6 to punish humanity for its sweeping wickedness has now decided, at the end of chap. 8, to preserve his creation, granting grace to humans still inclined to evil.<sup>30</sup> God’s distinctive feature thus lies in his freedom to change, in stunning contrast with the unchanging human tendency to evil. What emerges from the overall picture, therefore, is God’s desire to deal with humankind in its historical defective concreteness, a dramatic turn that is both realistic and benevolent.<sup>31</sup>

### Noah’s Mediation

The dramatic scene of God’s reversal in chapter 8, however, calls for a closer reading. As already stated, God’s monologue and gracious initiative have been prompted by Noah’s sacrifice, and more precisely by what God smelled on this occasion (v. 21):

<sup>30</sup> As Gerhard von Rad points out, “the same condition which in the prologue is the basis for God’s judgment in the epilogue reveals God’s grace and providence” (*Genesis: A Commentary* [London: SCM Press, 1961], 119).

<sup>31</sup> See Sonnet, “God’s Repentance and ‘False Starts.’”

And the LORD smelled the odor of appeasement [*wayyārah Yhwh 'et-rēah hannîhōah*].

In the book of Leviticus, the expression “an odor of appeasement” functions as a refrain associated with divine contentment in the sacrifices (starting with the holocaust in Lev 1:9,13,17). The scene in Genesis 6–9 takes place before the revelation of the sacrifices meant for the cult of Israel, and the phrase “odor of appeasement [*rēah hannîhōah*]” here draws its pertinence from a process of echoing in the macro-text. The word *nîhōah*, “appeasement,” derives from the root *n-w-h*, which stands behind the name of Noah.<sup>32</sup> In a subtle way, the word *nîhōah* echoes the consonants and the vowels of *nōah*.<sup>33</sup> This name, as we have seen in 6:8, mirrors God’s “grace” (*hēn*). In chapter 8, the word *hēn*, “grace,” compounds again with Noah’s name in the word *nîhōah*, “appeasement”—and this in the scene of God’s repentance of grace. When Noah freely and liberally offers a sacrifice of pleasing odor, he corresponds to the grace that pervades him; he enacts the grace that informs his name and his character, and this pleases God.<sup>34</sup> The surprise, therefore, is that God’s repentance of grace turns out to be such an act of synergy. Noah is acting as God’s second self, and God finds in Noah’s offering the prompt for his sovereign move. The scene actually creates a precedent, providing the pattern of prophetic intercession and of God’s willing self-exposure to such intercession.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The root *n-w-h*, “to rest,” dismissed in Lamek’s initial etymology, thus makes a comeback in Noah’s story. As Marks aptly observes, “the withheld meaning ‘rest’ returns with the gradual recession or ‘return’ [*š-w-b*] of the flood waters . . . when the ark ‘comes to rest’ [*wattānah*] on the mountains (8:4), and the dove ‘returns’ having found no ‘rest-place’ [*mānōah*] for her foot (8:9; cf. 8:7, 12). Finally, the ‘soothing aroma’ of the sacrifice [*rēah hannîhōah*] (8:21), which marks the end of the flood amid language richly reminiscent of the prologue, reconfigures Noah’s name” (“Biblical Naming,” 26).

<sup>33</sup> For the congruence between *nîhōah* and *nōah*, see already the midrash *Vayikra Rabbah* 25:2. See also: von Rad, *Genesis*, 122; Strus, *Nomen-Omen*, 162; Marks, “Biblical Naming,” 26.

<sup>34</sup> To say it with Gerard Manley Hopkins, he “keeps grace. . . . He acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is” (“As the Kingfisher Catches Fire”).

<sup>35</sup> For God’s exposure to intercession, see in particular Amos 3:7: “Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.” See also Exod 32:10, in God’s injunction to Moses: “And now leave me be [*hannîhāh lî*], that my wrath may flare against them.” The imperative “leave me” brings into play the root involved in Noah’s name, *nōah*, and may be understood as a kind of test of Moses, reminding him of his responsibility in intercession (as occurs in the next verse). “Scholars, both Jewish and Christian,” Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer writes, “have long suspected that the deeper message of the passage is not to ban interces-

What the perfume of the holocaust triggers is an impressive measure of grace: “And when the Lord smelled the odor of appeasement, the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, . . . nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done’” (v. 21). God’s repentance, in favor of humankind and creation, is a dramatic scene, a reversal in the narrative. Yet, for a careful reader or, more probably perhaps, for a careful re-reader, the reversal in question is not an outright surprise: it is also, as I have indicated, a motif discreetly announced, as by a watermark, in the phrase of Genesis 6:8: “But Noah had found grace in God’s eyes.” The phrase includes a filigree, the root *n-h-m*, the verb attached to God’s most inner reversals, and it does so in a context of grace. In other words, God’s graceful repentance in chapter 8 is not only a final turn in the story; it has been looming on the horizon of the story since its very beginning. In the end, thus, as Marks puts it, the name of Noah indeed implies “consolation” and “comfort.” Yet, it arrives at this meaning in another realm and through another process than what Lamek presumably expects: Noah’s consolation had to encompass the Lord’s own desolation in order to achieve its full relevance.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

Reversals affect the story of the Flood at all its constitutive levels, conferring further intensity on the narrative sequence. The drama pivots on a major change of direction, from a plan of de-creation (with its detailed instructions) to a plan of re-creation, with updated provisions. The linchpin of the reversal is located in the Godhead—God is the one who repents, opting first for watery destruction, but in the end, changing his mind: never again such a destruction. The turnabouts in the story intersect with axiological reversals: what God sees in Genesis 6 is no longer the goodness of his creation but the evil created by the first humanity. God repents, yet he will himself shift from a move of justice (in front of men and women inclined to evil) to a move of grace (in front of the same, still inclined to evil). A third level of reversal is more discreet, noticeable in the texture of the narrative, in the sequence of its letters. This level is paradigmatically illustrated in the inversion of the consonants *n* and *h* (from *nh* to *hn*) in the syntagm in 6:8: “and Noah had

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sion but to encourage it. In requesting to be left alone, God is in fact wishing the very opposite. In other words, by declaring his desire to destroy Israel, God gives Moses a reason to intercede, and by the words ‘leave me alone’ informs Moses that he had the power to hinder God from executing his threats” (“God’s Hidden Compassion,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 [2006]: 191–213, at 195).

<sup>36</sup> See Marks, “Biblical Naming,” 27.

found grace to the eyes of the Lord [*wəṇōāḥ māšā' hēn bə'éné Yhwh*].” In this case, however, the reversal does not play within a dramatic *peripeteia*, but in a process of mirroring. God’s grace, the sentence reveals, is mirrored in Noah’s name and person. The micro-process actually functions as a *mise en abyme* of a phenomenon that pervades the Flood narrative and endows it with a specific dimension. On this phenomenon my conclusion will briefly dwell.

Sequentiality is the backbone of narration, and the story of the Flood makes the most of it. It exhibits a sustained temporal and causal scansion, marked off by God’s initial reaction and his instructions to Noah, the sequence of days, the swelling and the receding of the waters, the successive releases of the dove—all leading up to Noah’s sacrifice and the final scene of divine repentance and covenantal commitment. Such a sequence has a definite theological import since it conveys how deeply God enters human temporality and consequentiality. When God at the beginning of the story takes note of the pervasiveness of human wickedness (“God saw that . . .”), he is considering accomplished acts. The God of the Flood narrative is a God who has entered human moral consequentiality and is the God who reacts. His justice is a poetic justice, which enhances the *post hoc, propter hoc* of divine retribution.

Yet, the same narrative takes pains to demonstrate that God is far from being lost in consequentiality. God’s action, although sequential, is much more than sequential. His design is associated with a temporality *sui generis*, in which a process of grace is synchronized with a process of judgment, where antecedency (the election of Noah) auspiciously meets teleology (the covenant of grace promised to Noah and his sons, that is, to future humanity). In this process, God’s grace (*hēn*) is mirrored in the name and in the acts of a man, Noah (*nōāḥ*), and God’s dramatic and final repentance echoes a motif present from the start, inscribed as a filigree in the narrator’s statement about Noah in 6:8 (“But Noah had found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” with the root n-ḥ-m inscribed in the sentence). If God enters human consequentiality, he nonetheless transcends it altogether, as the one who overlaps the *post hoc, propter hoc* process in his all-comprehensive design, reflected in Noah’s person—in a stupendous instance of dual causality.<sup>37</sup> The narrator is God’s first ally

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<sup>37</sup> About the way biblical narrative excels at alternating or intertwining divine and human causality, see: Yairah Amit, “The Dual Causality Principle and Its Effects on Biblical Literature,” *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 4 (1987): 385–400; Amit, “Dual Causality: An Additional,” in *Praise of Editing in the Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays in Retrospect*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 39 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 105–21.



in this intimation, who creates through the repetition of Noah's name (*nōah*) and its correlates in the narrative: "to repent" (*n-h-m*), "grace" (*hēn*), and "pleasing odor" (*rēah hannîhōah*) are a *basso continuo* throughout the Flood narrative, voicing God's alternative and persisting logic of grace. The successive elaborations on the nucleus (or the matrix) *hēn*, "grace," are certainly engaged in the narrative sequence, yet they also create a sense of pervasiveness. The story may go forward—it actually has to go forward—but these sounds continue to reverberate in the reader's memory. Like the perfume of Noah's sacrifice, the sound variations on the nucleus *hēn*, "grace," have a powerful and subtle communicative effect: they instill in the reader's mind a sense of the pervasiveness of God's grace in the story he is reading.<sup>38</sup> The reader is driven to keep this echo of grace in mind in the midst of the process of God's justice and punishment, just as God remembered Noah in the midst of the Flood (8:1). If the Flood narrative is a powerful instance of poetic justice, it is also an effective case of poetic mercy. The achievement of Genesis 6–9 is to have kept both poetics interwoven in the same plot as a witness to God's faithfulness to himself. In the crisis of the Flood, God reveals himself as a God of interrelated mercy and justice, exactly as he does in his revelation at Sinai. From this dynamic identity, able to embrace all the contingencies of human history, the biblical God never departs—"For I, the Lord, do not change" (Mal 3:6).<sup>39</sup> N.V

<sup>38</sup> See Gary A. Anderson's apt comment: "Representation and impassibility in their Old Testament inflections take seriously God's intimate emotional involvement with humankind. Yet however passionate the divine/human encounters may appear, they never call into question the benevolent ends toward which God is driving the story" (*Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament. Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017], 38).

<sup>39</sup> Karl Barth's sharp-witted words in his *Church Dogmatics* are worth quoting at this point: "The immutable is the fact that this God is as the One He is, gracious and holy, merciful and righteous, patient and wise. The immutable is the fact that He is the Creator, Reconciler, Redeemer and Lord. This immutability includes rather than excludes life. In a word it is life. It does not, therefore, need to acquire life from the impulse of the created world, or above all from the emotions of our pious feelings. It not only has nothing whatever to do with the pagan idea of the *immobile*, which is only a euphemistic description of death, but it is its direct opposite. . . . God's constancy—which is a better word than the suspiciously negative word 'immutability'—is the constancy of His knowing, willing and acting and therefore of His person. It is the continuity, undivertability and indefatigableness in which God both is Himself and also performs His work, maintaining it as such and continually making it His work. It is the self-assurance in which God moves in Himself and in all His works and in which He is rich in Himself and in all His works without either losing Himself or (for fear of this loss) having to perpetrate in

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Himself and renounce His movement and His riches. The constancy of God is not then the limit and boundary, the death of His life. For this very reason the right understanding of God's constancy must not be limited to His presence with creation, as if God in Himself were after all naked 'immutability' and therefore in the last analysis death. On the contrary it is in and by virtue of His constancy that God is alive in Himself and in all His works" (*Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2/1, *The Doctrine of God, Part 1*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000], 495).



## Prosopological Exegesis and Christological *Anagnorisis* in Jesus’s Reading of Psalm 110

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### Introduction

IN A RECENT BOOK ambitiously entitled *The Birth of the Trinity*, Matthew Bates has helpfully called attention to the significance of prosopological exegesis in the early history of Trinitarian thought.<sup>1</sup> Observation of this connection is not new. More than half a century ago, Carl Andresen rigorously traced the portentous appearance of the language of “person” (*prosōpon*) in theological speech to the second- and early-third-century practice of *prosopographische Exegese*.<sup>2</sup> Bates has, nevertheless, advanced Andresen’s claim by demonstrating that this mode of proto-Trinitarian scriptural interpretation (if not the explicit language of “persons”) can be solidly anchored in the text of the New Testament itself. More than this, Bates also means to attribute prosopological exegesis to “the historically plausible” Jesus himself.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, the emergence of the Trinitarian vision of God is certainly more complex than any one single explanation.<sup>4</sup> A profound Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in the New Testament & Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Carl Andresen, “Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des Trinitarischen Personbegriffes,” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 52 (1961): 1–38.

<sup>3</sup> Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 40–44.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicea: The Development and Meaning of*

engagement with the philosophical traditions of antiquity has long been appreciated in this regard (or observed with dismay, as the case may be).<sup>5</sup> The ongoing role of biblically based exegetical argument is, nevertheless, increasingly recognized to be a factor of central importance. These scriptural modes of thinking were not only of importance for developing patristic theology, moreover. They were also of central importance in what may be called the “Christology of Jesus.” Thus, while I will suggest in the following study that a much more ample and variegated range of exegetical operations must be envisioned than Bates’s presentation of prosopological reasoning indicates, I emphatically agree in plotting an important source of Trinitarian thought in Jesus’s own acts of biblical interpretation. This exegesis, I also suggest, invites precisely the same sorts of theological tension that were ultimately resolved ecclesially through the Arian crisis: namely, a high mediator Christology coupled with claims of being the one true God.

In order to illustrate these aspects of Jesus’s personal understanding of the Scriptures—above all the way in which he finds himself spoken of in the sacred text—I focus upon what Martin Hengel called “the most important Old Testament proof passage for the development of Christology”: Psalm 110.<sup>6</sup> Bates is hardly the first to see here a text of major significance, and Jesus’s direct quotation of the text in Mark 12:36 makes it an obvious cornerstone in any Christology that takes seriously the history of exegesis. Rather than seeking to draw from this psalm the preexistence theology that Bates has suggested, however, I prefer to propose another route. I will speak of “plenary *anagnorisis*” to designate a certain extension of the prosopological mindset that I see at work: a wider, less logocentric and dialogical slant on Jesus’s exegesis.

The essay has four parts. After offering an introduction to prosopological exegesis and its recent appearance in New Testament studies through Bates’s work, I will proceed to suggest certain limitations of this perspective as a foundation for Trinitarian exegesis, appealing to the so-called “iconic turn.” I will then propose *anagnorisis* as a more promising approach for historically imagining and theologically exploiting the

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*Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1894–1899), 1:43–50, and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 83–135.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish Hellenistic Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976), 80. See also Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 119–226.

personal exegesis of Jesus. Finally, I will offer two examples of this wider perspective in application to Psalm 110.

### Contextualizing Prosopological Exegesis

*Tis legei pros tina kai peri tinos*: “Who is speaking, to whom, and about whom?”<sup>7</sup> Ancient interpreters routinely asked these careful questions in their efforts to make sense of the texts they set about to study. Made more urgent by the difficult, unmarked character of ancient manuscripts, “solution-by-person” (*lysis ek tou prosōpou*) or prosopological exegesis addresses the problem of determining the voice of the speakers by positing the adequate *prosōpa*: so-and-so is speaking to such another. Ultimately rooted in the work of Alexandrian Homeric scholars and the rhetorical exercises of the Greco-Roman age (i.e., *prosōpopeia/ethopoeia*), this interpretative method is perhaps best known today to readers of Augustine, the roman rhetor, through the studies of Michael Fiedrowicz and others.<sup>8</sup>

The concrete procedure is easily grasped. Confronted with a line such as *Iliad* 16.22–23—“With a wrenching groan you answered your friend, O my rider”—the exegete (both ancient and modern) must identify and reflect upon this startling Homeric use of apostrophe, the poet’s own direct address (*tis legei*) to the character of Patroclus (*pros tina*), speaking about his friend, Achilles (*peri tinos*). The result is a clarified understanding not only of the referential functioning of the phrase, but ultimately of the whole complex fabric of the poem (in this case, the unique poetic handling and significance of Patroclus).

Such secular exegetical techniques naturally and easily penetrated early Christian culture. Applied to biblical texts, this or that enigmatic verse was accordingly set in the mouth, say, of the Father and thus said to be spoken *ek prosōpou patros*, “from the Father’s person.” The textbook case is Genesis 1:26—“Let us make man in our image.” Here, of course, the voice of the speaker (*tis legei*) is not the only pressing question, but also

<sup>7</sup> Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum* 4. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Second Temple and patristic works are my own.

<sup>8</sup> See: Michael Fiedrowicz, “Introduction,” in Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding, The Works of St. Augustine III/15 (New York: New City Press, 2000), 19–49; and Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus vox totius Christi: Studien zu Augustins “Enarrationes in Psalmos”* (Freiberg: Herder, 1997). See also, e.g., Balthasar Fischer, *Die Psalmen als Stimme der Kirche: Gesammelte Studien zur christlichen Psalmenfrömmigkeit*, ed. Andreas Heinz (Trier: Paulinus, 1982), 15–35, and Joseph T. Lienhard, “Reading the Bible and Learning to Read: The Influence of Education on St. Augustine’s Exegesis,” *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996): 7–25.

the mysterious *pros tina*. Theophilus of Antioch provides the acceptable answer in *Ad Autolyicum* 2.18: *Ouk allō de tini eirēken Poiēsōmen all' ē tō heautou logō kai tē heautou sophai* (“To no one else than to His own Word and Wisdom did He speak”).<sup>9</sup>

Far flung as the Fathers’ prosopological reading of Genesis 1:26 may seem to modern minds, it is hardly a technique limited to the divine conversation about the creation of mankind—or limited to patristic authors, for that matter. Bates convincingly shows that the same sort of thinking can be solidly anchored in the text of the New Testament itself. Peter’s application of Psalm 16 to Jesus is a perfect example. “You will not abandon my soul to death, nor let your Holy One see corruption.” How could David be the speaker, Peter asks, when that king’s tomb is here among us (Acts 2:29–31)?<sup>10</sup> The words must be heard coming from the mouth of Christ, that is from his person. The same applies to Psalm 110 and the exaltation to God’s right hand. “For David did not ascend into heaven,” Peter argues; David cannot therefore be the one who is both spoken to and spoken of (Acts 2:34).

Bates’s introduction of prosopological reading into the contemporary New Testament conversation is very welcome. It is important, moreover, to see what he means his new datum to contribute. His work belongs within a broader current in New Testament study, at once strongly attracted by the basic claims of the early high-Christology school, yet also in various ways dissatisfied. The effort, broadly, is to better explain both the origins and the precise character of the primitive Christian reconfiguration of Jewish monotheism.<sup>11</sup> Crispin Fletcher-Louis is perhaps the most significant voice of the school’s dissatisfied adherents, but others could be mentioned.<sup>12</sup> For his part, Fletcher-Louis means to give more place to those chief agent and divine mediator figures that scholars like Richard Bauckham have severely marginalized. Bates, without entirely knowing what to do with

<sup>9</sup> Trans. Marcus Dods, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 2004), 101 (slightly altered).

<sup>10</sup> See Carl Holladay, “What David Saw: Messianic Exegesis in Acts 2,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 19 (2016): 95–108.

<sup>11</sup> On the present state of the question, particularly the debate over the role of mediator figures, see Anthony Giambrone, “Jesus and the Jerusalem Temple: Two Monotheizing Loci in Greco-Roman Judaism,” in *From Polytheism to Monotheism*, ed. Uri Gabbay (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2020), 15–36. See also Larry Hurtado, “Observations on the ‘Monotheism’ Affirmed in the New Testament,” in *The Bible and Early Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Christopher A. Beeley and Mark Weedman (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 50–70.

<sup>12</sup> Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).



Bauckham, nevertheless has concerns with his “divine identity” language and prefers what, on the basis of this prosopological model, he promisingly calls a “Christology of divine persons.”<sup>13</sup> The design is to equip the discussion with more adequate historical categories for articulating an orthodox and systematically accurate doctrine of God.

Focus upon solution-by-person exegesis undoubtedly permits an alluring dialogical articulation of divine relations, in contrast to the unity intoned in Bauckham's notion of “divine identity.”<sup>14</sup> To the extent that a diversity of *dramatis personae* thus finds place within Bates' project, it is implicitly hospitable to the work of Fletcher-Louis. Bates even invokes Melchizedek in 11Q13Melch as a divine figure constructed through a prosopological reading of Psalm 110, in precise parallel to Christ.<sup>15</sup> While there are quite good reasons to be open in this direction and prosopological thinking should take its place in our reconstructions, there are nevertheless also reasons to be concerned about placing too much weight upon the discovery of this manner of reading Scripture.

### Trinitarian Exegesis and the Iconic Turn

In his enthusiasm to establish his model's importance in the scriptural shape of Trinitarian meaning (a significant, promising insight), Bates at times adopts a needlessly dismissive posture toward other forms of theological thought. Here the wider history of prosopological exegesis might itself serve as a ready warning. The easy adoption by Sabellian authors of *prosōpon*/mask language and development of the associated biblical interpretation was shown by Andresen. This highlights the need for clear philosophical underpinnings, if a doctrinally adequate approach to the tri-une God is ultimately desired. Plainly, the history of Trinitarian theology cannot be imagined apart from a great deal of ancient philosophy—even if central categories like “person” have stronger exegetical roots than many have heretofore appreciated. A raw historical approach will, therefore, in the end not be enough to fully equip an orthodox exegesis.

<sup>13</sup> Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 2, 22–26.

<sup>14</sup> Above all, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). For a Catholic perspective on this very influential “divine identity” proposal, see Anthony Giambrone, “Neo-Arians, Richard Bauckham, and the Revenge of Alexandrian Christology: In Search of an Ecclesial Hermeneutic,” *Angelicum* 94 (2017): 355–86.

<sup>15</sup> Bates, *Birth of the Trinity*, 59–60; and Bates, “Beyond *Stichwort*: A Narrative Approach to Isa 52, 7 in Romans 10,15 and 11QMelchizedek (11Q13),” *Revue biblique* 116 (2010): 387–414.

In addition to this ancillary metaphysical reasoning, however, one must likewise be sensitive to the key contributions of alternative biblical modes of thought. Historically this factor is also clear. Noting the much greater role that typological and allegorical perspectives have classically played in the development of doctrine, as well as the ways prosopological interpretation risks discarding the *sensus literalis*, Christopher Seitz thus wonders in his review why Bates seems unwilling to “share the terrain” with a fuller range of exegetical techniques.<sup>16</sup> The point is well made. For the depth and nuance of Trinitarian doctrine is not served by narrowing its biblical base or exaggerating the problems posed and answered with solutions-by-person.

It is revealing to observe in just this connection the manifest inadequacies of prosopological exegesis taken alone. The case of Genesis 1:26 again serves as a prime example. Neither Barnabas (Epistle of Barnabas 6.12) nor Justin (*Dialogus cum Tryphone* 62) in their prosopological readings ever detected a Trinity of characters in the plural forms of the verse, envisioning simply the two-way converse of Father and Son. Together with his contemporary Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus is the first to perceive a three-sided conversation between Father, Son, and Spirit; though even Irenaeus himself also settles for a two-member dialogue (see *Adversus haereses* 5.15.4 and *Epideixis tou apostolikou kēeymatos* 55.15), except in the celebrated image of the Son and Spirit as God’s two hands. The connection of the full Trinitarian vision with this anthropomorphic idea is crucial, for it also appears explicitly in Theophilus (*Ad Autolyicum* 2.5–6, 9, 18, 25, 35). Robert Grant suggested that Irenaeus knew Theophilus’s work, without ever mentioning him by name, and along with other evidence the shared two-hands trope makes some form of contact entirely likely.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Theophilus’s commentary on Genesis has not been preserved. Still, Irenaeus provides all that is necessary to recreate his Trinitarian reading of 1:26.

The famous image of God’s two hands is far too rarely contextualized, even within Irenaeus’ own work. It appears several times, but the foundational text comes in *Adversus haereses* 4, just after an affirmation that “it is impossible that the Father can be measured.” His unattainable height

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Seitz, Review of *Birth of the Trinity* by Matthew Bates, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78 (2016): 765. Bates’s tacit dissatisfaction with *Stichwort* exegesis might be added to the list of ancient techniques worthy of more attention and esteem.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 146–73.

of love has nevertheless been revealed in his Word and Wisdom (4.20.1). This comment refers back to a highly evocative statement several chapters before, where Irenaeus describes the Son as the *metron*, the measure of the immeasurable Father (4.4.2). Continuing in the present passage, Irenaeus then offers a monotheistic exegesis of Genesis's creation account—or the two creation accounts, to be more exact.

“And God formed man, taking dust of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life” (Gen 2:7). It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any power remotely distant from the Father of all things. [*virtus longe absistens a Patre universorum*]. For God did not stand in need of these [beings] in order to accomplish what he had himself beforehand determined should be done, as if he did not possess his own hands [*quasi ipse suas non haberet manus*]. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and for his own will, he made all things, to whom also he speaks, saying, “Let us make man after our image and likeness” (Gen 1:26).<sup>18</sup>

It is well known that Genesis 1:26 was by an early date already a problem text for Jewish monotheism. Against his gnostic interlocutors, Irenaeus here obviously means to attribute all creative agency to God, to the exclusion of any outside demiurgic helpers. The a priori oddity of reconfiguring a defense of monotheism around a kind of two powers conception—albeit two powers “not far removed from the Father”—is a bold strategy to say the least.<sup>19</sup> Yet the Lord God's modeling the clay in 2:7 has suggested the theme.<sup>20</sup> God's creative Word and his Wisdom first clearly appear as two distinct “powers” when they map onto the visual logic of his two hands.

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4.20.1, trans. Alexander Roberts, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Hendrickson, 2004), 487–88 (slightly altered). Cf.: 5.1.3; 5:15.4; 5.28.4.

<sup>19</sup> On the “two powers” conception, see Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> The hint of an embodied God and a physical *imago* should not be overlooked—*quasi ipse suas non haberet manus*—though the idea must naturally also be properly contextualized (cf. Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 5.7.1 and 5.16.2). See Alon Goshen Gottsein, “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 171–95.

The twinned cosmogonies in Genesis 1 and 2 accordingly supply Irenaeus's parallel rhetoric of *verbum* and *manus*. In the majestic discourse of Genesis 1 the Lord creates by his sovereign Word, while in the anthropomorphic account of Genesis 2 his *hands* become the agents of creation: thus his Word and Wisdom (not just the Logos alone) like two hands do the creating. It is true that the word *yād* never appears—just as the verbal root *d-b-r* is also wanting. Later exegesis supplied what was implicit, however.<sup>21</sup> The graphic imagery of Genesis 2:7, with its anthropomorphically imagined pair of hands, thus seems to provide an essential Trinitarian key, reversing for a moment the invisibility of the Sophia/Spirit. Accordingly, by the time Tertullian first explicitly names the Spirit as a *tertia persona* in the celestial conversation at the creation (*Adversus Praxeam* 12.3), the tri-personal reading had been grounded through an innovative fusion of allegorical and prosopological interpretations.

Such theologically fruitful blending of distinct image-based and speech-based exegetical logics is highly suggestive in grasping something of the very structure of revelation itself. A pattern of visualizing in duplicate what is elsewhere merely spoken is integral to the incarnational telos of prophetically ordered divine discourse. Without endorsing some post-rational bogeyman of “logocentrism,” exegetes and theologians would accordingly do well to reflect on the so-called “iconic turn” announced by Gottfried Boehm and others.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not Boehm's *Bildwissenschaft* points exactly the right way forward, at a historical level it is perfectly clear that a much more associative and graphically minded exegetical logic must be highlighted and recovered.

The Trinitarian theophany at Jesus's Baptism underscores the point through the visible presence of the Spirit in the likeness of a dove. In Bates's rendering this silent dove vanishes completely before the disembodied words of Psalm 2, spoken to Christ *ex persona Patri*: “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” The dialogical, person-based exegesis remains essentially binitarian in form. When Sergei Bulgakov, by contrast, says that “the Holy Spirit was revealed as a dove because this image most resembled both the Holy Spirit and Christ the Lord,” his own dyadic perspective

<sup>21</sup> 4 Ezra, for instance, has no hesitation in adding *dextera tua* to the creation narrative: “You brought him [Adam] to that paradise which your right hand planted before the earth came to be” (3:6). 2 Enoch says, “The Lord with his own two hands created mankind, in the facsimile of his own face both small and great he created them” (44:1).

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Gottfried Boehm, “Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder,” in *Iconic Turn: Die neue Macht der Bilder*, ed. Christa Maar and Hubert Burda (Cologne: DuMont, 2004), 28–43.

is playing on a robustly Trinitarian patristic trope.<sup>23</sup> The magisterial commentary of Cyril of Alexandria on this scene, for instance, perceives the identity of divine nature shared between both Son and Spirit precisely in the fact that Jesus like a dove is “gentle and humble of heart.” However tenuous modern minds may be inclined to judge it, unity of essence and trinity of persons were once grasped through the fruitful conjunction of image and word. Besides the famous *oublie du langage*, we must guard against the *oublie de l'icône* in reimagining the shape of Trinitarian scriptural thought.

### *Peri tinos: Christological Anagnorisis*

If ancient habits of exegesis carry us far from what might be considered professionally sanctioned modern practice, such interpretative instincts are not inevitably so foreign. Hans Joachim Kraus thus begins his classic commentary on Psalm 110 with the perennial question *Wer redet?* (“Who is speaking?”)<sup>24</sup> Jesus, for his part, takes David to be speaking “by the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36). If solution-by-person logic is accordingly a key piece of the puzzle, it is best not to land exclusively on the query *tis legei*, but to pose the much broader question *peri tinos*: “*About whom* is the prophet speaking [*peri tinos ho prophētēs legei*]?” (Acts 8:34). This too invites a person-centered exegesis, yet without the same limiting orientation to dialogue. For while Jesus did evidently identify himself as a participant within various “divine dialogues” (as Bates calls them), including very importantly the enthronement Psalms 2 and 110, Christ’s interpretive self-detection inside the sacred text did not stop at the exegesis of biblical conversations, but extends to every shape and manner of prophecy.

I have found useful the language of *anagnorisis*, which in Greek means both reading and recognition, to describe Jesus’s plenary self-perception within every jot and tittle of the Scriptures, alternately as object, audience, and speaker.<sup>25</sup> I take this as a foundational principle, in fact. Christ reading

<sup>23</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, “The Holy Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (<https://www.fministry.com/2016/01/the-lords-baptism-theophany-insights.html>).

<sup>24</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 346.

<sup>25</sup> See Anthony Giambrone, “Scripture as *Scientia Christi*: Three Theses on Jesus’ Self-Knowledge and the Future Course of New Testament Christology,” *Pro Ecclesia* 25 (2016): 274–90, at 283: “Jesus found himself in Scripture because he experienced himself with an unequalled focused intensity as the proper object and audience of Israel’s revelation. As the Lord’s servant, he lived in a state of obedient alacrity and heard God’s word addressed to him with perfect directness, an almost unimaginable immediacy: as if every word of the sacred text had that singular

the Scriptures is the incarnate Word regarding his own image in a mirror inspired by the Holy Spirit; it is the Son knowing himself through the *speculum scripturae*.

If I call plenary Jesus's intelligence of the Scriptures in order to secure theologically his status as revealer, there is certainly nothing wrong (or new) in singling out Psalm 110, the most quoted Old Testament Scripture in the New Testament. Scholars like Bauckham and Hengel, for instance, have leaned heavily upon this psalm to help explain the origins of so-called "Christological monotheism."<sup>26</sup> Bauckham is rather less venturesome than Bates, however, and perhaps rightly so, for congenial as is the latter's effort to detect here Jesus's robust self-awareness of his preexistence, the strong dependence of Bates's argument on the divergent Septuagint (LXX) tradition (an issue, in fact, throughout Bates's book) severely cripples the plausibility of his "historically plausible Jesus."<sup>27</sup>

Bates's effort to support his case by appeal to 11Q13Melch, which he cites as precedent to Jesus's prosopological manner of reading, requires a number of uncertain and questionable assumptions.<sup>28</sup> With its disappearance we also lose a firm Palestinian hold. Thus, without overdrawing an outmoded and useless dichotomy, greater caution about the Hellenistic pedigree and context of the *lysis ek tou prosōpou* is in order. It is no accident that Acts and the Letter to the Hebrews are the two main New Testament loci where the practice is found. Bauckham saw the matter with clarity twenty years ago, laying stress precisely on the contrast between the huge importance Psalm 110 holds in early Christian reception and its near complete neglect within the Jewish milieu.<sup>29</sup> This discrepancy likely owes

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power that gripped St. Anthony when he walked into the church and heard the reading of Matthew's Gospel."

<sup>26</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 22, 173–75; Hengel, *Studies*, 119–26.

<sup>27</sup> Bates is aware of the basic problem, but judgments will differ whether his effort to address it is sufficiently thorough (*Birth of the Trinity*, 54n25).

<sup>28</sup> Bates usefully appeals to a narrative logic in his reconstruction and sensibly tries to hold the various biblical traditions about Melchizedek together ("Beyond *Stichwort*," 390–403). His attempt to move from how Psalm 110 *can* be read prosopologically (e.g., taking nouns as vocatives), to how it *was* in fact read at Qumran *in persona Melchizedek*, requires some significant jumps, however, which are not clearly articulated in (or always demanded by) his larger argument. The highly associative nature of the exegesis in 11Q13Melch, nevertheless, offers a very good instance of the wider interpretative matrix against which I mean to position Jesus's behavior.

<sup>29</sup> See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 174–75: "There is no convincing case of allusion to Psalm 110:1 (or any other part of the psalm) in Second Temple Jewish literature, apart from *Testament of Job* 33:3 where it used [*sic*] quite differently . . .



as much to the linguistic factor as anything else: in Hebrew the psalm is frankly less impressive. The double Greek *kyrios* mystifies two perfectly distinct Hebrew characters, Yhwh and Adonai, who share neither a single name nor unambiguously sit upon a single throne.<sup>30</sup> The former's begetting of the latter before the morning star also disappears in the Masoretic Text (MT) like the morning dew. Adrien Schenker, carefully examining the infamous textual issues, makes the intriguing suggestion that the underlying Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX betrays the influence of a polytheistic Mesopotamian royal ideology, later sanitized by the (proto?) rabbinic monotheism of the MT recension.<sup>31</sup> This perspective would privilege the LXX as the earlier text form, but also strengthen the differentiation of the two *kyrioi* elided in the Greek, pushing in the opposite direction from a *homoousios* understanding of *pro heōsphorou exegegnēsa se*. Of course, who knows ultimately what form of the text was in circulation in Jesus's time and place? And who knows how exactly mediator figures (*Mittelwesen*) were assimilated into the Jewish monotheism of the period, including that variant form called "Christological monotheism"? The debate is far from settled.<sup>32</sup> I have no fetish about the MT and do not exclude the possibility of some text-critical resolution, but the ground around Psalm 110:3 will always be uncomfortably shaky.

If Jews of the period saw little in the text of Psalm 110, as Bauckham emphatically insists, what then drew Jesus to it? It is a question of underestimated importance. In the final section of this paper I would like to propose two ways to come at the text of the psalm, both representing a

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Psalm 110:1, perhaps the most foundational text for the whole configuration [of key messianic texts applied to Jesus], was a novel choice, evidence of the exegetical and theological (the two are inextricable) novelty of the earliest Christian movement."

<sup>30</sup> Fletcher-Louis is keen to underscore this point in his treatment of the psalm: "In various ways the psalm stresses the subordination of the 'messianic' *kyrios* to the divine '*Kyrios*'" (139; see 138–41 more generally).

<sup>31</sup> See Adrian Schenker, "Textkritik und Textgeschichte von Ps 110(109),3: Initiativen der Septuaginta und der protomasoretische Edition," in *La Septante en Allemagne et en France: textes de la Septante à traduction double ou à traduction très littéraire; Septuaginta Deutsch und Bible d'Alexandrie: Texte der Septuaginta in Doppelüberlieferung oder in wörtlicher Übersetzung* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 172–90.

<sup>32</sup> See Giambrone, "Jesus and the Jerusalem Temple," 20: "Perhaps, in the end, it is . . . better to think in terms of 'Christological *monotheizing*' and see primitive Christology as a very particular stage in Israel's perennial wrangling with its surrounding polytheistic culture(s): a decisive new phase that engaged the world of the Greeks with unheard of openness, energy, and boldness."



kind of archeology of Christological *anagnorisis*: contextualized by the exegesis of the epoch and suitable, I submit, for any historically plausible Jesus.

### Jesus and Psalm 110

Jesus' self-identification with Psalm 110 was presumably not attracted in the first place by the Greek riddle of the psalm's dialogue partners. Instead, within the hermeneutical circle, one might propose as a kind of exegetical first principle Jesus's provocative self-understanding as eschatological priest and living temple. With this approach to the psalm we confront a type of associative logic that admirably coheres with the pervasively iconic character of ancient biblical interpretation. This perspective opens the doors to the plenary intelligence just invoked, situating the psalm within a much larger web of interwoven biblical readings.

#### *The Priesthood of Melchizedek*

Bates's appeal to 11Q13Melch points in a helpful direction, though the question of prosopological exegesis at Qumran obscures the more important exegetical dynamic. *Jesus, like other Jews of the period, was evidently attracted to the pattern of priesthood embodied in the mysterious figure of Melchizedek.* This, it seems, has something very important to do with his special interest in Psalm 110. It is true that Jesus never mentions Melchizedek's name in our surviving sources, just as 11Q13Melch for its part never cites Psalm 110. Both, nevertheless, play with a shared, interlocking series of Scriptures pointing to an eschatological Jubilee.

It is not difficult to see how the figure of Melchizedek was pulled into a discussion of Jubilee regulations and speculation. In Genesis 14, Abraham pays a tithe to Melchizedek, the first mention of tithing in the Bible. Sadly, a lacuna interrupts the text of the Book of Jubilees just at this point in the story, but it is clear enough that, for those who believed that Abraham observed Torah *avant la lettre*, Melchizedek stands in here for the priestly attendants in Deuteronomy 14:22–26, appearing as a kind of protological version of the Jerusalem priesthood (see Jubilees 13.25–27). Through its citation of Deuteronomy 15:2, it is clear that 11Q13Melch has made a similar interpretative connection, now stressing a specific link between Melchizedek and the Sabbath year of release (II.3). From here a rich cluster of intertextual connections crystallizes, as Deuteronomy's year of release easily leads the author to the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25:9, 13 and ultimately to the "Year of the Lord's Favor" in Isaiah 61:1–3. In fact, the passage from Isaiah—which already represented a theologized reapplica-

tion of the financial arrangements proscribed in Leviticus 25<sup>33</sup>—becomes the controlling text in 11Q13Melch, supplying Melchizedek's characterization as the Anointed One who liberates captives from the "debt" of sin in an eschatological Jubilee (II.6).<sup>34</sup>

If 11Q13Melch never actually cites Psalm 110 in shaping its picture of Melchizedek as the anointed figure of Isaiah 61:1, it is critical to recall that we possess only very damaged and partial fragments of the complete scroll. The possibility of some exegetical interaction with the psalm should not therefore simply be excluded.<sup>35</sup> At the very least, one must readily allow that a Second Temple Jew might have easily moved exegetically between Isaiah 61 and Psalm 110.

This brings us to Jesus. When he cites Psalm 110 and introduces himself as the *addressee* spoken to by Yhwh, he thereby invites an implicit and potent reading of the entire psalm. Bates pushes directly to the thorny expressions in verse 3b: a defensible, but rather risky move, as noted. An alternative, more historically secure approach would be to move to the steadier footing in verse 4. Indeed, whatever mysterious attributes we consign to the silent, character created by the second person statements of the psalm, there is no mistaking the significance of this figure's priestly status: "The Lord has sworn an oath he will not change, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" The suggestion is thus very simple. Jesus's interest in Psalm 110 can be explained, at least in part, by a concomitant interest in the figure of Melchizedek, with whose priesthood Jesus somehow identified.

The argument here is obviously circumstantial, but it goes deeper than simply the general Second Temple interest in Melchizedek. It is based on a prominently shared scriptural middle term. Through Isaiah 61, the Lukan tradition has unmistakably presented Jesus as the proclaimer of a Jubilee of forgiveness, in striking parallel to the role assigned to the eschatological

<sup>33</sup> See Bradley Gregory, "Post-exilic Exile in Third-Isaiah: Isa 61:1–3 in light of Second Temple Hermeneutics," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 475–96.

<sup>34</sup> See Pierpaolo Bertalotto, "Qumran Messianism, Melchizedek, and the Son of Man," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages, and Cultures*, ed. Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold, *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 140, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1:335: "As acknowledged by many scholars, Isa 61:1–2 stands in the background of the entire sectarian text of 11QMelch. Melchizedek is identified as the one who has to perform the liberation of the captives (II:4–6). . . . It seems probable therefore that the title 'Anointed of the Spirit' [in II.18] was borrowed from this same prophetic passage."

<sup>35</sup> *Pace* Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 174n50.

high priest Melchizedek in 11Q13Melch.<sup>36</sup> The Sermon at Nazareth is Luke's most ostentatious illustration of this conception; yet the Jubilee motif has a variety of other echoes, while the identity centered on Isaiah 61:1–3 is more deeply embedded in the Synoptic tradition than this very Lukan passage might suggest. It certainly cannot be dismissed wholesale as a fabrication of the Third Gospel. The citation of Isaiah 61:1–3 in Matthew 11:2–6 and Luke 7:18–23, attributed to Q in the Two Source Theory, is widely accepted as going back to the historical Jesus and indicates that Luke 4's dramatic presentation of Jesus as the Anointed One of Isaiah 61 is anything but pure Lukan fantasy. It evidently owes something to a primitive tradition of Jesus's own messianic self-identification with the figure who proclaims Isaiah's prophecy of the arrival of the Lord's Year of Favor. Coupled with his self-perception as the addressee of Psalm 110 and the exegetical traditions known from 11Q13Melch, it is accordingly hard not to suspect some concern with the eschatological priesthood of Melchizedek.

Additional, image-based indices of this typological role might be adduced to fill out the picture. The use of bread and wine at the Last Supper, above all, should not be too summarily dismissed in this connection. The pattern of Melchizedek's sacrificial offering in Genesis 14 is naturally not necessary as an explanation of Jesus's use of these elements at the meal; yet his behavior nevertheless fits a broader pattern inspired by an eschatological high priestly order. One way or another, the extraordinary iconic force of the Eucharistic bread and wine must not be bypassed or negated. Its hearty reception in early Christian homiletics and art insists upon the connection with Melchizedek; and from the perspective of Boehm's *Bildwissenschaft* such referential logic is compelling.

To conclude: A Second Temple hermeneutical circle binds Genesis 14, Psalm 110, and Isaiah 61. The missing link in both 11Q13Melch and the Gospels is a citation of Psalm 110:4. Buttressed by his self-recognition in Isaiah 61:1–3, however, and through graphic typological hints like his offering of bread and wine, Jesus's certain self-recognition in Psalm 110:1 grounds an assumption concerning his identification with the priestly character in verse 4. The "novelty" of Jesus's exegesis in this hypothetical reconstruction would thus be essentially twofold. He would exploit the latent Melchizedek potential of the psalm, otherwise unattested in the pre-Christian literature of the period (not so daring); and he would apply

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<sup>36</sup> See Anthony Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke's Gospel*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 439 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 127–39.

this priestly messianism to himself (much more audacious). As such, Jesus's own exegesis would contextualize the claims developed at length in the Letter to the Hebrews. That letter's focused combat against angel Christology would further add to this mediator theology an important anti-Arian reading of Psalm 110, pointing presciently ahead to later theological controversies.

### *The Son/Stone Temple*

Another hermeneutical epicycle similarly links up with Psalm 110. Again the exegetical texture reveals a pattern of Jesus's self-recognition in the Scriptures, much wider than prosopological thinking. We may take as two fixed points of departure two broadly accepted interpretative acts. To begin, Jesus cites Psalm 110 not only in the question about David's son (where the question is indeed explicitly *pros tina*), but a second time in answering the high priest before his Passion, now in conjunction with Daniel 7:13 and the coming Son of Man. It is the shared image of enthronement—not any speaker or *Stichwort*—that brings these two passages into relation. Iconic logic is thus already at work assembling a biblical base, with the enthronement of Psalm 110 in prominent position. Second, Jesus also identifies himself as the stone rejected by the builders in Psalm 118:22, just after the parable of the vineyard (cf. Mark 12:10; Matt 21:42).

These two seemingly distant scriptural self-descriptions—Daniel's enthroned “son man” and the rejected stone of Psalm 118—together point very forcibly to one common, yet concealed messianic text: the stone not hewn by hand in Daniel 2. In perfect parallel to “the one like a son of man” in Daniel 7, the mysterious stone in chapter 2 enters the visionary drama to mark the final end of the sequence of four world empires. For any ancient reader, the linkage of the two visions with their parallel characters would have been automatic. Hippolytus, in fragment 4 on Daniel, makes explicit that ancient readers indeed saw the two visions and two figures as one. Josephus records a popular Hebrew play on words between “son” and “stone,” *bēn* and *'eben*, understood as messianic titles, which would only have reinforced the connection (*Bellum judaicum* 5.6.3). As for Psalm 118, the link here is not only the stone image itself, but above all the odd fact of its not being quarried. Luke 20:18 confirms the logic holding these two particular texts together by adding to Mark's parable of the vineyard an open allusion to Daniel 2. Josephus and 4 Ezra, finally, both confirm the messianic character of this Danielic stone. When Jesus thus circles around this text in a kind exegetical enthymeme, it is hard not to find him making the same connections as other ancient readers.

Where then does this bring us? To an aniconic iconic turn, if the

expression be permitted. For the action of the unhewn stone in crushing the colossus is not merely triumphalist David-and-Goliath messianism, although it is that. “He will shatter kings on the day of his great wrath” (Ps 110:5). The statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar and crushed by the stone is cast precisely as an idol, a false image—and not a typical Babylonian bearded bull, but a simulacrum of the *imago dei*: a human form. When the stone that demolishes this image is described in Daniel 2:45 as being cut *lo’ bida’in*, “without two hands” (dual form in the Aramaic), we have stumbled on the back side of a monotheistic polemic topos. The stone/son is being consciously contrasted with those false images of wood and stone, the mere works of human hands. But, like the unhewn sacred steles of the ancient Near East or the altar in the temple, which could also not be hewn (Exod 20:25), it is the hands of God that have directly shaped this *’eben*.

The sacred stone that brings down the statue replaces the idolatrous image as the God-made locus of true worship; and the mountain that grows out of the stone is widely recognized to be the image of a temple, a Babylonian ziggurat recalling the world dominance of Mount Zion. “In days to come, the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be greatly exalted” (Isa 2:2). The temple was seen in Tannaitic tradition to be the work of God’s hands to a still greater degree than creation itself.

When the Holy One, blessed be he, created his world he created it with but one hand, as it is said, “Yea, my hand has laid the foundation of the earth” (Isa 48:13). But when he came to build the Temple, he did it, as it were, with both his hands, as it is said: “Thy sanctuary O Lord which your hands have established” (Exod 15).<sup>37</sup>

We have here something greater than Genesis’s *imago*. A *cultic* and not merely a military dominion is being depicted in the stone’s victorious elevation over the collapsed (may we say fallen?) image of the man. On cue in Daniel 2:46, Nebuchadnezzar drops in worship, confessing the one true God.

In identifying himself with Daniel’s iconoclastic and imageless work of God’s own hands, Jesus makes a mysterious messianic claim about his more than human origin and about his mission. He who was reported to say that he would build a sanctuary *acheiropoiēton*, “not made by hands” (Mark 14:57), identifies himself through Daniel 2 and Psalm 118 as being the very cornerstone of that eschatological temple. This identification

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<sup>37</sup> Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Shirata 10. Translation from the Lauterbach edition (vol 2., p. 79), lightly modernized.

transpires, moreover, within as a strident a Second Temple monotheistic discourse as we might wish to find. Daniel 2 is determined to say that the no mere human should be worshipped. In this context, Jesus's graphic self-depiction as a divinely fashioned image and as the living foundation of a post-exilic temple is not so dissimilar to Paul's operation with the divine name in Philippians 2 and 1 Corinthians 8. But on several counts, it is a new way of envisioning Jesus's own "Christological monotheism."

Were we to pursue this agglutinative process of visual logic it could take us quite far quite fast: Isaiah's cornerstone and stone of stumbling (Isa 8:14; 28:16); Zechariah's stone of seven facets (Zech 3:9; 4:7; 12:3); even the itinerant stone gushing water in the desert (see 1 Cor 10:4). One picture leads to another as the Christological portrait accumulates ever-new dimensions, accenting both divine essence and personal distinction—and importantly, also the human nature of Christ. Yet we can leave this work to the authors of the New Testament and the Fathers, who admirably perceived and advanced the scriptural "pressure" (to borrow an idea of Brevard Childs). It suffices to say that Jesus approached the Scriptures in a similar way to other ancient readers, generating vast webs of interpenetrating associations—with the great difference that, unlike other readers, he ever placed himself in the center of the *mise-en-scène*.

### Conclusion

Prosopological reading highlights a massively significant Christological datum. Yet Jesus's self-projection into the Scriptures is not limited to his assuming roles in Scripture's divine dialogues. It extends to a startlingly comprehensive range of prophetic images and tropes. To this degree, insofar as the origin of Trinitarian exegesis is bound up with Jesus's own reading of Psalm 110, it seemingly has its roots in a prior, Scripture-oriented awareness of himself as at once a cosmic priestly mediator and the unique locus of worship of the one true God: both the Anointed One and the Father's Son, God's true Image not made by human hands.

By expanding the scope and nature of Jesus's self-identification with key biblical characters, we move away from an overly logocentric, puzzle-based model of his self-discovery in the Scriptures, toward a "recognition" on the swift order of intuition. Dialogical self-definition between Father and Son clearly plays a hugely important revelatory role, but in his humanity the Logos has no need to apprehend his divine *ousia* by exegetical calculations.<sup>38</sup> He spoke from the fullness of his two natures and found both

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<sup>38</sup> For the sake of illustration, Bates (*Birth of the Trinity*, 65) reconstructs a syllogistic act of Jesus's exegesis of Psalm 2, in which he reasons his way to the prosopological

spoken of in the word prophetically revealed by the Spirit.<sup>39</sup> In the creative tension of Jesus's scripturally/pneumatically expressed identity as the uncreated mediator of the created cosmos we can anticipate the controversies in which the Church later parsed its orthodox understanding of God. In Jesus's reading of texts like Psalm 110, we discern the primitive Christological ferment in which this Trinitarian exegesis was born. N-V

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conclusion "this *me* was begotten before the time of the speech." Whatever such ratiocination might correspond to in the psychology of Christ's human nature (he was certainly capable of exegetical argumentation about what pertained to him), I prefer to intone a more mysterious and instinctive, even experiential mode of *anagnorisis* (reading/recognition) in the delicate matter of Christ's self-knowledge. On Adoptionism and Jesus's self-perception in Psalm 2 (not only as Son but also as Servant), see Giambrone, "Scientia Christi," 285–90.

<sup>39</sup> I would add here a significant fact noted neither by Andresen nor by Bates. *Lysis ek tēs physeōs*, solution-by-nature—that is, attributing Jesus's logia in the Gospels to the human or divine nature of Christ respectively—was the inevitable Christian development of prosopological reading.



## Is Nicene Trinitarianism “In” the Scriptures?

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Tout ce qui demeure cache dans le Nouveau Testament  
fait encore partie du Nouveau Testament<sup>1</sup>

MY TITLE poses a blunt question, one that is full of ambiguity. But this is just the sort of question that my students are apt to pose when they study the emergence of classic doctrinal formulae, and I emphasize that the controversies that gave them birth are deeply exegetical. The crux of any plausible answer to the question is the bridge that one must construct between the language of the New Testament—where a clear statement of the nature of the godhead is absent—and the language of later Nicene Trinitarian formulation.<sup>2</sup> My own attempt at spanning what to modern eyes easily seems a significant gap will begin by critiquing another attempt,

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<sup>1</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre sens de L'Écriture*, vol. 4 (Paris: Aubier, 1964), 111. I admit that I have quoted this same statement at the beginning of another recent piece, one on which I will draw later in this essay: “The Word Answering the Word: Opening the Space of Catholic Biblical Interpretation,” in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honor of John B. Webster*, ed. R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 37–53.

<sup>2</sup> A significant question not discussed here is what we might mean by “Nicene” Trinitarianism. The creeds of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) do not offer a definition of Trinitarian belief with full clarity. But we can be reasonably clear that the latter creed was meant to be interpreted within a wider framework of beliefs that modern scholars term “pro-Nicene” theology. For discussion see: Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236–40, 273 and onward; Ayres, “On Locating Pro-Nicene Theologies,” in *Varieties of Nicene Theology 360–420*, ed. Mark DelCogliano and Lewis Ayres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

one that might initially seem to offer all that we need. As I do so it will be clear that I am focused on the texts of the New Testament, but as I begin to set out my answer I will at least hint at how we might also extend this argument to cover Israel's Scriptures.

## I

In the first few years of my teaching career, David Yeago's short essay "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma" was frequently referenced as an answer to the question of how one might understand the classical formulae of the Christian faith to be fundamentally in accord with that which is revealed in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> The essay offers an approach to the question of my title that appeals to any scholar taken by the post-liberal vision of doctrine as fundamentally regulative, or taken by the concept of the "plain sense" of Scripture as it was articulated by a number of those who were associated with Yale during the 1970s and 1980s.

At the heart of Yeago's argument lies a fairly simple principle: in order to understand the relationship between the Church's Trinitarian teaching and the text of the New Testament we need to look to the *judgments* that the text renders. Yeago writes:

The New Testament does not contain a formally articulated "doctrine of God" of the same kind as the later Nicene dogma. What it does contain is a pattern of implicit and explicit judgements concerning the God of Israel and his relationship to the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Philippians 2:9 tells us that God has bestowed on Christ "the name which is above every name," and this must be the name of Yhwh. We read this text in the light of the Philippians 1:10–11 insistence that "every knee should bend," and we know the latter to be alluding to Isaiah 45:21–24, which insists that in Yhwh are "saving justice and strength." Hence *the* judgment of the text is that "within the thought-world of Israel's Scriptures, no stronger affirmation of the bond between the risen Jesus and the God of Israel is possible."<sup>5</sup> Yeago goes on to write:

It is perfectly consistent with this that the early communities came

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<sup>3</sup> David Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 152–64.

<sup>4</sup> Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 153.

<sup>5</sup> Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 155.

to speak by preference of the God of Israel as Jesus' *Father* and of Jesus as God's unique *Son*, in a relationship definitive for the identity of each.<sup>6</sup>

Yeago's understanding of the judgments that Scripture delivers is quite expansive and yet precise:

The affirmation that *this* God has so radically identified himself with Jesus can rhyme with Israel's confession of the singularity and incomparability of God *if and only if* their relationship is *eternal*. There is only one God, Yhwh, and relationship to Jesus of Nazareth is somehow intrinsic to this God's identity from everlasting. There is only one God, but the one God is never without his only-begotten Son.<sup>7</sup>

In this quotation Yeago seems to be arguing that the judgments we can attribute to the text include some second-order logical consequences. Thus, he doesn't point to other key texts that one might use to argue for the Son's eternity, but presents belief in the Son's co-eternity as a *necessary* corollary of the text's claim about the supposed identity between Yhwh and Christ.

Yeago is also fairly careful about how he understands the relationship between these "judgements" and those made by Nicene Trinitarianism. Three conditions must be satisfied before we can say that they are "identical." First, the logical subjects spoken of in each case must be identical; and here both sets speak of Jesus Christ and the God of Israel. Second, we must ask about the "logical type of the particular predicates affirmed or denied within the conceptual idioms they employ"; in this case both the Philippians hymn and statements of Nicene faith predicate "of these two subjects the most intimate possible bond, using the strongest terms available within the conceptual idiom of each."<sup>8</sup> And third, one must ask about the point or function of their affirmations or denials; in both cases here, Yeago claims, these statements are articulating principles implicit in Christian proclamation and worship.

Before advancing any critique of Yeago's argument we need to note a key second argument he makes. Yeago strongly criticizes a certain style of historico-critical scholarship for identifying "conceptualities" behind the text and then using those "conceptualities" to determine a text's mean-

<sup>6</sup> Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 155.

<sup>7</sup> Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 157.

<sup>8</sup> Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 160.

ing. He gives an example from one of the great Durham New Testament scholars, James D. G. Dunn. Dunn argues that behind the language of the Philippians “hymn” lies the conceptual structure of an “Adam Christology” and that, hence, pre-existence, which is not part of this scholarly construct, cannot be read into this text.

Yeago makes two strong points about such a reading. The notion of an “Adam Christology” lying behind the text is a scholarly construct, and to accord it a necessary set of features a priori and then to use that set as a control for how we can read what Paul actually says, would be a dangerously circular argument. At the same time, we best interpret texts by looking at how they *use* the resources and conceptualities on which they draw, and it would be a mistake to override the judgments in Paul’s expressed words because of a belief about what could and could not be said within a particular conceptuality. I will return to Yeago’s rather blunt point here in a few minutes, but for the moment we should note that he wisely concedes some place to such historical-critical work:

Study of the history of the conceptualities employed in the texts can provide significant material for comparison, so that the distinctive employment of these conceptualities in the rendering of judgements in the biblical texts stands out more sharply.<sup>9</sup>

Yeago’s article constitutes an imaginative attempt to sever a Gordian knot. In the end, however, the sword proves just too blunt for the task or the knot too resilient. Most importantly, what Yeago identifies as *the* implicit judgments of the text turn out to be judgments chosen from a *range* of possible judgments that the texts could quite fairly be taken to offer. Moreover, it took centuries for close readers to identity the judgments of which Yeago speaks, and those judgments are inseparable from quite complex extra-scriptural resources.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the best way to see why Yeago’s argument fails is to take a look at two examples of rather different readers from the fourth century.

I want to look, first, at the discussion of Philippians 2:9–10 in the first

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<sup>9</sup> Yeago, “The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma,” 163.

<sup>10</sup> I would not deny that Yeago’s criticism of the problems with interpreting texts in the light of scholarly constructs of their supposed backgrounds applies to the work of some New Testament scholars, but his critique does not really work with scholars who are undertaking more piecemeal attempts to look at the contexts and resources with which New Testament writers worked.

of Athanasius’s *Orations Against the Arians*.<sup>11</sup> Here Athanasius opposes a reading which focuses on the force of “*therefore* God has highly exalted him.” The status of Christ *changes* because of his exaltation, these opponents argue, and so we have proof that Christ is mutable. Athanasius’s response can be understood only when we see how his *previous* discussions in this text frame what he says *directly* about this verse. Thus, before he comes to this text Athanasius has already discussed the question of whether the Father alone is “unbegotten.”<sup>12</sup> The term “unbegotten,” Athanasius argues, can be taken in a number of ways. Were we to take it as meaning “what is not a work but exists always,” then it certainly describes the Son; if we take it to mean “not generated, nor having any father,” then only the Father is such. In any case the Father’s Word and Son is not “originated,” but is an “offspring.”<sup>13</sup>

But even as he offers this argument about the nature of unbegottenness, Athanasius also references an even earlier account of the Word’s status. To take just one small but crucial section of that earlier discussion, there Athanasius argues that the Son *is* the Father’s own power; Romans 1:20 speaks of God’s eternal power, 1 Cor 1:24 speaks of Christ as the “Power and Wisdom of God.” But God, the Father, is eternal—Isaiah 40:28 makes this clear—and so must the Father’s power be. It makes no sense, Athanasius argues, that the Father is his own eternal power, as his opponents argue when they speak of the Son as an image of the Father’s power. It is this eternal Power of God through whom all is created, and who is seen in the creation, and to see whom is to see the Father.<sup>14</sup> Note two things. First, Athanasius argues not by placing the entire weight of the argument on

<sup>11</sup> I offer further comments on the character of exegesis in the fourth century in “Scripture in the Trinitarian Controversies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Interpretation*, ed. Paul Blowers and Peter Martens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 439–54.

<sup>12</sup> Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* [*C. Ar.*] 1.30 and onward. For the *Contra Arianos*, I have used the edition of K. Metzler, D. Hansen, and K. Savvidis, *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 1/2, *Die Dogmatischen Schriften: Orationes I et II contra Arianos* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016). The most recent full English translation is by M. Atkinson, revised by A. Robertson, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 4, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 97–148. Some sections are also translated much more readably in K. Anatholios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1.31.

<sup>14</sup> Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1.11–12. On the complexities of power language in the fourth century, see Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

one text, but by interrelating and linking exegesis of a number of different texts and images. Second, this may well be so because, while each of the texts he considers can certainly bear the weight he puts on them, in each case one could fairly suggest that the text also suggests other possibilities. One could easily dispute, for example, the way Athanasius construes the distinction between “originated” and “offspring,” between “work” and “offspring,” or between the different senses of “Wisdom” or “Power.”

Returning to the direct discussion of Philippians 2:9–10, Athanasius begins by defending the principle that the Son is unchangeable. He offers a catena of texts in support: Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 102:26; Hebrews 1:12; Malachi 3:6. Psalm 102:26 in particular identifies the created order as intrinsically changeable, while the Lord is not. The Son, being “from the Father” must share the Father’s unchangeability. Indeed, how are we to understand this unchangeability? It is not as if the Son were an accident in the Father’s essence; he is from the essence and therefore shares its characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Once again, Athanasius’s account is certainly defensible from the texts that he uses to establish the Son’s existence “from” the Father, and together his picture grows in force, but each *individual* reading is certainly not simply *the* necessary reading.

And thus we come to Philippians 2:9. When the text states that God has exalted the Son, Athanasius insists this refers to his humanity; a position Athanasius supports with another catena of texts suggesting that, “before” the Son became incarnate, he was with the Father, who delighted in him.<sup>16</sup> The name that Christ has received is that of Son and God, and he can be *true* Son only if he shares his Father’s nature and is immutable. Quoting the whole of Philippians 2:5–11, Athanasius then asserts it as obvious that the Son, being God, descended from on high and became a human being.<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen, Athanasius draws from texts conclusions that are certainly plausible, but not the only necessary conclusions. He often accomplishes this by adding in interpretive glosses that highlight his own desired meaning—the use of “own,” as in the Father’s “own” Wisdom, being a key example. Moreover, we see him taking terms and investing them with a particular force by paralleling them with broader distinctions he is developing. Being “from” the Father is an excellent example; the term can bear the weight Athanasius places on it only when read as part of his wider assertion of the nature of divine being, the natural consequences of any generation in that context, the complete distinction between creating

<sup>15</sup> Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1. 36–7.

<sup>17</sup> Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1. 40.

and generating. We might say that, throughout the *Orations*, Athanasius's theology appears through the intersection of two sets of conceptual resources: those provided by the text of Scripture, such as light and wisdom, and those which reflect his own context both Christian and non-Christian, such as his assumptions about the distinction between Creator and creation, about the nature of eternity, or about the implications of Father and Son language. The logic of the text that Athanasius wishes to draw out, and a variety of broader conceptual building blocks, is complex, and not, I suggest, well grasped by Yeago's rather simple distinction.

The clearest way of showing that Athanasius is not simply identifying the one possible logic of the text is to look at an alternative. And so, allow me to turn for a few moments to another of the great figures of the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea. Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical Theology* is a polemic against Marcellus of Ancyra, who taught that the Word of God came forth as a distinct entity for creation. Eusebius presents the faith of the Church in these terms:

The monad is invisible, confessing one source, the one God who is unbegotten and without source, but also confessing the only-begotten Son who is born from him, truly existing and living and subsisting as Savior, though he is neither without source nor unbegotten.<sup>18</sup>

Earlier Eusebius describes the Son as the eternally existing "image" of God through whom all things are made. He piles up titles to describe Christ as rock, light, life, and radiance, among others. Amid this account there is a reading of key elements of the Philippians hymn. To understand what it means for Christ to be "in the form of God," we must read this title alongside his designation as mediator (Gal 3:19–20), and as image, radiance, and Son. He is clearly distinct, and yet as "radiance" he is a unique offspring, not generated as are mortal animals.<sup>19</sup> Now, as we know from Deuteronomy 4:35, there is one God, but the Son of God may also be termed God

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<sup>18</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *De ecclesiastica theologia* [*Eccl. theol.*] 2.6.1. The translation is (slightly adapted) from Eusebius of Caesarea, *Against Marcellus and Ecclesiastical Theology*, trans Kelley McCarthy Spoerl and Markus Vinzent, *Fathers of the Church* 135 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 225–26. The edition I have used is *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 4, *Gegen Marcell, Über die kirchliche Theologie, Die Fragmente Marcells*, ed. Erich Klostermann and Günther Christian, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* 14, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, *Eccl. theol.* 1.13.67–71.



“because of the form of the Father that is in him as in an image.”<sup>20</sup> Eusebius draws on rather different resonances of key terms. Placing emphasis on “image,” and interpreting that as implying the Son’s secondary possession of the Father’s “form,” allows him to cast terms such as “radiance” in a rather different light. Insistence on the uniqueness of the divine, understood as God and Father, also casts the term “Son” rather differently.

In these arguments Eusebius is unfairly described by the blunt term “subordinationist.” His intent is to set out the second *hypostasis* as an eternal, distinct reality who can be described as “God” and yet who does not impinge on the unique deity of the one unbegotten. He also relies on investing the term “begotten” with a unique significance, but within a rather different sense of what is and is not possible if God is one. The two thinkers operate with a rather different sense of how one may conceive the “grammar” of divinity. Athanasius is moving toward an account in which, if an entity is God, then, a priori, that entity is one with the one God and possesses all the attributes of divinity, while Eusebius exhibits a more gradated conception of the divine within which the ontologically lesser entity, the Son or Word, receives or participates in some of the Father’s characteristics. There is no one text that can a priori decide between these two readings of what it means for the Son to be “in the form of God” or possess “equality.”

Both Athanasius and Eusebius were good readers of scriptural texts, adept at constellating texts and interpreting scriptural metaphors to support their positions, adept at investing texts with particular meaning and treating them as hermeneutical keys, adept at drawing out conclusions from the possibilities offered by the plain sense, adept at subtly weaving into their readings of texts principles that they took to be key markers of the Church’s faith—and scriptural teaching. Both authors draws on what we can best describe as a *field* of judgments that scriptural texts offer.

While neither would be willing to recognize that the other was making a fair claim on the possibilities of the text, I think we should. However, recognizing that this is so does not mean that the possibility of normative judgments has been taken from us. We can say *both* that the Nicene dogma offers judgments that are compatible with scriptural discussion of relevant topics, that are certainly warranted and driven by the scriptural text, *and* that other construals of those texts are possible that do not simply do obvious violence to their phrasing. The possibilities that any individual text offers are shaped both by the words of the text and by the resources of other parallel texts that one might draw in as support, and then the possi-

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<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, *Eccl. theol.* 1.14.74.

bilities are limited by a field of other texts whose plain sense presses against many readings one might offer of some texts in isolation. Speaking in these terms should offer some sense of how I would face questions concerning the manner in which we set bounds to possible readings.

As may be obvious, by putting the matter in these terms I am also drawing on aspects of the very same school that lies behind Yeago's own argument. But interest in the "plain sense" of the text is here modified in two ways. First, I assume that "the way the words run" often permits a *variety* of readings. Second, whereas Yeago effects a strong separation between the judgments of the text and the conceptual schemes behind it, I would suggest a more complex arrangement, in which texts and their interpreters draw on and adapt a variety of conceptual resources. There will of course be dispute about what resources we should assume are behind a particular text or interpreter, and dispute about how those resources are used, but attending to these questions is an important part of understanding the possibilities of meaning that any text offers, or the nature of any reading of texts.

## II

If my critique is correct, we are faced with an obvious need. If the *necessary* link between the readings of Nicene Trinitarianism and the text of the New Testament is severed, to be replaced with a real link, but one that is not the only possible, then we need to find a way of talking theologically as well as philosophically about the process by which the resources of the text are explored and drawn out into the Church's doctrinal formulae. As the first step in this process, allow me to summarize and reflect on an argument I offered recently in a *Festschrift* for the late John Webster.<sup>21</sup> There I pursued an argument offered by the young Father Joseph Ratzinger in the debates about Scripture and Tradition that raged around the Second Vatican Council.<sup>22</sup> At the core of Ratzinger's argument lies the link between the layers of reinterpretation that he sees as structuring the Scriptures and the character of the Church's dogma as itself an interpretation. Without rehearsing his argument again, it is perhaps enough to note the formal parallel he draws between the reading of Israel's history that we find in the earliest texts incorporated into the New Testament and the re-reading of

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<sup>21</sup> "The Word Answering the Word" (see note 1 above).

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Question of the Concept of Tradition: A Provisional Response," in *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 41–89 (originally published in 1965 in *Quaestiones Disputatae* 25).

the very earliest Christian community that we find reported in such later texts as Acts. In the former case, we see both a close reading that finds itself constantly engaged with the imagery that the text offers and the judgments that it has traditionally suggested and, yet, a reading that also surprises in its unexpected newness.

This newness is, in the first place, a newness because of the action of Christ's Spirit within the community and, in the second place, always a newness *in interpretation*; it is not a newness that abrogates the centrality of the Scriptures. Thus, for example, in 2 Corinthians 3 Paul speaks of the veil over the books of Moses being removed when one turns to the Lord and receives the Spirit of the Lord that is freedom (*eleutheria*). Similarly, in Acts 15, Barnabas and Paul narrate the signs and wonders that God has done, and it is this that prompts James to treat Amos 9 as a warrant for imposing few restrictions on gentile converts. For Ratzinger, this freedom in interpretation that comes from the active presence of Christ is both central to the very structure of Scripture and shown to us in Scripture as a constant of the Christian community. And so, on this foundation, the young Ratzinger points to the Church's dogmatic Tradition as an authoritative interpretation of Scripture driven by the work of the Lord's Spirit in the Church

This argument is of considerable use for this paper. Although it was not Ratzinger's original concern—and he shows little interest in the malleability of scriptural texts—his account allows us to open a space within which we can understand how the text could have been read multiple ways over time, its judgments and imaginative resources explored in a variety of contexts. Thus, while we can investigate how the text may have been heard by those who encountered it first, we may also explore how the text was read in different contexts over following centuries until dogmatic definition bounds ever more closely the possibilities for appropriate reading.

Arguing in this manner is not simply to relativize the meaning of the text for two reasons. First, and as I indicated briefly above, the text itself shapes and bounds possible readings in all sorts of ways. Readings which offer little consonance with “the way the words run” or are easily contradicted by another text will not prosper. But second, and essentially, Catholic Christians celebrate the emergence of defined readings as the work of the Spirit. Of course, when I say “defined readings,” it is rarely the case that we are talking specifically about dogmatically defined readings of specific texts. There are some examples of this, but more frequently dogmatic definitions articulate positions which have significance for the interpretation of multiple texts. Indeed, one of the functions of dogma I would suggest is precisely to canonize, under the Spirit's aegis, particular

frames for the reading of Scripture in part and as a whole. Beyond formal acts of dogmatic definition, the Church’s long Tradition of magisterial teaching similarly frames and guides the reading of texts. This process is of course extremely complex: the magisterial promotion of particular schools of thought or particular models of exegetical competence pushes exegesis down particular paths and into particular controversies. None of these complex ways in which scriptural exegesis is bounded prevents modern reconstructions of how texts would have been heard by their authors, redactors, or first audiences from exercising a deep influence over our readings today, but it is an understatement to say that there is much more here to be discussed about how we might train theologians to undertake exegesis that puts front and center the unfolding of interpretation within the life of the Church, *as well as* the possible meanings of a text at the times of its composition or final editing.

If something like this is true, then the core of an answer to the question in my title has emerged. The doctrine of the Trinity is most certainly “in” the New Testament, but we can speak about what we mean by “in” the New Testament only on the basis of clarity about the multiple possibilities of the text and the process by which the formed doctrine of the Trinity was discovered hidden therein. The emergence and development of this doctrine may be read as a drawing out by the dual agency of human beings and the divine of that which lies hidden within the written Word. I confess my statement here draws heavily on Henri de Lubac, who offers us the wonderful aphorism that “everything which remains hidden within the New Testament is still part of the New Testament.”

Somewhat gnominically de Lubac then observes:

While the *historia* which made up the ancient Scripture [the Old Testament] guided the reader to an *allegoria* by prefiguring a reality which was other, ulterior and superior, namely the very mystery of Christ which is the New Testament, the Mystery of Christ does nothing else but spread forth its own intrinsic dimensions before the eyes of the believer who studies it.<sup>23</sup>

For Catholic theologians it is not only those readings of a text for which a good case can be made that they would have been likely for readers in the late first or early second centuries, that may be said to be “in” the text. Readings may be said to be “in” the Scriptures—part of the “intrinsic

<sup>23</sup> De Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, vol 4, 111; cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, trans. Luke O’Neill, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 200.

dimensions” of the Scriptures—because plausible cases can be made that they are consonant with the possible judgments of the text, and because they seem consonant with the Church’s faith. Of course, if those readings do not have the force of magisterial definition, then we exist always within the realms of relative plausibility. In many cases, of course, we will deal with readings that have been hallowed by dint of long reflection through the Tradition and we would be wise to think long and hard before we turn aside from them; in other cases Tradition itself offers a plurality of readings that serve only to stimulate more. Modern styles of historical-critical exegesis certainly should push us in new directions and cause us to think again about some long cherished readings, but they cannot foreclose on the complex of possibilities that texts still offer to us. Certainty will come only at the End.

To understand my answer a little more deeply, allow me to draw attention to another insight of de Lubac’s. In a famous essay on the “development of doctrine” in 1948 he argues against any vision that sees a clearly defined core of faith gradually accruing further definition as we gradually conquer and subdue the mysterious fringe of the undefined. Whether such a picture takes the form of a logical deduction model of development *or* of a model of historical unfolding, de Lubac argues that, rather, the mystery of Jesus Christ remains always *mystery* at the heart and center of our faith; dogma draws only on what he terms the “definable fringe” of that mystery. We might push this a little further and describe the Scriptures as providing us with the *speakable* fringe of the mystery.

Although my focus so far has been on the texts of the New Testament, these themes from the young Ratzinger and de Lubac enable us to see how we might apply the same arguments to the Scriptures as a whole. Although this is really the subject for another paper, I will offer a couple of sentences. Simply put, if we are right to see Nicene Trinitarian theology as an appropriate drawing out and exploration of that which is revealed to us in the New Testament, and if we are right to see the texts of the New Testament as a revealing of that which lies hidden in the texts of Israel’s Scriptures, then we can say nothing other than that in Israel’s Scriptures we find a field of judgments about the nature of God, and a field of metaphorical resources that not only were the resources that our earliest Christian writers drew on and which they transformed, but also are there for us, as resources that we can and should read through the lens of the New Testament and Nicene Trinitarian theology. Understanding the history and transformation of those resources within the history of Israel is an obvious part of understanding the use and transformation of those resources by early Christians and within the later Christian community. But there is a

continuum that needs to be ours if we are to move forward fruitfully.

### III

The picture I have offered so far is insufficient insofar as it has concentrated mostly on the path from the readings of the late first or early second centuries to the readings possible in the light of formed Trinitarian doctrine. In the last section of the paper I would like to think in broader terms about the activity of the theologian as scriptural interpreter, using an analogy drawn from a perhaps surprising quarter. This analogy, I hope, will help us to think in a little more depth about the inevitable plurality in interpretation that has been a significant concern throughout my argument.

In a lecture entitled "On Fairy-Stories" first delivered in 1938, J. R. R. Tolkien reflects on the act he terms "sub-creation." The writer of fantasy intends the creation of a world with sufficient density, sufficient "inner consistency," to convince the reader that the events of the story take place in a world one might inhabit. Without such a sense of reality, the reader will not experience the catching of breath or the lifting of the heart that occurs when ill or good befalls the central characters. And yet, Tolkien argues, "every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Tolkien writes, when we feel joy at the end of the successful fairy-story, this may even be "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world." The Gospels contain "a fairy-story . . . which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. . . . [They are] 'mythical' in their perfect self-contained significance. . . . But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation." The fairy-story, then hints at truth, and truth is known in the Gospel, which is history and yet is so without "losing the mythical or allegorical significance that it had possessed."

Tolkien also notes the continued *necessity* of fairy-stories:

In God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. . . . Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The *Evangelium* has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them. . . . The Christian still has work to do, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare

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<sup>24</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 11–70, at 61.

to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know.<sup>25</sup>

“Effoliation” is a good word. Tolkien recovered a noun from a long unused verb signifying the unfurling of buds in the springtime. In this term readers of his works should hear echoes of Tolkien’s fascination with the creation and cultivation of Middle Earth in the long faded first age, and with the subcreative activity given to the Eldar and the other elves. At the same time, the word is a striking testimony to the power in Tolkien’s mind of fairy-story also to *re-foliate* the world in the light of the Gospel, to unfurl the buds of narrative and reason that have grown even in the dark years before the Gospel.

We may glean a little more from Tolkien’s letters, where we find him commenting on his own writing not as allegory but as “exemplification.” Exemplification is the creation of a story that is no conscious allegory, each event or character intentionally representing an aspect of another more primal story, but a story in which many aspects of the one true story, or aspects of true virtue are simply exemplified. But, importantly, this act of exemplification Tolkien sees as, at its best, an act of homage which directs our attention toward the true myth that is the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> In fact, it is not quite right to present sub-creation as entirely an act of the human author’s creation; it is also an act of discovery that occurs in response to the manner in which the truth *presents itself* to the mind.

This may seem to have taken us far from questions of the relationship between the text of Scripture and the Church’s formed doctrine. But not so. Consider this question: in what ways have theologians and theological schools been sub-creators, imitating and paying homage to the Scriptures

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<sup>25</sup> Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories,” 63.

<sup>26</sup> *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981): letter 131 (likely 1951, to Milton Waldman [pp. 145–46]); letter 153 (September 1954, to Peter Hastings: sub-creation is “a tribute to the infinity of His potential variety” [p. 188; see also pp. 192 and 194–95 in the same letter]); letter 181 (likely January or February 1956, to Michael Straight [pp. 232–37], on representation and sub-creation). I am particularly grateful to Prof. Paige Hochschild for sending me to Tolkien’s letters. Of particular interest is her talk “Hobbits and Humility: Catholicism, Christology and the Lord of the Ring” ([soundcloud.com/thomisticinstitute/hobbits-humility-catholicism-christology-and-the-lord-of-the-rings-paige-hochschild](https://soundcloud.com/thomisticinstitute/hobbits-humility-catholicism-christology-and-the-lord-of-the-rings-paige-hochschild)).



in their theological formulations? In what ways have they undertaken a task of exploring and effoliating the revealed word, unfolding its depths? Allow me to explore two differences between Tolkien's sub-creator and the theologian.

I will begin with an obvious difference: theologians seek to tell the *same* story, or at least to tell their stories in such a way that we are drawn back toward the one story. But their telling of stories may still be understood as an exercise in exemplification. My talk of theologians "telling stories" needs a little unpacking. I use the language because of the analogy; more precisely I refer to the ways in which theologians create particular paths through the symbolic universe of Scripture. The brief discussions of Athanasius and Eusebius that I offered earlier exemplify this creation of paths well. Both theologians are attempting to set out what Scripture teaches; both create particular paths, or modify traditional paths through the scriptural universe. But I could easily illustrate the phenomenon by considering quite different but certainly orthodox Nicene theologians; exegetical exemplification often produces a plurality of readings and paths through the scriptural universe, even when an identical teaching is being articulated and explored. Such theologians are both giving us "what Scripture teaches" *and* exemplifying the story that Scripture tells. They are "sub-creating," "effoliating" Christian thought under scriptural ordinance.

So far, however, one might think I have identified only an inevitable hermeneutical action; in the attempt to work out what a text means, newness inevitably occurs. But here we find the second difference between Tolkien's sub-creator and the Christian exegete. His sub-creator is able to work *because* the Gospel has licensed and hallowed her enrichment of creation; the theologian's work is, however, part of the life of the body of Christ, it is an activity drawn out by the Spirit as we are led toward the Father. We most easily speak of the work of the Spirit when we reference the emergence of the credal and magisterial traditions that should guide our acts of sub-creation. But we need also to recognize the far less perspicacious role of the Spirit in generating the theological work within which that defining Tradition emerges. The theological sub-creator should know that her work may be part of intended unfolding of revelation's meaning; certainty would of course here be inappropriate and impossible, but belief that the theological Tradition is so ordained reveals the necessity and centrality of the commitments that should be central to theological work. The effoliation of thinking through the exploration of the definable and the speakable fringe of the mystery, accessed through the reading of Scripture, is a work given us in the event of revelation.

**IV**

I hope my analogy has done enough to suggest a line of argument, even if there remains much to be drawn out. It is time for me to bring this paper to a close. In sum then, Nicene Trinitarianism is, thus, “in” the Scriptures not only in the sense that its judgments are consonant with the judgments that scriptural texts offer—even if those judgments are not the only ones that the texts allow—but also in the sense that the Scriptures offer a field of images that, in various different constellations, have founded a broad variety of Trinitarian theologies. The hiddenness of these theological themes, and the work that was required for the Church to draw them out, should not make us doubt, or fear that there is no connection between doctrine and text; it should make us reconsider and celebrate the work of effoliation, of unfurling the buds of revelation that is itself part of what has been gifted to us. The drawing out of the written Word’s meaning under the guidance of the incarnate Word’s presence in his body is itself a fundamental part of the divine work in Christ. N.V

## The Presence of the Ascended Son in the Gospel of John

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THE FOURTH GOSPEL distinctively articulates the shared Christian conviction that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead after his crucifixion and was exalted to heaven.<sup>1</sup> As for other New Testament writings, that belief also raises the fundamental question of how this same Jesus continues to relate to ongoing Christian faith and experience. Where is Jesus now? Is he *here* or *somewhere else*, at a spatial and perhaps temporal remove from the lives his followers lead now?

In scholarly and critical study of the Gospels, that rather basic question is further complicated, made more strange and complex by its methodological elusiveness. There are many possible ways to try and contextualize it in either ancient cultural or modern analytical settings. A century ago, standard approaches to the comparative study of ancient religion tended to focus on expressions of divine presence either in terms of “the numinous” (Rudolf Otto),<sup>2</sup> of social ritual as expressing the power of society (Emile

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for questions and comments from Anthony Giambrone, Greg Tatum, and other conference participants. Parts of this material were previously presented as part of the 2018 Didsbury Lectures in Manchester, which I hope in turn to publish as part of a larger monograph. I also wish to acknowledge valuable feedback and suggestions from the Didsbury audience, as well as from Marianne Meyer Thompson.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J. W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 85: “In the Gospel of Jesus we see the consummation of that process tending to rationalize, moralize, and humanize the idea of God, which began with the earliest period of the old Hebrew tradition

Durkheim), or in history-of-religions comparisons with providential or animistic conceptions. Today the comparative bird's eye view has for the most part surrendered to more focused textual and empirical study of the texts and phenomena in view. So, for example, one frame of reference might be Jewish, early Christian, and Graeco-Roman mysticism, on which a good deal of work has been done in recent years. Others have studied the role of interiority and cognitivity in specific religious traditions. There have been books on ascetical, shamanistic, and neurobiological aspects of ecstatic experience, especially in relation to the Apostle Paul. And a series of recent studies has called for fuller discussion of the role of religious experience in the formation of early Christian belief and theology. The broader theme of divine presence and absence has also repeatedly attracted the attention of scholarship on ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism.

A clearer methodological account must be left for another occasion. I do not doubt that many of these modes of characterizing divine presence are relevant to a description of early Christian realities: quite likely they are. This paper probes the focused and in a sense “dogmatic” question about how the Gospel of John envisages the location of Jesus after his earthly lifetime. How does the Fourth Evangelist handle the dialectic between affirmations that Jesus is present with the disciples or on the other hand that he has gone to another place? I am for present purposes not as concerned with abstract definitions of absence or presence in metaphysical or personalist terms,<sup>3</sup> nor with a comparative phenomenology of Johannine religious *experience*. Instead, my focus will be on the Gospel of John's stated (“emic”) affirmations about the presence or the absence of the post-Easter Jesus—the convictions that shaped and were in turn shaped by this evangelist and his community.

The Fourth Gospel's manuscript distribution and especially its reception in the exegetical disputes and deliberations leading up to the great Christian creeds leave no doubt that this text had an inestimable effect on

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and became specially prominent as a living factor in the Prophets and the Psalms, continually bringing the apprehension of the numinous to a richer fulfilment by recognizing in it attributes of clear and profound value for the [*sic*] reason. The result was the faith in ‘the fatherhood of God’ in that unsurpassable form in which it is peculiar to Christianity.”

<sup>3</sup> For an attempt at the former see e.g. Notger Slenczka, *Realpräsenz und Ontologie: Untersuchung der ontologischen Grundlagen der Transsignifikationslehre* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); for the latter, see, e.g., David Walsh, *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

the formulation of Christian doctrine about the person of Jesus Christ. Among the company it keeps in the library of early Christian sacred texts, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are clearly paramount. Richard Bauckham and others have plausibly argued for John's knowledge of something rather like the Gospel of Mark in particular; and despite some useful criticisms, that view may represent a growing consensus.<sup>4</sup> But beyond this there has long been a notable trickle of New Testament scholarship which would affirm the historical *priority* of John over the Synoptics,<sup>5</sup> or even just over Luke.<sup>6</sup> Others more cautiously propose stages of composition in which each stream of Gospel tradition influenced the other, possibly through the continuing interrelationship between writing and primary or secondary oral tradition.<sup>7</sup>

But rather more revealing than this Gospel's inscrutable literary relationships with other New Testament texts is its formative influence on early Christian belief. One thinks here of the prologue's exegetical pressure on the creedal language of Jesus as the only-begotten Son, coeternal with the Father: "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made." The influence of John's Gospel is unmistakable, and was explicitly recognized in the ancient debates that generated these

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Richard L. Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for all Christians*, ed. R. J. Bauckham. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 147–71; *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> So most famously John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985); cf. Klaus Berger, *Im Anfang war Johannes: Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (Stuttgart: Quell, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> So, e.g.: M. E. Boismard, *Comment Luc a remanié l'évangile de Jean*, Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 51 (Paris: Gabalda, 2001); B. Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources and Literary Context*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 215 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); Mark A. Matson, *In Dialogue with Another Gospel?: The Influence of the Fourth Gospel on the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Luke*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 178 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Matson, "Current Approaches to the Priority of John," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 7 (2004): 73–100. Jesper Tang Nielsen, "Johannes und Lukas," in *Rewriting and Reception in and of the Bible*, ed. J. Hogenhaven et al., Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 396 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 125–62, offers a history of research on this relationship (134–39) and concludes in favor of Luke's priority over John.

<sup>7</sup> For the history of this question of relative priority, see, e.g., *Für und wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums*, ed. P. L. Hofrichter (Hildesheim: Olms, 2002); Matson, "Current Approaches"; Nielsen, "Johannes und Lukas," 126–34.

formulations. It is vital to see that “Christian Scripture does not yield a normative theology *but suggests a doctrinal norm*”—and it can be an appropriately critical judgment to conclude that no New Testament text has a better approximation to this doctrinal norm than the Gospel of John.<sup>8</sup>

One might say that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke the story invites its readers into a growing appreciation of who Jesus is as the account unfolds. The narrative build-up of Jesus happens in a more linear fashion, even if the whole invariably turns out to be much greater than the parts. And to be sure, on returning to the beginning from the end, those Synoptic parts do turn out in fact to be replete with the whole.

In the Gospel of John, by contrast, that linearity of disclosure and understanding becomes rather more complicated. This is because John’s prologue dramatically front-loads the question of Christology from the very first line of the text. The divine identity of Jesus Christ is fully and explicitly in focus from the start. So the effect here becomes less cumulative: as readers seek to understand what Jesus says and does, it seems that each part of the story is already full to bursting with the whole.

The whole of Jesus as the coeternal Son invades the narrative from the start. But this also inevitably colors the central question of this study: for the Fourth Evangelist, where is this Logos now, risen in his flesh (20:20, 27) but no longer bodily manifest in his earthly life? Is he still present to believers here, revealing his glory and empowering them to become the children of God (1:12, 14)? Or is he absent to them, somewhere else?

The Fourth Gospel engages more articulately and acutely than the Synoptics with the tension between the present and the absent post-Easter Jesus. On one account, *nearly half* of this Gospel is concerned with the topic of Jesus’s death and departure.<sup>9</sup> This theme of departure and bereavement dominates from chapter 13 onward, but there are numerous references to it well before then, raising important questions about the presence and absence of Jesus long before the Passion narrative.

My approach here will foreground attention to explicit statements relating to the post-Easter Jesus, and where possible, avoid the temptation

<sup>8</sup> See Robert Morgan, “Can the Critical Study of Scripture Provide a Doctrinal Norm?,” *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 206–32, 207, 217–23 (italics mine).

<sup>9</sup> Thus Hans-Joachim Eckstein, “Die Gegenwart des Kommenden und die Zukunft des Gegenwärtigen: Zur Eschatologie im Johannesevangelium,” in *Eschatologie–Eschatology: The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Eschatology in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Tübingen, September, 2009), ed. H.-J. Eckstein et al., *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 149–69, at 162, with reference to 13:1–20:31/21:25.

to appropriate narrative motifs allegorically with little or no warrant in the text.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Public Ministry: Book of Signs (Chapters 1–12)**

I begin with the public ministry of Jesus in the first twelve chapters, sometimes called the Book of Signs, before turning to the Farewell Discourses and the Passion and resurrection accounts in the second half of the Gospel (the so-called Book of Glory, chs. 13–21).

#### *The Incarnation of the Eternal Word (Chapter 1)*

As already intimated, the prologue's sustained and powerful language of the Incarnation clearly foregrounds the Word's presence to the Father and then to his own people in coming into the world. He enters as the light into darkness, becoming flesh and dwelling among us (1:1–14). As God the only Son, the Logos uniquely made known (*exēgēsato*; 1:18) the invisible God the Father through his Incarnation. These rightly celebrated lines are impossible to overestimate in their influence on the formation and articulation of Christian faith through the centuries.

Significantly for my purposes, however, the verbal tenses deployed in the prologue have their reference almost exclusively in the incarnational *past*. The only exceptions relate to the evangelist's light imagery and to the Son's timeless presence to God: key phrases are "the light shines [*phainei*] in the darkness" (1:5), "the true light which enlightens [*phōtizei*] everyone" (1:9), and "God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart [*ho ōn eis ton kolpon tou patros*]." These three expressions evidently evoke certain aspects of timelessness in how Jesus is present to the narrative, and by implication to the believing reader. Particularly striking potential in this respect may additionally lie in the evangelist's assurance that to "all who received him" and "believed in his name," he who is Word and True Light gave "the power [*exousia*] to become children of God" (1:12). Hints at a timeless presence occasionally surface in the Synoptics, too, perhaps especially in Matthew. But in John they are much more frequent; and as we shall see, they continually raise questions about where Jesus is located

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<sup>10</sup> The latter remains a widespread tendency. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 274–75, on 6:16–18, offers just one of numerous examples: "The words 'By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them,' though doubtless prosaically true, may also be symbol-laden: as in 3:2; 13:30, the darkness of night and the absence of Jesus are powerfully linked." While doubtless generally true to Johannine sentiments this conclusion is here unsupported by any evident textual warrant.



when he utters them or they are uttered about him.

That said, the Son's past Incarnation in the earthly life of Jesus is clearly John's primary narrative interest and starting point, even if his stories invariably and deliberately carry a surplus of meaning that signifies far more than they appear to say at face value.

The prologue's culminating emphasis on the Word becoming *flesh* also encourages a reading of the Gospel narrative in terms of its focus on the visible, tangible presence of that incarnate Word: "we have *seen* his glory" (1:14). It is "upon" him as the heavenly Son that the very angels will "ascend and descend" (1:51), just as in Jacob's dream they did "upon" the ladder linking heaven and earth (Gen 28:12). And as soon as the narrative gets underway, we find that through his signs Jesus "revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him" (2:11).

It is true that this *visibility* of the earthly Jesus is of course shared with the other Gospels. But John does seem to make a particular feature of it. One of the Fourth Gospel's favorite verbs for the process of coming to faith in Jesus Christ is "seeing." Examples include Jesus inviting two disciples of John to "*come and see*" (1:39), or the Samaritan woman calling her neighbours to faith: "*Come and see* a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (4:29; cf. 4:42). A few chapters later, the man born blind replies to a challenge about Jesus with an exquisitely ironic confession: "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, *now I see*" (9:25).

*Seeing* that presence of Jesus is for John not only a central image of faith, but it is also at the very heart of Jesus's ministry. It is the reason why he has come (9:39): "I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." And he insists that seeing and knowing the Son is also to see and know the Father (12:45; cf. 14:7).<sup>11</sup> The Catholic philosopher Romano Guardini rightly called the Fourth Evangelist a "man of the eye."<sup>12</sup>

It is not perhaps immediately clear quite how much this theme of seeing

<sup>11</sup> Jörg Frey, "Wer mich sieht, der sieht den Vater': Jesus als Bild Gottes im Johannevangelium," in *Vermittelte Gegenwart: Konzeptionen der Gottespräsenz von der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels bis Anfang des 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, ed. A. Taschl-Erber and I. Fischer, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 367 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 179–208, develops this theme more fully.

<sup>12</sup> Romano Guardini, *Johanneische Botschaft: Meditationen über Worte aus den Abschiedsreden und dem Ersten Johannes-Brief* (Würzburg: Werkbund, 1962), 53, 57. See the more philosophical exploration of this theme of the "phenomenology of Christ" in Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. S. Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), esp. 69–93.

contributes to our question of Jesus's presence or absence after Easter. Indeed, John later has the post-resurrection Jesus strongly relativize the importance of sight in favor of those who believe *without* having seen (20:29)—a point that more than one commentator emphatically relates to the theme of his *absence*.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it matters to the Fourth Evangelist that the presence of the incarnate Word to the *eyes* of the apostolic witnesses also grants *valid* access to the presence, life, and metaphorical sight of Jesus for those who believe on the basis of the apostolic testimony (see 19:35; 20:30–31). Past apostolic *sight* of Jesus undergirds the present *insight* of faith, and it invalidates the option of a merely docetic, symbolic presence.<sup>14</sup>

*The Descended and Ascended Son: Jesus and Nicodemus (Chapter 3)*

Illustrations of the timeless *simultaneity* of Jesus's earthly and heavenly presence feature repeatedly even in the early chapters. So Jesus says to Nicodemus, "No one *has ascended* into heaven *except* the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."<sup>15</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:13–15). The forward-looking reference to the Son of Man's "lifting up" bringing eternal life makes good sense at this point of the narrative. But John's otherwise familiar and intelligible dynamic of the Son's descending and ascending (3:31; 6:33, 38, 42, 51, 58, 62; 7:34; 8:23; 16:28; 20:17) here again leaves uncertain the question of the vantage point. The language of the Son's "descent" from heaven and subsequent "ascent" is of course frequent throughout the text. As late as

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Francis J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 163, 178–79.

<sup>14</sup> The docetic interpretation famously associated with Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 44–72, and Ernst Käsemann, "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), 138–67, has been abandoned by most interpreters (see, e.g., Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, trans. L. M. Maloney [Minneapolis: Fortress Press]; Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], although it periodically resurfaces (e.g., Esther Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and its Historical and Cultural Context* [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 301–16).

<sup>15</sup> The majority of the manuscript tradition reads, "the Son of Man *who is in heaven*"—a reading that merits discussion as potentially preferable, see Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Bible Society, 1994), 174–75.

20:17, after the resurrection, we hear that Jesus has “not yet ascended to the Father.”

The descent and re-ascent of heavenly figures is as such a familiar trope from pre-Christian Jewish sources, although not perhaps as closely related to the ascent (and eschatological descent) of prophets like Moses or Elijah as commentators sometimes assert.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the influential angels on Jacob’s ladder whom we encountered earlier (1:51; cf. Gen 28:12), the theme is comparably used of the Logos of God in the Book of Wisdom (18:14–16) or of the messiah in a number of other texts.<sup>17</sup> And while the Synoptic evangelists may make little explicit use of it, it is already clearly present in earlier Pauline texts like the Letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:6–8).

And yet here it seems as if that ascension has already happened, so that at least for the reader the Jesus of chapter 3 already reflects the default state of post-Easter *absence* with which so much of the second half of the Gospel is concerned: the only one who has (already?) *ascended* into heaven is the Son of Man, who descended from heaven. A comparable passage appears in 7:34, where Jesus anticipates his return to the Father and warns his uncomprehending opponents that “You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I *am*, you *cannot come*.” (Note the striking present tense of the last two finite verbs—*hopou eimi egō hymeis ou dunasthe elthein*; contrast 8:21.) Here again it seems as if Jesus is absent as the already-ascended one, who elsewhere identifies himself as “not of this world” and “from above” (8:23).

### *The Bread of Life Discourse (Chapter 6)*

Among the pre-Easter teachings of the Johannine Jesus, the Eucharistic connotations of the Bread of Life Discourse in chapter 6 have always been a central locus of critical and theological debate. Jesus famously offers no words of institution or interpretation over the last meal with his disciples in chapter 13, which John does not characterize as a Passover meal as the Synoptics do. Instead, a strongly sacramental-sounding interpretation attaches to Jesus’s instruction after the feeding of the five thousand (6:35–58). He identifies himself in apparently timeless terms as the “bread of life,” offering the universal assurance that “whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (6:35).

<sup>16</sup> See also the ambitious argument of Simon Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), esp. 137–41, attempting to make the same case for the Synoptics.

<sup>17</sup> Sibylline Oracles 5.414; 4 Ezra 12:32; 14:52; 1 Enoch 39:6–7; 46:1–4.

As this is reiterated and expanded at the end of the discourse, it seems at first to be tethered more narrowly to the Incarnation: Jesus is “the living bread *that came down from heaven*,” specifically to give his flesh for the life of the world (6:51). But its application then expands more boldly to a set of affirmations that seem to locate in Jesus’s flesh and blood an *abiding* presence that is in principle both available and necessary for *all* believers, whether during or after the earthly ministry:

Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; . . . Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood *abide* in me, *and I in them*. . . . The one who eats this bread will live forever. (6:53–58)

The Johannine Jesus here speaks with confidence about his presence to the believer from now until the “last day,” suggesting that the assurances here given are not restricted to the time of his earthly ministry. Such “ingestion” of the Son of Man, it seems, secures the *permanent* benefit of his presence to each participating believer.

Whether this promise is for the evangelist therefore specifically and explicitly located in the *Eucharist* and the Eucharistic elements is another matter. It is at any rate not hard to find commentators who favor such a reading; many do so very emphatically.<sup>18</sup> While all other clear references to the Eucharist in Paul and the Gospels do connect it unambiguously to the Last Supper, this connotation is not present in John 6. It does seem in some respects attractively neat and compelling, even if less than wholly self-evident. A specific Eucharistic context may be difficult to prove beyond doubt in John 6. Nevertheless, the text as it stands certainly underscores at a minimum that the condition for resurrection life and the Son’s indwelling presence is to accept and receive Jesus as God’s true food from heaven in his incarnate entirety, in his person and his words.

That said, as soon as the Eucharist became integral to the Christian celebration of Jesus, this text very quickly engendered a Eucharistic association that spoke of the powerfully effective presence of Jesus to the believer in corporate worship. In fact, it appears that this connection may have been made virtually as soon as the ink was dry on the Fourth Evangelist’s papyrus: thus Ignatius of Antioch already speaks of the Church’s breaking bread together as “the medicine of immortality, the antidote that we

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible 29–29A (New York: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 1:258.

should not die, but live for ever in Jesus Christ” (*To the Ephesians* 20.2; cf. *To the Romans* 7.3).<sup>19</sup>

### The Present “I Am”

This consideration of John 6 raises the question of the so-called “I Am” sayings more generally, which have rightly attracted a large amount of scholarly attention.<sup>20</sup> What are we to make of Jesus’s statements that “I am the bread of life” (6:35, 41, 48, 51), “I am the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “I am the gate” (10:9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, the truth and the life” (14:6), and “I am the true vine” (15:1)? Are they intended to underscore

<sup>19</sup> *hena arton klōntes, hos estin pharmakon athanasias, antidotos tou mē apothanein, alla zēn en Iēsou Christō dia pantos*. This link, which finds regular acknowledgment in later patristic writers (see, e.g., documentation in Joel C. Elowsky, *John*, 2 vols., Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006–2007], 1:227), is also supported by Enno Edzard Popkes, “Die verborgene Gegenwärtigkeit Jesu: Bezüge zu eucharistischen Traditionen in Lk 24 und den johanneischen Schriften,” in *The Eucharist—Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, vol. 1, ed. D. Hellholm and D. Sänger, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 376 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 503–12, at 511 (“The attempt to ground the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus in John’s Bread of Life discourse can be discerned as early as Ignatius of Antioch”; translation mine). Contrast Jan Heilmann’s argument for a more strictly secondary connection with the Eucharist, e.g., in “A Meal in the Background of John 6: 1–58?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 2 (2018): 481–500.

<sup>20</sup> For recent treatments and discussion of prior scholarship see, e.g.: Paul N. Anderson, “The Origin and Development of the Johannine ‘egō eimi’ Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9 (2011): 139–206; Hans Förster, “Selbstoffenbarung und Identität: Zur grammatikalischen Struktur der ‘absoluten’ Ich-Bin-Worte Jesu im Johannesevangelium,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 108 (2017): 57–89; Silke Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock: Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ich-bin-Worte*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 127 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Dietrich Rusam, “Das Johannesevangelium—eine ‘Relecture’ der synoptischen Evangelien?: Intertextuelle Beobachtungen zu den ‘Ich-bin-Worten’ des Johannesevangeliums,” in *Kultur, Politik, Religion, Sprache—Text: Wolfgang Stegemann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. C. Strecker (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 377–89; and previously Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of ‘Ani Hū’ in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd series, vol. 113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); also see Daniel Facius, *Ich bin: Die Selbstoffenbarung Jesu in den Bildreden des Johannesevangeliums* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2016).

the connection of his continuing presence as bread, light, gate, shepherd, and so on?

Much Johannine scholarship has regarded these sayings as programmatic and definitive for the Christology of the Fourth Gospel, often claiming that they are specifically and deliberately seven in number.<sup>21</sup> This popular claim requires one to ignore the repetitions and variations of several sayings (esp. “bread of life” and “light of the world”); it also raises difficulties around the striking statement 8:58 that “before Abraham was, I am.”

Leaving aside this somewhat sterile numerical problem, it is undoubtedly the case that these are timeless statements about Jesus’s identity, whose relevance does seem to extend beyond his lifetime, and therefore into the evangelist’s present day. Recent scholarship has increasingly shown that these sayings at the heart of John’s Christology plausibly derive from core Synoptic convictions that are then developed and expounded in the associated Johannine discourses.<sup>22</sup>

But the question at issue here is about *where* John envisages Jesus to be after Easter, whether that be described in physical, relational, or metaphorical conceptions of space. While the “I Am” sayings do of course offer a timeless account of *who* Jesus is, and to some extent what he does, they are markedly less clear about *where* he is in relation to the believer.

It is in principle possible that all the “I Am” statements are intended to describe a timeless and permanent presence of Jesus to the evangelist’s here and now. But that would make for a rather attenuated sense of “presence”—and close reading seems in several cases to make this difficult to sustain in the text. At 9:5, for example, we encounter the temporally bounded affirmation, “*as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” Similarly, it is worth asking whether there is some necessary disruption to the Good Shepherd’s work as he lays down his life for the sheep (10:11), not least since after Easter we find him entrusting his shepherding task to Simon Peter (21:15–17).

In short: the “I Am” sayings yield less explicit information about our specific question of presence and absence than might at first appear to be the case. A similar conclusion probably follows for several related Christo-

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<sup>21</sup> But see, more cautiously: Ben Witherington, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 156; R. Alan Culpepper, “The Christology of the Johannine Writings,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology in Honor of Jack Dean Kingsbury*, ed. M. A. Powell and D. R. Bauer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 66–87, at 81–85.

<sup>22</sup> So, e.g., Anderson, “Origin and Development.”



logical statements that also seem to have a timeless application. One thinks here for example of relational claims like “the Father and I are one” or “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:30, 38), neither of which seems particularly eloquent on *where* he is now.

### *Lazarus and the Absence of Jesus (Chapter 11)*

A more promising and widely discussed passage in relation to our question is the story of Lazarus in chapter 11. This is in many ways pivotal to the structure of the whole Gospel. It attracts one of the longest narratives about a miracle, dwells extensively on death and resurrection, and in one view almost appears to take the place of the otherwise absent exorcism narratives of the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>23</sup>

The central concern of this passage is patently about Jesus’s messianic power to defeat death and to raise the dead, which is a traditional Jewish eschatological affirmation both about God (for example in the daily Amidah prayer<sup>24</sup>) and about God’s messiah (for example at Qumran<sup>25</sup>).

At the same time, Wendy North has argued that a subsidiary theme in the passage is how to deal with the problem of the absence of Jesus and perhaps his failure to return.<sup>26</sup> This problem does arguably surface in the Farewell Discourses, as we will see. But North regards the absence of Jesus as a painful and pressing concern to John’s readership throughout: it is “the situation that informs the Gospel at every turn” (41), whose flames are fanned by persecution, and whose effect she sees attested in chapter 17 as threatening the very breakup of the Johannine community. It is this that also shapes her reading of chapter 11 in particular. She finds its meaning encapsulated in Jesus’s somewhat puzzling delay before arriving in Bethany, evoking Mary’s counterfactual, disappointed statement that, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died” (11:21). In response to this, she finds John drawing comfort for his audience from

<sup>23</sup> So, e.g., Barnabas Lindars, “Rebuking the Spirit: A New Analysis of the Lazarus Story of John 11,” *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 89–104.

<sup>24</sup> Amidah petition 2: “Blessed are you, Lord who raises the dead to life” (*The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth*, ed. Simeon Singer and Jonathan Sacks, 4th ed. [London: Collins, 2006], 111; translation mine).

<sup>25</sup> 4Q521 [Messianic Apocalypse] 2 II, 12: “[For] he will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead live, he will proclaim good news to the poor” (translation mine).

<sup>26</sup> Wendy E. Sproston North, “‘Lord, If You Had Been Here . . .’ (John 11.21): The Absence of Jesus and Strategies of Consolation in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36 (2013): 39–52.



the promise of resurrection life and from resorting to the Holy Spirit as the substitute for the absent Jesus.

The story of Lazarus clearly held enormous resonance for early Christian readers of John, as it provided them with a graphic image of striking humanity to give hope in Jesus as the Lord of life and death. Beginning with some of the earliest expressions of Christian art, Lazarus held pride of place not least on the occasion of Christian funerals and burials. Charles Hill's influential study of John's impact in the early Church notes the frequent paintings of Lazarus in the catacombs.<sup>27</sup> The theme of his second death and burial took hold several centuries later at Kition (modern Larnaca) in Cyprus, which claimed him as its first bishop.

Jesus's unexplained delay and Mary's heartfelt sadness at his absence during her moment of need are doubtless a feature of this story, and commentators rightly note their pastoral significance.<sup>28</sup> But these features do not dominate the narrative in the way that North asserts. The absence of Jesus is temporary, thoughtful, and deliberate; and it evidently results in deliverance for Lazarus and his sisters. Mary recognizes as much when she immediately goes on to temper her disappointment with an unreserved expression of trust: "Even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (11:22). Read in that light, verse 21 is not reproachful, but functions, despite the note of disappointment, as a statement of fact and of trust: the presence of Jesus would have had the effect of saving the life of Lazarus; and "even now" (*[alla] kai nun*) it has the power to do so.

There is little sign here of desperation, let alone of a community about to break under the strain of Jesus's absence. Explicit reproach about that absence, such as it is, comes from neither Mary nor her friends, but rather from the group identified as "the Jews," some of whom are heard wondering, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (11:37). Faced with the raising of Lazarus, however, even that reproach appears to turn to faith: "Many of the Jews . . . believed in him" (11:45). What is more, even the chief priests plotting his death

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<sup>27</sup> Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 156–57, also quoted by North, "Lord, If You Had Been Here," 50.

<sup>28</sup> Note, e.g., Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 245, who also quotes Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 65, on the sister's words resonating with readers "as they experienced sickness and death in a time when Christ was not visibly present, and as they turned to a seemingly absent Christ for help and received no timely answer."

detect in the report of these events not a problem of absence, but only the danger that, “If we let him *go on like this* [*houtōs*], everyone will believe in him” (11:48).

All in all, therefore, John 11 hardly reads well as a story problematizing an absent post-Easter Jesus. Instead, it manifests to the believers of Bethany an anticipation of the life-giving eschatological presence of the Son.<sup>29</sup>

### The Farewell Discourses and the Passion (Chapters 13–19)

Throughout the story of the earthly ministry, John repeatedly focuses the significance and purpose of Jesus’s life more specifically on his impending “hour,” which in the first half of the Gospel “has not yet come” (2:4; 7:30; 8:20), until at the beginning of the Passion narrative we finally discover that in fact now it “has come” (12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). In that sense, John’s narrative positively requires this somewhat more back-loaded sequence, which allows him to animate his understanding of the Cross as the hour of Jesus’s redemptive “lifting up” on behalf of his friends.

With 12:23 as the first announcement that his hour has now come, the Gospel has reached a crucial turning point as Jesus’s departure and absence draws near. Jesus begins to hint at this later in the same chapter in predicting the saving significance of his crucifixion (“when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” 12:32). And he warns his audience that (his) light will be with them only for a little while longer before darkness overtakes them (12:35; anticipated in 9:4). The implication of absence in that darkness is often asserted, but it seems just as feasible to read this darkness as above all of the Triduum, the period between the Cross and the resurrection. As one commentator puts it:

The *night* seems to be the time when Jesus is absent from the world between his death and resurrection, since thereafter the Spirit will be present (20:22) who will continue Jesus’ work through the disciples. Through this strong warning, which regards such a limited period of time, we are led to see the enormity of the darkness of those three days in salvation history.<sup>30</sup>

The disciples’ experience of the darkness temporarily overtaking the light also needs to be contextualized in relation to 1:5, where the evangelist asserts more categorically that the darkness has not finally overcome the light of Christ.

<sup>29</sup> See Eckstein, “Die Gegenwart,” 163–67.

<sup>30</sup> Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 237–38.

More often than in the other Gospels, John's Jesus announces that he has to "go away." He does so repeatedly, beginning quite early in the narrative.<sup>31</sup> Even by chapter 7, this is a point not lost on a quizzical audience wondering if he is going to the Greeks (7:35). It is a distinctive feature of this Gospel that Jesus himself quite explicitly tackles the problem of his departure from the disciples while he is still with them, rather than after Easter (as he does in Luke).

The drawn-out reflections of chapters 13 to 17 accompanying Jesus's final meal with his disciples occupy the chronological space that in the Synoptics is taken up by the much briefer accounts of the Last Supper. Specifically, these Farewell Discourses dwell extensively on the question of presence and communion with Jesus once he is no longer there. It is precisely the fact that he "goes away" which alone makes it possible for him to "come again" (*palin erchomai*; see 14:3, 18, 28) in order to take his disciples to the apartments he has prepared for them in his Father's house.

This may seem on the surface a puzzling and disturbing rationale: why inflict on the disciples the bereavement of the interim, just for the sake of being able to return to them?

An important point to note is that, like the other New Testament Gospels, John engages the theme of absence as the essential consequence of a temporally bounded Incarnation. This also strikingly separates his approach from that of the timeless Saviour of several of the Nag Hammadi gospels, who never stoops to take flesh and who instead carries his disembodied disclosure exclusively to the elite gnostic mind—a mind whose inner divine spark is raised above merely earthly and human realities.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Paraclete*

As we saw earlier, a basic theological challenge throughout these discourses is the impending *absence of Jesus*: how can his person and his salvation possibly be mediated if the Incarnation of divine salvation is now *absent*? Rather than affirming a Matthean idea of continued presence, the Johannine Jesus here stresses his departure over and over (beginning with 13:33–38).

John's solution is similar to Luke's, but developed in considerable depth and complexity. Jesus promises that, while he himself will "go

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<sup>31</sup> E.g.: 7:33; 8:14, 21–23; 13:3, 33, 36; 14:2–3, 28; 16:5, 7, 17, 19; 17:11, 13; cf. 20:17.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Truth*, bound together with the *Apocryphon of John*. See also my further discussion in Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels, Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), esp. 183–84.

away,” Father and Son will send “another” advocate or ombudsman, the Spirit, who will in fact be “with” and “in” the believers forever (14:16–17; 14:25–26; 15:26). The Advocate or Paraclete supplies whatever might be lacking in the presence of Jesus. The problem of departure and absence is packaged in such a way as to allow the Paraclete to overcome the tension as manifesting God’s love, mediating his joy and presence to disciples who are thus not left abandoned.<sup>33</sup>

This Johannine promise of “another” Paraclete famously lent hostages to fortune, which the followers of both Mani (*Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis* 64.8–65.18) and Mohammed (*Qur’an* 61:6 and commentaries) put to ready use in their own cause.

That said, John’s correlation between Jesus and the Paraclete is so inextricably close that the Paraclete does inalienably manifest the love and living presence of Jesus *himself*. “Another” Paraclete appears therefore to mean not “other,” but more of the same: their distinctive unity is the reason Jesus can in these chapters paradoxically claim to be absent *without leaving the disciples “orphaned”* (14:18).

The Paraclete comes from God and is sent by the Father in the name of the Son (14:16, 26); elsewhere he is sent by Jesus from the Father (15:26; 16:13). He is identified as the Spirit of Truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13) or the Holy Spirit (14:26) who comes to be with the disciples only after Jesus has departed (16:7, 8, 13). Unknown to the world (14:17) but judging the world (16:8–11), he dwells in the believers and his work is to glorify Christ.

Even in the absence of Jesus, the Spirit’s task and teaching is precisely what Jesus does and teaches; he speaks only what he hears (16:13). He acts to remind the disciples of Jesus, to teach them and lead them into all truth. And it is through the Spirit that Jesus is able to leave his peace with them (14:16–17, 25). By the Spirit’s coming, the disciples will know that they are in Jesus and he in them; indeed, by keeping his commandments they love him and he will love them and manifest himself to them (14:20–21). The Paraclete as the “other advocate” thus activates and makes real the abiding presence and advocacy of none other than the living Jesus, who will be

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<sup>33</sup> Exegetically less convincing is Secondo Migliasso, “La presenza dell’Assente: saggio di analisi letterario-strutturale e di sintesi teologica di Gv. 13,31–14,31” (PhD diss., Pontifical Gregorian University, 1979), esp. 261 (the problem of absence raised by Jesus’s physical death is overcome by his perennial presence brought about in the disciples through the “mystery” of his death). Won-Ha Hwang, “The Presence of the Risen Jesus in and among His Followers with Special Reference to the First Farewell Discourse in John 13:31–14:31” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2006), argues that it is the first Farewell Discourse *itself* which mediates the continuing presence of the risen Christ.

with them and “come to them” even though he is “going away” and for a time they will not see him (14:3, 16–18, 28; cf. 20:29).<sup>34</sup>

More than in Luke, the Spirit operates as the fully empowered representative or even a kind of functional proxy for Jesus, though not as his replacement. In practice this seems to mean a substitution without radical absence: the Spirit serves as a presence of emphatically *Christological* shape and importance, and provides a concrete focus for the continued post-Easter activity of Jesus. As Jörg Frey puts it, the work of the Spirit is to make both Christ himself and the Father present to the Church.<sup>35</sup>

So the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the work of the Spirit functions in terms very much like the work of Christ himself: he testifies on Christ’s behalf, he convicts the world, teaches the disciples, and leads them into all truth. Most importantly, perhaps, this Paraclete will mediate and represent Christ forever (14:16). Given John’s view of “the world” as predominantly a problematic place, it is particularly interesting that despite the Spirit’s relationship of hostility to the world, he nevertheless operates in it, at least to convict it of sin (16:8).

As we saw earlier, the question of whether the Paraclete is the *same* or *another* Advocate has long been contested. One important additional perspective on this problem is offered by the interpretation in the First Letter of John, where the Paraclete is emphatically *identified as Jesus Christ the Righteous* (1 John 2:1). But 1 John also confirms that the Spirit in fact mediates assurance of the abiding presence of *Jesus*: it is through the Spirit that we know *the Son* abides in those who keep his commandments (3:23–24).<sup>36</sup> Although we will do well to exercise caution about hybrid readings of John with 1 John on this question, it does seem justifiable to read 1 John as a valid and viable first-century interpretation of the Paraclete’s function in mediating and activating the presence of Jesus. In support of this reading, commentators have also rightly noted the Gospel’s intimate correlation of the Paraclete with the glorified Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> North, “Lord, If You Had Been Here,” links this dynamic especially to the Lazarus narrative of chapter 11, which textual and artistic sources show to have exercised a powerful influence on the early Christian imagination.

<sup>35</sup> Jörg Frey, *Die Johanneische Eschatologie*, 3 vols., *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 96, 110, and 117 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997–2000), 3:238.

<sup>36</sup> Note that interpretation of the successive pronouns in 3:24 is notoriously contested. Outside John 14–16, the Gospel foregrounds a more traditional conception of the Spirit without reference to the Paraclete, but one that remains compatible (cf.: 1:32–34; 3:34; 7:39; 20:22).

<sup>37</sup> E.g., Andreas Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten: Eine exegetische Studie zu*

In fact, a theological and Christological *development* in the understanding of the Paraclete has been suggested not just for 1 John. Some scholars have also suggested this within the often somewhat resumptive and circular prose of the Farewell Discourses themselves: one ultimately not very persuasive account has attempted to resolve the compositional tensions of John 15–16 by reading them as a *reinterpretation* of chapters 13–14.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the emphasis on the Paraclete, the Fourth Evangelist acknowledges and yet also strenuously mitigates the problem of absence. Jesus goes away, but he does so only “for a little while” (*mikron*), in order to prepare a place and swiftly to turn their pain into joy in a way that leaves no unanswered questions (16:16–22). He goes away, but that departure is never explicitly narrated, let alone in the three-dimensional terms deployed in Luke and Acts.

### *Mystical Union with the Son*

In addition to this important Paraclete-centred resolution of Jesus’s absence, 13:34–35 and 15:1–17 point to a second, ethically oriented pair of concepts that draw on an abiding and quasi-mystical union with Jesus. These twin themes of love and fruit arise from the image of the vine and its fruit-bearing and from the love of Jesus for the disciples as his friends. In both cases the theme of union arguably presupposes a notion of abiding presence, perhaps along the similarly timeless-sounding lines of 14:23: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (NRSV). Here it is notably Jesus *himself*, and not the Paraclete, who makes his home in them and the one in whom believers abide.<sup>39</sup>

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*den johanneischen Abschiedsreden (Joh 13,31-16,33) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Relecture-Charakters*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 169 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 293–304, whom Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 100n53, criticizes (to my mind incorrectly) for supposedly failing to maximize the categorical theme of “physical absence.”

<sup>38</sup> So, e.g., Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten*, esp. 293–99. Theories of alternative versions or recensions of these discourses were liberally advocated, e.g., by Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> This is one of a number of considerations that question the assumption of the Paraclete as a full and comprehensive substitute for Jesus, without remainder, as Christian Dietzfelbinger, “Die theologische Bewältigung von Tod und Abwesenheit Jesu in den Abschiedsreden des Johannesevangeliums,” *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 19 [2005]: 217–41, at 224, claims: “. . . complete replacement for the departed Jesus” [translation mine]).

It is a distinctive dimension of John's extensive treatment of our theme that so many of the key passages appear *before* Easter. This means that much of the discourse material develops its Christological reference to Jesus in the *present tense*—and as we saw earlier, there is scope for confusion about whether, in addition to *descending* from heaven, Jesus has also already *ascended* (e.g., 3:13).

One of the more intriguingly ambiguous passages attached to the Farewell Discourses themselves is the so-called High Priestly Prayer of chapter 17, whose timeless language of the Son's intercession and union with the Father and with his disciples makes the reader wonder where exactly the narrative camera is located. Is the point of view situated in any actual moment of the earthly life of Jesus, or rather eternally in the Son's union with the Father? This ambiguity is at one level deeply rooted in John's subtle eschatology, which many Johannine scholars consider to be mostly of the realized variety (even if more clearly future-oriented in 1 John).<sup>40</sup> That said, another way of describing the perspective of John 17 is in closer analogy to the experience of believers in Hebrews, where even ahead of the expected eschaton they participate in the human and angelic worship of the heavenly Mount Zion and draw near to the intercessory high-priestly ministry of Jesus. Already the intercession of Jesus is "that they may be with me where I am, to see my glory," and indeed that "the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (17:24, 26).

### The Risen Jesus (20–21)

Finally, and rather like Luke, John envisages a brief but poignant delay between Jesus's resurrection and his departure to be with the Father. During that period Jesus is still bodily present from time to time, but the nature of that presence appears complex and differently attuned to different disciples: Mary Magdalene *may not* touch him, but Thomas somehow *needs to* and is urged to do so (20:17, 27).

Before the appearance to Thomas, Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit by breathing on the disciples—implying graphically that here, too, as Jesus departs his life-giving place is literally taken by his own *pneuma* (20:22).

Commentators have sometimes noted a tension between this gift of the Spirit here while Jesus is still with the disciples, and on the other hand the statement that the Paraclete cannot come *unless and until* Jesus departs: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advo-

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<sup>40</sup> See the discussion in Eckstein, "Die Gegenwart," 152–55, and most fully Frey, *Johanneische Eschatologie*, both of whom also insist on retaining an element of future eschatology.



cate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (16:7). His departure is real and objective, even though the evangelist takes measures to mitigate its effects, as we saw above near the end of the discussion of the Paraclete in chapters 13–19.

John’s concluding chapter supplements the discourse about Jesus’s presence in the Paraclete. It does so by juxtaposing the role of two Apostles, John and Peter: first, the possibility of the Beloved Disciple’s continuing witness to Jesus until he comes; and second, the authorization of the restored Simon Peter as the one who will now act on Jesus’s behalf in continuing the Good Shepherd’s care and feeding of his flock (21:15–25).

To some extent this role as the chief under-shepherd confirms for Peter the role that in traditional Catholic language has sometimes been associated with the Pope: that is, to represent Jesus as shepherd of the flock and as servant of the servants of Christ.<sup>41</sup> This is not of course the same role as that of the Paraclete, but nevertheless it seems in certain limited respects to be analogously vicarious. The post-Easter Jesus remains the one who feeds his followers as the bread of life, as in chapter 6—and that ongoing task of nourishment is here entrusted to the rehabilitated Peter.

### Conclusion

If the messianic redeemer is to be incarnate and “God with us,” then his departure and absence must inevitably raise difficulties. The Fourth Gospel at one level is most exercised by the problem of Jesus’s departure and the fact that his incarnate presence has come to an end with his resurrection and ascension. In New Testament scholarship one frequently encounters claims of the post-Easter Jesus’s categorical and definitive absence. One scholar’s comment stands for many: “One of the key concerns of this Gospel—perhaps even its central concern—is that of the ‘absence’ of Jesus for later generations.”<sup>42</sup>

In contrast to that primarily negative view, we have seen the Fourth Gospel affirm at the same time a continuing and quasi-sacramental presence of Jesus to the faith of all believers. This is quite strikingly the case in passages about Jesus as the bread of life (6:35, 48, 51)—a promise at once

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<sup>41</sup> See further Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 181–83.

<sup>42</sup> Brendan Byrne, “The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 23 (1985): 83–97, at 93. See also Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 178; and Dietzfelbinger, “Die theologische Bewältigung.”

rendered meaningless if Jesus is by default dead or absent. On the contrary, this abiding reality of his living presence is the necessary corollary of the claim that Jesus is life (11:25; 14:6; cf. 8:12). Similarly, one thinks of seemingly permanent promises in the Farewell Discourses about the branches abiding in the vine and vice versa (15:4) or assurances like “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, *and we will come to them and make our home with them*” (14:23).

Such promises make it impossible to accept blanket statements about the categorical absence of Jesus—or about the post-Easter period as a “time devoid of Christ,” as one commentator likes to put it.<sup>43</sup> Instead, his identity to faith in the present continues his past identity in the flesh: the Lord in whom his disciples believe is the same both before and after the resurrection.<sup>44</sup>

The dialectic of the risen Jesus’s absence and presence appears for all Four Evangelists to become more articulate and more pressing as time passes. Mark considers the question of the bridegroom’s absence, but does not systematize it as a symbol of the post-Easter period. The encounter with the risen Christ and reunion with him in Galilee is essential to his understanding of the disciples’ future relationship with Jesus, a point that is well appreciated by the interpretation offered by the canonical longer ending of Mark (16:19–20).

Matthew is aware of the potential challenges of Jesus’s absence, but in his final chapter resolves the tension firmly in favor of the risen Lord’s abiding presence in the Church and in its mission of proclamation, disciple-making, baptizing, and teaching. For Matthew there is no departure at all, and therefore no sustained problem of absence.

Luke is the first evangelist to deal explicitly with the end of resurrection appearances and the reality of departure; for him as for John this means that the departed Jesus sends his Spirit to continue his work. But both in the Gospel and especially in Acts, that same “Lord” Jesus himself continues in significant ways to remain the “teaching and doing” protagonist in the apostolic mission (see Acts 1:1).

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<sup>43</sup> Dietzfelbinger speaks repeatedly of “the time devoid of Christ” (“Die theologische Bewältigung,” 226, 241) and suggests that the church *requires* the “space” constituted by absence of Jesus in order to be itself and to benefit from the aid of the Spirit (225). See also, more moderately, Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, esp. 163, 178–79, who prioritizes the theme of faith in the physical absence of Jesus.

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, *John*, repeatedly (13, 310) quotes Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. N. Davey, rev. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 35, to good effect: “What Jesus *is* to the faith of the true Christian believer, he was in the flesh.”

It is John, finally, who wrestles with the departure and absence of Jesus most explicitly of all, and develops a powerfully eschatological and sacramental vision of union with the Son as a way to assure believers of his continued presence. It is as the risen and ascended Son that his life-giving presence through the Paraclete is at its most powerful. Perhaps the Fourth Gospel's striking realism about the tension between departure and presence is precisely what makes possible its strongly mystical and sacramental emphasis, including its deeply Christological account of the Spirit. N·V

## On the Unity of the Two Testaments: In What Sense Is the Torah a Law for Christians?

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### Navigating the Stormy Waters

THE TORAH, also known as the Pentateuch, is “a body of ritual, civil, criminal, and international law that guide[s] the people of Israel in relationships,”<sup>1</sup> not only with God and the nations but also with each other. And yet, the Torah is not *just* law. It is *also* a larger narrative moving from the creation stories to the entrance into the promised land. Accordingly, many have sought to isolate the Torah’s 613 laws from its narrative surroundings.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that unraveling all the difficulties posed by biblical law is simple—especially in light of the relationship between biblical law and the New Testament. For sure, we are all aware of the old claim that the “grace of the gospel in Christ has replaced the bondage of the law under Moses.”<sup>3</sup> And yet, while there is some level of tension, there are also many shared convictions and practices between Jews and Christians—especially in light of the similar religious and

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<sup>1</sup> Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus and the Temple: The Crucifixion in its Jewish Context*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 165 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 30.

<sup>2</sup> In the Babylonian Talmud, see b. Makkot 23b.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel I. Block, “Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, no. 2 (2012): 196.

cultural milieu of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

Now, at the heart of Second Temple Judaism is the relationship between God and Israel, a relationship centered around the Torah and Israel's adherence to it—something which particularly urged in the Shema (Deut 6:4–9) and the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–21; Deut 5:1–21).<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the Torah was not only considered “the basis of Jewish identity as the people of God . . . [but also effectively presented] itself as the expression of God's will.”<sup>6</sup>

It makes sense, then, that the other two parts of Jewish Scripture—the Prophets (the *Neviim*) and the Writings (the *Ketuvim*)—have come to be considered as a *rereading* of the Torah from within the new cultural and historical setting they find themselves in. The New Testament was not ignorant of this; it, too, can be seen to be another *rereading* of the entire Old Testament corpus grounded in how the coming of Jesus sheds light on what God continues to will for his people and how his people must continue to obey this divine will.

It is precisely here, however, where the tension between the two are felt. Certainly, if Jesus both emphatically denies invalidating (*katalyō*) the law and reveals its fulfillment (*plēroō*; Matt 5:17), then *some things are* different. And yet, not *everything* is different; *if read well*, nowhere in the New Testament do we get the sense that God's law is pitted against God's Gospel. Neither does it say anywhere that God's law is detached from the covenant nor that the Christian, “free” from the law, can do as s/he pleases. Rather, Christian discipleship necessitates cruciform living and submission to God's will *embodied* in the person of Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

In front of all this confusion, *how is the Torah a law for Christians?* I

<sup>4</sup> See: Stephen Westerholm, “Introduction: Old Skins, New Wine,” in *Law and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament*, ed. Stephen Westerholm, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 2. See also: Ed P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity: Common Judaism, Paul, and the Inner and Outer in the Study of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016); Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> See: William R. G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 2; James G. Crossley, *The New Testament and Jewish Law: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 5–7.

<sup>6</sup> Loader, *Jesus' Attitude*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> See: Westerholm, “Introduction,” 16–18; see also: Richard B. Hays, “Whose World, Which Law?,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 32, no. 1 (2017): 17–25, at 22; Michael J. Gorman, “Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ,” *Journal Moral Theology* 2, no. 1 (2013): 64–83.

hope to show, by looking at biblical law in both its Old Testament and New Testament contexts, that Scripture *primarily* concerns itself with the particular identity as people of God and the specific lifestyle that this implies. If this is so, then biblical law's *ultimate aim for Christians is the identity-forming covenant commitment with Jesus Christ embodied in the call to holiness.*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The more significant works consulted are: Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (London: SCM, 1986); Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); J. Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: a Theme in Biblical theology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 305 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Hannah K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World*, Religion in the First Christian Centuries (New York: Routledge, 2001); Jiří Moskala, "Categorization and Evaluation of Different Kinds of Interpretation of the Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11," *Biblical Research* 41 (2001): 5–41; Richard A. Allbee, "Asymmetrical Continuity of Love and Law between the Old and New Testaments. Explicating the implicit side of a hermeneutical bridge, Leviticus 19.11–18," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (2006): 147–66; Naphatli S. Meshel, "Food for Thought. Systems of Categorization in Leviticus 11," *Harvard Theological Review* 101 (2008): 203–29; Bruce Wells, "What is Biblical Law? A Look at Pentateuchal Rules and Near Eastern Practice," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008): 223–43; Raymond Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook*, vol. 1, *The Shared Tradition*, vol. 2, *Cuneiform and Biblical Sources*, ed. Bruce Wells and F. Rachel Magdalene (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Hanna Liss, "Of Mice and Men and Blood: The Laws of Ritual Purity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World: Proceedings of the Conference Literary Fiction and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Literatures. Options and Limits of Modern Literary Approaches in the Exegesis of Ancient Texts (Heidelberg, July 10–13, 2006)*, ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 199–213; Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Reception of the Torah in Mark: The Question about the Greatest Commandment," in *Pentateuchal Traditions in the Late Second Temple Period: Proceedings of the International Workshop in Tokyo, August 28–31, 2007*, ed. Akio Moriya and Gohei Hata, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 227–42; Joshua Berman, "The History of Legal Theory and the Study of Biblical Law," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 76 (2014): 19–39; Bernard Och, "Creation and Redemption: Towards a Theology of Creation," in *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting toward a Temple-Centered Theology*, ed. L. Michael Morales, *Biblical Tools and Studies* 18 (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2014), 331–50; M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Law and Christian Ethics: Signposts for a Fruitful Conversation," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35 (2015): 3–32; Joshua Berman, "Supersessionist or Complementary? Reassessing the Nature of Legal Revision in the Pentateuchal Law Collections," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135 (2016): 201–22; Jonathan Burnside, "At Wisdom's Table: How Narrative Shapes the Biblical Food Laws and Their Social Function," *Journal of Biblical Literature*

## Biblical Law in its Old Testament Context

### *In What Way is Biblical Law Law?*

The first question that must be confronted is the nature of biblical law. While the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17; Deut 5:6–21) stands out as the more important legal text, most of the 613 laws are found in the four major “biblical codes”: the Covenant Code (Exod 20:23–23:19), the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 12–26), the Priestly Code (laws scattered in Exod, Lev, and Num), and the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26). The traditional view was that this complex formed the basis of a full-functioning *prescriptive* legal system where supreme authority rests on the “autonomous and exhaustive”<sup>9</sup> written word of the law codes themselves.

More recently, this *statutory* approach to biblical law has been brought into question: scholars rightly started to ask if our modern-day biases about the law were not skewing how we were interpreting *biblical law*—a system of law that came into being much earlier than the mid-nineteenth century when the statutory approach became popular.<sup>10</sup> For example, scholars started to question the idea that the Deuteronomic Code sought to *conceal* the Covenant Code in order to *supersede* its authority and “present itself as the sole authority of divine law.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, nowhere do we read that the Covenant Code has been abrogated in favor of the Deuteronomic Code; both are written, codified texts, which would imply that both would still be in force. Strangely enough, this approach creates certain contradictions that are hard to resolve (as in the law concerning slaves: Exod 21:1–11; Deut 15:12–18).<sup>12</sup>

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135 (2016): 223–45; Henry A. Kelly, “Love of Neighbor as Great Commandment in the Time of Jesus: Grasping at Straws in the Hebrew Scriptures,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60 (2017): 265–81; Wil Rogan, “Purity in Early Judaism: Current Issues and Questions,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 16 (2018): 309–39; *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, ed. Pamela Barmash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Berman, “History of Legal Theory,” 32. See also: Westbrook, “Biblical Law,” in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber*, 2:303–4; William J. Doorly, *The Laws of Yahweh: a Handbook of Biblical Law* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>10</sup> See: Berman, “History of Legal Theory,” 20: 25, 31; Berman, “Supersessionist or Complementary?” 207. As for a definition of “common law,” we can say that it “refers to a body of legal norms law that is developed by judges over time, more or less organically, as individual judges decide the particular cases and controversies brought before them” (Kaveny, “Law and Christian Ethics,” 5).

<sup>11</sup> Berman, “History of Legal Theory,” 28.

<sup>12</sup> See: Wells, “What is Biblical Law?,” 226–28; Berman, “History of Legal Theory,” 22; Berman “Supersessionist or Complementary?,” 203–7.



Due to this puzzling situation, scholars started to look more closely at the legal systems of Israel's neighbors. This line of thought proved beneficial since it highlighted many common points witnessed throughout the law codes in the ancient Near East. Indeed, such comparative approaches allowed us to appreciate that biblical law is not to be understood through the *hermeneutic of statutory law*, but of *common law*: in forming a *system of reasoning*, biblical law is essentially *customary law* based on judgments that a judge would make with recourse to the repository of known customs and accepted norms—they formed the basis of *precedent* but not *legislation*. This would mean that the Deuteronomic Code's revision of the Covenant Code ought to be considered as a process that *updates* but does not *erase* it from record.<sup>13</sup> Returning back to the laws of slaves, it is understandable that, after six years, a slave would make a new life for himself/herself and this new situation would create the need for a *revision* of the previous law, a law that would, however, *remain a part of the repertoire of common law*.

Thus, one could not “point to *the law*,”<sup>14</sup> as the system of reasonings are not just found *in the text* but also *behind the text*. A good example that illustrates the need to *get behind the text* is witnessed in the case of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 concerning divorce law. This case presents an unusual (and difficult) case wherein, if a husband finds *some kind of indecency* in his wife and divorces her, this ex-husband cannot remarry her if her second marriage either fails (not due to indecency) or because her second husband dies. This is an anomalous case because, in this second marriage, unlike the first, the woman would have her dowry restored and be paid compensation. If the first husband, then, remarries the same woman, he would *profit twice*, since he would not have given any compensation at his divorce and would have obtained the dowry gained from the second marriage. In this case, therefore, the application of common law was concerned more with fraud, bearing false witness, and hypocrisy. Strikingly, all these are aspects of that lifestyle that the law denounces—and this is why the punishment is so severe.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, by seeing biblical law in this way, we can see the *complementariness* of the different codes as they are *reread, reinterpreted, and reap-*

<sup>13</sup> See: Westbrook, “The Nature and Origins of the Twelve Tables,” in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber*, 1:32–36; Berman, “History of Legal Theory,” 24–26; Berman, “Supersessionist or Complementary?,” 208–9.

<sup>14</sup> Berman, “History of Legal Theory,” 27.

<sup>15</sup> See: Westbrook, “Biblical Law,” 313–14; Westbrook, “The Prohibition on Restoration of Marriage in Deuteronomy 24:1–4,” in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber*, 2:387–404.

plied to one another according to the changing circumstances of Israel's history.<sup>16</sup> The heart of biblical law would, then, be "the critical preservation, retrieval, and correction of a normative political-moral tradition"<sup>17</sup> that is essential in the formation of a people's *identity*, since this law would reflect the *Volksgeist* or the "collective conscience of the people."<sup>18</sup> In other words, biblical law, based on common values and a common story, explains *who Israel is* and not just *what Israel does*. In the end, this is why it is fundamental that, in order to really understand biblical law, we must appreciate the Torah's *metanarrative*, as it is this narrative which explains how "the unwritten law was woven into the fabric of society and enunciated in the course of judicial deliberation."<sup>19</sup>

### *The Torah's Metanarrative*

In order to appreciate this larger narrative framework, I think it is enough to examine Exodus 19:4–6a. There, we see that the covenant indicates that, on the one hand, God is omnipotent and, on the other, Israel recognizes God's supreme authority to govern; and all this is ratified in a binding commitment in order that right relations are established between the two parties.<sup>20</sup>

As this is the case, the *Volksgeist* of Israel concerns the long story of creation, deliverance, and covenant, wherein deliverance from bondage "serves the creational goal by enabling humanity to live the life it was created to live,"<sup>21</sup> a goal that is ratified at Sinai. This *Volksgeist* implies that, while human judges were appointed to faithfully interpret and apply law in the daily life of Israel, God remains "the supreme judge as well as lawgiver,"<sup>22</sup> as he is the creator and caregiver of the cosmos and of his chosen fruit, Israel. This is the *hermeneutic* which guides all of Israel's thoughts, words, and behaviors with God, with the nations, and amongst themselves. This is the hermeneutic of common law and not statutory law. And this is the hermeneutic which allows us to appreciate biblical law all the more.<sup>23</sup>

But, if this is so, the aim of the law must be interpreted from within this same *Volksgeist*. So, then, what is the ultimate aim of Israel's story? If election

<sup>16</sup> See Berman, "Supersessionist or Complementary?," 215, 219–20.

<sup>17</sup> Kaveny, "Law and Christian Ethics," 6.

<sup>18</sup> Berman, "History of Legal Theory," 23.

<sup>19</sup> Berman, "History of Legal Theory," 27; see also Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> See: Jan Joosten, "Covenant," Barmash, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, 8; Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> Och, "Creation and Redemption," 397, 408.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 223.

<sup>23</sup> See Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People*, 56.

and covenant are aimed at helping Israel to live the life that it was created to live, then it stands to reason that the final aim of the law is to bring about communion with the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth.

*Biblical Law's Final Aim: the Call to Holiness*

To this end, I am firmly convinced that the answer, as Exodus 19:4–6a so eloquently puts it, is the call to holiness. Of course, if Israel is called to be holy, it is only because God is holy—after all, as Jo Bailey Wells rightly points out, all the commandments that Israel should follow, in both cultic and ethical terms, are summarized quite well in the exhortation to be holy as God is holy (Lev 19:1–2; 20:26). In other terms, in being holy, Israel “belongs to God in a particular way, living faithfully according to particular commandments.”<sup>24</sup>

By highlighting both cultic and ethical terms, Bailey Wells illustrates that the modern idea that Old Testament law is divided into two large groups, the ritual and the ethical, is “anachronistic and misleading”<sup>25</sup>—both aspects are important as both are necessary elements in understanding the identity of the people of God.

First of all, we can examine the cultic aspect, as this concerns the need for Israel to be *holy* and *pure* in order to enter into God's presence. This presence, of course, is not to be trifled with; Israel must have the utmost reverence when meeting God. And unlike God, who is always holy—and “not subject to death and decay”<sup>26</sup>—this state of purity that humanity needs to approach the holy can be lost. For instance, as Leviticus 11–15, Numbers 19, and Deuteronomy 23, which discuss death, clean and unclean food, skin diseases, and bodily emissions, all point out that most forms of impurity are found within the semantic field of *creation theology*, since they deal with changes in life and the life-force itself; while skin diseases are associated with death and decay, the shedding of blood during childbirth or menstruation is related to fertility and reproduction. “Blood is then seen in analogy to body fluids such as sperm,”<sup>27</sup> since they too have

<sup>24</sup> Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People*, 241.

<sup>25</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 318.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah K. Harrington, “Accessing Holiness via Ritual Ablutions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature,” in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart, Resources for Biblical Studies 85 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 73.

<sup>27</sup> Christian A. Eberhart, “To Atonement or Not to Atonement: Remarks on the Day of Atonement rituals according to Leviticus 16 and the Meaning of Atonement,” in Wiley and Eberhart, *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement*, 205. See also: Liss, “Of Mice and Men and Blood,” 205–8; Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, “A Paradox of the Skin Disease,”

a connection with the life force—something that belongs to God alone. Therefore, anyone who comes into contact (touch) with such things is said to be impure.

More to the point, many scholars now view the purity laws as “subordinate to the more fundamental requirement to preserve the sacred domain from desecration.”<sup>28</sup> In front of the font and giver of life, death and corpse impurity were considered as the greatest form of *desecration* and had to be kept away from God. For this reason, as Numbers 19 states, purification from corpse impurity was highly regulated and required the passage of seven days and the use a mixture of ashes of a red heifer and water.

Interestingly enough, *most* elements that cover food laws can be best understood from within the same semantic field of creation theology.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, what is most important for Israel is that, through what it eats, it respects life. This is why Israel cannot ingest—and therefore touch—the blood of animals, since blood is essentially linked to the life-force of that animal which belongs to God alone. For the same reason, this not only means that Israel must exclusively eat herbivores but also means that the slaughter of these same animals must be humane and quick. Thus, what is most important is that “there is a distancing in Israel from those animals which cause or are the result of death.”<sup>30</sup>

And yet, in order to stand in the presence of God, Israel did not *just* have to be ritually pure; one *also* needed to be morally pure and be especially careful about idolatry, sexual immorality, and bloodshed. Perhaps what is more important for us is that, for the Old Testament itself, the purity laws are “subservient”<sup>31</sup> to other *heavier* commandments that concern the love of God and neighbor. After all, in the Book of Tobit, for example, upon hearing that a Jew was murdered, Tobit jumped up and went to bury him (Tob 2:3–4; see also 1:18)—something which happens shortly after we are informed not only that he was mindful of God with

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*Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113 (2001): 508.

<sup>28</sup> Yitzhaq Feder, “Purity and Sancta Desecration in Ritual Law,” in Barmash, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, 104.

<sup>29</sup> Therefore, I agree with Moskala’s intuition that the unifying criteria of the purity laws is a theology of creation (“Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11,” 40). Even the so-called “hard cases” such as Lev 11:4–8 (the camel, hyrax, hare, and pig) can be viewed from within a theology of creation because, as Burnside notes, they are “half one thing and half of another,” since they either chew the cud but do not have *real* hooves or have hooves but do not chew the cud (“Biblical Food Laws,” 230); see also: Meshel, “Food for Thought,” 216, 225.

<sup>30</sup> Harrington, *Holiness*, 172.

<sup>31</sup> Harrington, *Holiness*, 186.

all his soul (Tob 1:12) but also that he performed many acts of charity (*eleēmosynē*) with his kindred (Tob 1:16). Thus, notwithstanding the explicit impurity connected with touching a corpse, “the attendance to the burial of even a stranger is an overriding *mitzvah*.”<sup>32</sup>

If there is no inherent dichotomy between ethics and purity, then they are a part of the same nexus which revolves around holiness and Israel’s state as being the chosen fruits of God. The consequence of this *election* by God, therefore, is immense responsibility; it requires that his people are separated from all that fractures and sullies the relationship with God and that they belong to him alone. In this way, Israel, tethered to God, is called to become a *mirror* which reflects God’s own holiness in the world and this reflection embraces not only ritual purity but also being *good* and avoiding *evil*, since *no evil can dwell with God* (Ps 5:4).

Furthermore, for Israel to act as a “mirror,” its eyes, ears, and heart must remain forever fixed on God. Certainly, as the prophets would often exclaim, God cannot abide fickleness of heart where the people sometimes follow God and sometimes turn away from him. The people must, therefore, be always wholeheartedly focused on God alone, as is stated in the Shema, where Israel is called to love God with all one’s being.

Thus, holy Israel is required to live a style of life in congruence with God’s will and nature. It is no coincidence, in fact, that, shortly after calling Israel a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6a), God gave the law to his people (Exod 20:1–21), a law which stipulates that one must adhere to God and neighbor. This law, therefore, is the basic indicator of what is this lifestyle of holiness that God wills his people to live. The corollary to this is that, if the people neglect the law and do what is evil in the eyes of the Lord—by not loving God and neighbor—the people will profane themselves and effectively cut themselves off from God.

Ultimately, the final aim of the law is to make sure that Israel has ways

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<sup>32</sup> Harrington, *Holiness*, 186. Also, Collins rightly notes that, in Second Temple Judaism, it was most common to define the *heavy* commandments as “those forbidding idolatry, unchastity, the shedding of blood, profaning the divine name, calumny or slander against one’s neighbor and those commanding keeping the Sabbath holy, studying the Torah, and the redeeming [of] captives” (“The Reception of the Torah in Mark,” 235). Interestingly, all this is succinctly summarized in the double commandment of love of God and neighbor. See also: Testament of Issachar 5:1–2; Testament of Dan 5:3; Jubilees 7:20; 22:2; 36:7–8; Philo of Alexandria, *De decalogo* 12; and Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 2.15. For a critical edition of Philo, see *Philo in Ten Volumes (and two Supplementary Volumes)*, trans. Francis H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 320 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937).

and means to remain holy, to be separated *for* God and not *from* God. And if Israel is called to be separated from everything that God is not, this means that Israel too must be holy, pure, and good. As God himself says, Israel is *to be holy as he is holy* (Lev 19:1–2; 20:26). This, of course, goes to the very heart of what it means to be a Jew; it expresses not so much particularities which regulate the minutiae of behavior, but rather *identity*—a *Volksgeist* that revolves around how Israel lives for God alone, something which is expressed in Israel's submission and obedience to the will of God.

### Biblical Law and the New Testament

Our study on biblical law has formed a solid foundation so as to better understand the relationship between biblical law and the New Testament. There is no doubt, of course, that the death and resurrection of Jesus has profoundly shifted some elements of the law—in particular, the theology of the temple, sacrifices, and justification. But this does not mean that the New Testament rejects the essential features of biblical law in favor of something else.

Indeed, it shall be argued that the common-law approach can help us appreciate not only how the Gospels understand how Jesus can both assert that he has not come to annul the law and to bring it to fulfillment but also how Paul can declare that the works of the law do not justify but that *doers of the law will be justified*. Here, we hope to persuade our audience that both Paul and the Gospels aim to explain that holiness entails the love of God and love of neighbor, since the doing of these two things is why God gave the law to Israel in the first place.

#### *The Unfortunate Reality: Being Separated from God instead of for God*

The conclusion from the last section indicates that the law is the means given by God to his people so that they remain holy, separated *for* God and not *from* God. And yet, we know that Israel did not; it broke the covenant and, in making itself unclean, brought down the curses of Deuteronomy 27 on itself.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the law, holy that it is, was incapable of keeping Israel separate—and it has now become something which condemns, because it

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<sup>33</sup> After all, the prophets are clear about how Israel had continuously broken the covenant notwithstanding the constant call to return to the Lord (see, among others: Jer 3:1–8; 4:1–4; Hos 11:5–7; Joel 2:12–14; Amos 4:6–11; Zech 1:1–6). This constant rebellion, and the great history of sin, comes to a head in Ezekiel, who highlights how the history of Israel is one long history of sin and rebellion (Ezek 20) to the point that Israel will now face God's judgment (Ezek 20:35). See: Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 544.

has illustrated that, while God remains faithful to the covenant, humanity has not.

Of course, Israel did have a system in place in which the one *who bears the weight of sin* can remove it—and this system revolves around the offering of sacrifices, as is witnessed most forcefully on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1–34). While we cannot say much, we can highlight that it is the animals' blood that is shed which is significant for atonement; blood belongs to God alone and, through its shedding, symbolically represents the offering the life of the offeror (see Lev 17:11 and Num 35:33).<sup>34</sup>

And yet, the sacrifices were unable to keep both the sanctuary and Israel as a whole cleansed from the moral (and ritual) impurity that permeated the land—the glory of the Lord eventually left the sanctuary and the exile happened. The Old Testament, then, reveals the “tragic paradox which underlies the Divine/human relationship.”<sup>35</sup> Humanity, who wants communion and peace with God, cannot seem to pass the trial by itself and ends up separated from the God it longs for. But, in spite of all the tragedy of sin, neither God nor the Old Testament allows the umbilical cord to be cut, as there is an overarching thrust of hope and messianic expectations imbued therein, expectations that come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

### *Christ's Lasting Corrective*

The first detail concerning Christ's fulfillment of the expectations of old concerns the temple itself. Indeed, with the dawning of Christ, God's presence and glory is no longer *properly* found in the temple. In effect, therefore, Jesus *replaces* the temple with his own body.<sup>36</sup> This, of course, creates a reordering of many things, especially the purity laws. Certainly, if the holy and the common are strictly separated and if the categories of pure and impure were introduced to enable the holy to meet the common, then this whole system is *transformed* when God became man because, in the Incarnation, holy God broke into this common space; by doing so,

<sup>34</sup> See: Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 15–26; Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 505–7; Joseph, *Jesus and the Temple*, 85–95; Isaac Kalimi, “The Day of Atonement in the Late Second Temple Period: Sadducees' High Priests, Pharisees' Norms, and Qumranites' Calendar(s),” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14 (2011): 71–91; Hanno Langenhoven, Eliska Nortjé, Annette Potgieter, Yolande Steenkamp, “The Day of Atonement as a Hermeneutical Key to the Understanding of Christology in Hebrews,” *Journal of Early Christian History* 1 (2011): 91.

<sup>35</sup> Och, “Creation and Redemption,” 349.

<sup>36</sup> See Joseph, *Jesus and the Temple*, 209.



Jesus effectively pulled down the old dividing line between the holy and common once and for all.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, we can highlight how the New Testament rereads the theology of sacrifices in light of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Above, we saw that what was important in the rite of purification on the Day of Atonement was the blood shed from animals as symbolic of the offering of the life of the one who offers. In the New Testament, we move from a symbolic offering of oneself through another to the selfless offering of Jesus for the many, whose blood cleanses all from sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 1:7). This theological line of thinking, of course, finds its climax in the letter to the Hebrews, which "contrasts the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to that of the Levitical system, . . . [since it] accomplishes complete atonement."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, since the sacrifices of old were unable to remove sin, the sacrifice—and shedding of blood—of Jesus was a necessary *lasting corrective* for real atonement to happen.

Thirdly, we can point out that this real atonement should lead humanity to a transformation on both ontological and epistemological levels that results in reconciliation with God; since Jesus, through his blood, has closed the account and paid off all the debts that we have incurred through sin (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23), then the "*purpose of Christ's death was not merely to offer forgiveness of sins so that people could go on their merry way*. Rather, its purpose was to completely reorient human existence towards God, . . . expressed in living for Christ rather than for self."<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, in understanding this larger context, we can appreciate how the coming of Jesus reconfigured our understanding of the law. Indeed, not only does Jesus replace the temple as the meeting place between God and humanity, but his redemptive sacrifice on the Cross also brings about real *reconciliation*. And yet, it is also true that Jesus's call for covenant *commitment* to God and to one's neighbor is the same call that is constantly underlined in the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> After all, even if the dichotomy between the holy and the common has been abolished, the distancing of humanity from God can still take place if humanity is not *perfect*, loving God above all else and loving neighbor as self.

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<sup>37</sup> See Liss, "Of Mice and Men and Blood," 208.

<sup>38</sup> Langenhoven, Nortjé, Potgieter, and Annette, "Day of Atonement," 92.

<sup>39</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 364. See also: Anderson, *Sin*, 43–54; Juan M. Granados Rojas, *La teologia della riconciliazione nell'epistolario paolino*, Subsedia Biblica 46 (Rome: G&B Press, 2015), 136–39.

<sup>40</sup> See Block, "Preaching the Old Testament Law," 220.

*Jesus Christ, Telos of the Law*

As we have seen, the common-law approach allows us to appreciate how certain laws, like the purity laws, are *transformed* and *updated* due to the coming of Christ. But it is not just the purity laws that are updated—everything is. Indeed, I firmly think that this common-law approach is pivotal to understand Paul’s global understanding of the law.<sup>41</sup>

On the one hand, there is the polemic about the “works of the law.” Now, this polemic appertains not to acts of charity that flow naturally from the lifestyle of holiness, but to works like circumcision, thought to bring about right covenantal relations.<sup>42</sup> As the above paragraphs imply, this line of thought is not unique to Paul. What is unique is that, for him, Christ, *telos* of the law (Rom 10:4), unveils the law’s true sense by making *reconciliation* possible (Rom 5:1–11; 2 Cor 5:18–21). Indeed, what Paul meant by saying that Christ is the *telos* of the law is that “it is only in Christ that the law’s aim is achieved, so that everyone who believes in Christ may attain the status of being counted righteous.”<sup>43</sup> As the law did not annul the promise (Gal 3:17), its aim was not to supplant the promise, but rather to help Israel cleave to it and, therefore, to keep Israel holy. It is here that we find the importance of the law as our *paidagōgos*, since its purpose was not only to instruct the people concerning the goodness required of the all but also to discipline us when we erred; but alas, we know well that this instruction did not bring about its desired end as *everyone fell short of the glory of God*.

On the other hand, Paul also says that his teachings *uphold the law* (Rom 3:31)—which implies that what Paul is saying about the law “reorients the reader’s focus back to the purpose of the law—to foster whole-hearted devotion to God among people.”<sup>44</sup> And this focus is none other than a return to the Shema and love of neighbor. Indeed, while in Romans 3:30, he makes only an oblique reference God’s oneness, we can confirm that this is a reference is to the Shema because Philo of Alexandria calls the acknowledgment and honor of the one God the first and most sacred of

<sup>41</sup> See Ryder Wishart, “Paul and the Law: Mark Nanos, Brian Rosner and the Common-Law Tradition,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 11 (2015): 153–77.

<sup>42</sup> See Jean-Noël Aletti, *God’s Justice in Romans: Keys for interpreting the Epistle to the Romans*, Subsidia Biblica 37 (Rome: G&B Press, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Charles Lee Irons, “The Object of the Law is Realized in Christ: Romans 10:4 and Paul’s Justification Teaching,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 4 (2016): 33–54, at 51. See also: Hays, “Whose World, Which Law?,” 21.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory S. Magee, “Paul’s Gospel, the Law and God’s Universal Reign in Romans 3:31,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57 (2014): 345.

commandments.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, that *doing* good acts of charity (love of neighbor; Gal 5:14) flows from the life of holiness can be witnessed in Romans 12:1–8 and 13:1, 8–10. In the former, the giver who gives in simplicity is one who has offered himself as a sacrifice acceptable to God so as to ascertain what the will of God is (that which is good, pleasing, and perfect). In the latter, Paul makes clear that, in 13:1, true authority (*exousia*) rests with God and that, since love does no wrong, it is the fulfillment of the law.<sup>46</sup>

When all is said and done, the common-law approach allows us to see how Paul interprets the reservoir of the common law of Israel in light of the coming of Christ. In this way, “Paul saw *no* tension between the law’s condition of obedience as its path to life and his conviction that salvation is to be found in the Christian gospel: the same requirement of righteousness underlies both.”<sup>47</sup> But, since the law, holy as it is, was not able to keep Israel holy, God sent Jesus Christ as the way to make the pact right. This, of course, does not mean that the same requirements of love of God and neighbor are annulled because *we have died to sin to live for God in Christ Jesus* (Rom 6:11).

### *Jesus Christ, Authentic Interpreter of the Legal Deposit of Israel*

If we are right to ground our thesis on the common-law approach, then we should see this same logic in the Gospels. The Sermon on the Mount is the best place to see how Jesus keeps the old and brings it to fulfillment. Therein, we first find the *exordium* (Matt 5:1–16) wherein Jesus describes the *identity of the Christian*: the poor in spirit (5:3), the light of the world, and the salt of the earth (5:13–16). This identity requires a lifestyle to sustain it, a lifestyle that is based on a higher righteousness (5:20) and that is congruent with the law’s fulfillment (5:17–19). What is this higher righteousness is then explained and developed in the rest of the Sermon, wherein it is clarified not only that the six antitheses (5:21–48) illustrate that righteous living is a matter of the heart and living in wholehearted union with God (5:48) but also that the traditional Jewish practices of giving alms, prayer, and fasting (6:1–18) are to be carried out with a sincere

<sup>45</sup> See Philo, *De decalogo* 65.

<sup>46</sup> See: Collins, “Reception of the Torah in Mark,” 238; Kelly, “Love of Neighbor,” 275, 280–81; J. Schembri, *When Your Eye is ἀπλοῦς: The Christological Implications of Discipleship in Luke 11:33–36* (Rome: Angelicum Press, 2018), 90n102.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Westerholm, “Finnish Contribution to the Debate on Paul and the Law,” in *Law and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 249. See also Westerholm, “The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans,” *Law and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament*, 256.

and simple heart focused on God alone (6:19–24).

Whilst much more can be said, I do think that what was said is indicative that Jesus was focused on the “weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.”<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, the Sermon shows that righteousness, right covenantal relations, is always derived from a “disposition of the heart, from the right intention, from love”<sup>49</sup>—and it is this disposition of the heart which forms the disciple as one who bears good fruits.

This same logic is witnessed in the larger context of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–42) and the double commandment (Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34), as well as in the discussion with the rich young man (Matt 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30). In fact, in these texts, Jesus brings to the fore the identity-forming call to a life of holiness and perfection.

We can also make mention of Jesus’s critique on divorce (Matt 5:31–32; 19:1–9; Mark 10:1–12; Luke 16:18). The issue of divorce in Jesus’s teachings really concerns faithfulness in marriage as stated in Genesis 2:24. There is much that can be said about Matthew’s exception concerning *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 19:9). Many scholars, such as W. R. G. Loader, view *porneia* as simply illicit sexual activity. However, in light of Genesis 2:24, it seems better to view *porneia* as J. M. Weibling does, as “illicit sexual activity which reveals a determined desire to divorce her present husband and become the wife of another,” since Genesis 2:24 implies both cleaving to one another and sexual union. The point, then, is on steadfast love in marriage—and this is possible only if we are *perfect* and wholeheartedly focused on God.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, we can also mention the polemics with the Pharisees and scribes (Matt 15:1–11; Mark 7:1–23; Luke 11:37–53). While often exaggerating the negative view of these groups, these polemics, echoing Old

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<sup>48</sup> Richard E. Averbeck, “The Law and the Gospels, with Attention to the Relationship between the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” in Barmash, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, 414. Of course, this line of reasoning is seen elsewhere in the Gospels, as in Mark 12:28–34. Perhaps, as Allbee illustrates, what Jesus adds to the common law of the Old Testament is to *extend* the love commandment to its natural logical conclusion (“Asymmetrical Continuity of Love and Law,” 166). See also: Collins, “Reception of the Torah in Mark,” 235.

<sup>49</sup> Bernardo Estrada, “La giustizia in Matteo. Presenza del Regno,” *Rivista biblica italiana* 59 (2011): 383.

<sup>50</sup> See James M. Weibling, “Reconciling Matthew and Mark on Divorce,” *Trinity Journal* 22, new series (2001): 227 (emphasis added). See also: William R. G. Loader, “Did Adultery Mandate a Divorce? A Reassessment of Jesus’ Divorce Logia,” *New Testament Studies* 61 (2015): 67–78.

Testament texts like Deuteronomy 29:18, Isaiah 56:9–12, and Psalm 24:4, explain that what is missing in the emphasis on purity is the internal cleanliness of the heart (see also Matt 3:8; 7:16–20; 12:33; Luke 3:8; 6:43–45), since only a *pure* heart can produce *pure* fruit.

What is important in all this is the inclination of the heart, as it is what is in the heart that leads to actions; if the heart is good, we shall know, by the person's fruits, that the disciple's heart is focused wholeheartedly on God and on Jesus, whom he sent.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, in rereading, reinterpreting, and reapplying the legal deposit of Israel's common law, Jesus brings us back to our roots and explains *why* God had given the law to Israel in the first place.

Ultimately, the call of the new covenant written on hearts instead of stone tablets in Jeremiah 31 comes to fulfillment in the New Testament. This call refers to the fact that, if the people would cling wholeheartedly to God, they would *know* what he wills, and consequently, no one would require either instruction or a *paidogōgos*, because, having become of age, they would know what God wants. And they would know it because they cling wholeheartedly to Jesus and his Cross.

### In the End, Be Holy

In this essay, we have seen that, on the one hand, Jesus Christ is now the *embodiment* of the will of God and that the Christian is required to listen to his voice to understand what is God's will for his people. However, on the other hand, what God wills has always been the same thing: that humanity recognizes its place, purify its heart, and submit to God (Jas 4:6–8)—in other words to become *perfect* as God is *perfect* (Matt 5:48) and be *holy* as God is *holy* (Lev 19:1–2; 20:26). This is the pattern of life that is congruent with “God's norms for life and conduct”<sup>52</sup> and requires us to be simple and pure to Christ (2 Cor 11:3).

In all this, we hope that we have persuaded our audience that biblical law's *ultimate aim and function for Christians is the identity-forming covenant commitment with Jesus embodied in the call to the life of holiness and perfection*. And, in the New Testament, this requires the Christian to recognize that everything depends on how much s/he is rooted in Christ, for it is this rooting in Christ from which Christian actions flows.

Ultimately, just as “God has an undivided love for all humanity and

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<sup>51</sup> See: Estrada, “La giustizia in Matteo,” 392; Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 324.

<sup>52</sup> George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 94.

demonstrates this in action”<sup>53</sup>—an action that pivots round the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross—so too must the disciple have “a total, undivided allegiance to God.”<sup>54</sup> As this means “detaching oneself from that which separates from God,”<sup>55</sup> this also means that the disciple must reflect God’s holiness in the world by embracing the law of love which “is found in all streams of the tradition emanating from the person of Jesus. Appearing many times in the Synoptic Gospels, it is also evident in the Pauline tradition (Rom 13:9) and forms the very essence of Johannine theology,”<sup>56</sup> as well as the Catholic Epistles.

Therefore, *be holy and perfect as God is holy and perfect*, for this is the essence of the law, a law which leads us to the Cross, for it is the Cross, and the blood shed on it, that keeps us all separated *for* God forever more.

N.V

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick J. Hartin, “Call to Be Perfect through Suffering (James 1:2–4): The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount,” *Biblica* 77 (1996): 486.

<sup>54</sup> Hartin, “Call to be Perfect,” 486.

<sup>55</sup> Gerhard Delling, “τέλος, τελέω, ἐπιτελέω, συντελέω, συντέλεια, παντελής, τέλειος, τελειότης, τελειόω, τελειώσις, τελειωτής,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 74.

<sup>56</sup> Hartin, “Call to Be Perfect,” 487–88.





## History, Illocution, and Theological Exegesis: Reading Paul’s Letter to Philemon

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THIS ARTICLE participates in two related conversations: first, the role of historical and critical reconstruction in Catholic theological exegesis; second, the interpretation of Paul’s Letter to Philemon. The Church calls interpreters to attend to individual biblical authors’ historical audiences and communicative intentions, as well as to a text’s further significance within the broader context of divine revelation, but the role of historical reconstruction of what is “behind the text” in the theological task remains debated. To emphasize and explore the relevance of history in interpretation, this article highlights especially its role in determining the force of a text’s illocution, illustrated in the interpretation of Philemon. It must be acknowledged that such a limited article will leave lacunae in both conversations that must be assumed from other studies or investigated elsewhere. It is hoped, however, that the points made here sufficiently illustrate the necessity and relevance of the historical task for the process of theological interpretation, both at its first stage and throughout.

### History, Theology, and Christian Exegesis

Though emphases differ across time, Christian biblical interpretation has consistently tasked its practitioners with both history and theology, or differently put, critical and canonical interpretative strategies. Pius XII quotes as far back as Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.54, about the need to understand a text’s background to understand its import. Commenting on Heb 1:4, Athanasius writes: “Here also, as is expedient and indeed necessary [*prosekei . . . anankaion estin*] in the case of all the divine Scripture, we

must [*dei*] note on what occasion the Apostle spoke; we should carefully and faithfully observe to whom and why he wrote, lest, being ignorant of these points, or confounding one with another, we miss the real meaning of the author.”<sup>1</sup> For canonical interpretation, Leo XIII can quote as far back as Clement of Alexandria to prove his statement that “the sense of Holy Scripture can nowhere be found incorrupt outside of the Church,” calling those who would read Scripture for all its worth to attend to the whole of the canon and the dogmatic tradition.<sup>2</sup> As ascertained by the faithful, a text’s meaning takes into account both (1) the broader controls of the rule of faith and dogmatic development and (2) the impulse of the inspired author’s communicative intent. Visible in writers such as Augustine, Aquinas, the Tübingen theologians, and more recently *ressourcement* thinkers like Yves Congar or Benedict XVI,<sup>3</sup> the duality of this task found its fullest magisterial synthesis in the Second Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* [DV] (esp. §§11–13): the transcendent God self-discloses on the plane of history and, in Scripture, makes assertions by inspiring human communication for a community of faith; hence the faithful must hear divine assertion through human voice and text while also listening to the entirety of what the same God speaks in canon and in his leading of the Church.<sup>4</sup> In the words of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1964, the exegete must evaluate the texts in history, but “should not stop halfway.”<sup>5</sup> For, biblical interpretation aims at the Church who hears Scripture in every

1 Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* [1943], §34. Translation is from *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, trans. and ed. Dean P. Bécharde (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical, 2002), 128, but altered toward the Greek text (*PG*, 26:123).

2 Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* [1893], §32 (in Bécharde, *Scripture Documents*, 128). He cites Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.16; Origen, *De Principiis* 4.2.1; Tertullian, *De praeceptione haereticorum* 15.

3 Note Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* [2010], §34: “Only where both methodological levels, the historical-critical and the theological, are respected, can one speak of a theological exegesis, an exegesis worthy of this book.” Interest in the divine author’s intent (e.g., Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 16.2) hardly nullifies appeals to the hagiographer’s or even translator’s intent (e.g., Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.30).

4 Articulations of inspiration vary, of course. For two accounts to which I am sympathetic, see Robert Sokolowski, “God’s Word and Human Speech,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 11, no. 1 (2013): 189–212 (published also in *Phenomenologies of Scripture*, ed. Adam Y. Wells [New York: Fordham University Press, 2017]), and James B. Prothro, “Theories of Inspiration and Catholic Exegesis: Scripture and Criticism in Dialogue with Denis Farkasfalvy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

5 Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* [1964; *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*], §12 (in Bécharde, *Scripture Documents*, 232).

age, encompassing critical and dogmatic questions in order to expand to “actualization,” the interpretation of a text *into* the life and praxis of the faithful today.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, questions abound about the practicability and necessity of historical study in theological interpretation. Ascertaining the history “behind” a text sometimes requires significant speculation, and some question the degree to which authorial intent can be determined. And is not the text, rather than what is behind it, what is inspired for our reading?<sup>7</sup> As Ignacio Carbajosa notes, even those operating with a synthetic view of God’s assertion of eternal truth through contingent human communication often conceive of our historical task as separate and perhaps unessential to hearing the word of God in the text.<sup>8</sup> Denis Farkasfalvy even critiques conciliar and pontifical mandates to seek the human author’s intention to ascertain divine meaning.<sup>9</sup> He maintains that historical work is important, but “history and criticism” are only “sovereign in their own sphere (the beginning phase of the exegetical process).”<sup>10</sup>

Such arguments are easily understandable as reactions against the hegemony of (sometimes historically erroneous) critical methods in especially the last century.<sup>11</sup> It is likewise true that an exegete who studies *nothing*

<sup>6</sup> See particularly Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Subsidia Biblica 22 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2001), 273–325.

<sup>7</sup> See: Olivier-Thomas Venard, O.P., “Problématique du sens littéral,” in *Le sens littéral des Écritures* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2009), 293–353; “*Behind*” the Text: *History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, Mary Healy, and Murray Rae (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ignacio Carbajosa, *Faith, the Fount of Exegesis: The Interpretation of Scripture in Light of the History of Research on the Old Testament*, trans. Paul Stevenson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 194–96. See also Gabino Uríbarri, “Para una nueva racionalidad de la exegesis: Diagnóstico y propuesta,” *Estudios bíblicos* 65 (2007): 253–306. Critiquing less synthetic accounts, see Michael M. Waldstein, “*Analogia Verbi*: The Truth of Scripture in Rudolf Bultmann and Raymond Brown,” *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 93–140.

<sup>9</sup> Denis Farkasfalvy, O.Cist., “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4, no. 1 (2006): 231–53, at 239. See also Farkasfalvy, *A Theology of the Christian Bible: Revelation, Inspiration, Canon* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 53.

<sup>10</sup> Denis Farkasfalvy, O.Cist., “The Case for Spiritual Exegesis,” *Communio* 10 (1983): 333–50, at 346. Compare Christopher Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 99.

<sup>11</sup> See Mark Reasoner, “*Dei Verbum* and the Twentieth-Century Drama of Scripture’s Literal Sense,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 1 (2017): 219–54.

but the circumstances “behind” the text can be little more than a quartermaster for theological interpretation—and believing critics are not unaware of this.<sup>12</sup> But reconstructive work and the data it provides shape the mediation of God’s word from beginning to end. We may elaborate this in a few brief points.

First, all words are inescapably embedded in history, even when they apprehend a *res* that transcends language.<sup>13</sup> Guy Mansini argues the validity of trans-temporal dogmatic language precisely *by* affirming that “there is no human cognitive possession of reality that bypasses language,” which of necessity is “historically conditioned.”<sup>14</sup> Insofar as “theology” is a discipline of articulation and reason, therefore, there is no separation of theology from history. This is not relativism but a reality, one inherent in the doctrine of inspiration itself, wherein God self-discloses by using language for its current and potential value within a (historically conditioned) network of generic and linguistic symbols.<sup>15</sup> “Christian Scripture is an instrument of human and divine meaning making in history.”<sup>16</sup> A friend

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<sup>12</sup> E.g.: Joseph G. Prior, *The Historical Critical Method in Catholic Exegesis*, Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 50 (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999); Roy A. Harrisville, *Pandora’s Box Opened: An Examination and Defense of Historical-Critical Method and Its Master Practitioners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014); Karl Möller, “Renewing Historical Criticism,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 145–71; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Scripture, the Soul of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> I mean here to agree with John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* [1998], §95, though emphasizing what he concedes: “Human language may be conditioned by history and constricted in other ways, but the human being can still express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language. Truth can never be confined to time and culture; in history it is known, but it also reaches beyond history.” Compare Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 1 a. 7 (on the transcendent object of doctrine) and II-II, q. 1 (on faith’s division into articles). Hans Urs von Balthasar strikes similar notes in *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 61, 75, 105–6.

<sup>14</sup> Guy Mansini, O.S.B., *Fundamental Theology*, Sacra Doctrina (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 129 and 132 (respectively); on “trans-cultural” dogmatic categories, see 123–24, 132–39, 178–83. See also: John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §96; Yves Congar, O.P., *La Foi et la Théologie*, Le Mystère Chrétien (Tournai, BE: Desclée, 1962), 62–71.

<sup>15</sup> See James B. Prothro, “The Christological Analogy and Theological Interpretation: Its Limits and Use,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 14, no. 1 (2020): 102–19, esp. 114–18.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph K. Gordon, *Divine Scripture in Human Understanding: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Bible*, Reading the Scriptures (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), 172.

once quipped that, while historical footnotes are interesting, he can still understand Aristotle without them. He was, however, reading an English translation, whose renderings are based not on some intrinsic likeness of sound with sense (despite Plato's *Cratylus*) but on the reconstructed encyclopedia of the ancient mind in a particular century and dialect of Greek, assuming a certain social location, to understand the relation of words to acts or realities in the mind of the author as that author anticipated his audience's prior understanding and capacity.<sup>17</sup>

Second, when the "things" signified by words signify other things in turn—in simple metaphor or allegorical readings—a correspondence from one to the other is necessary. Christian reading of the Old Testament need not confine all meaning to the original author's or audience's field of vision. Still, the "divine pedagogy" (*DV*, §15) presumes that God did legitimately self-disclose to the text's first audience, if imperfectly; moreover, allegorical transference comes about when the initial historical referent is *then* filtered through salvation history and the canon.<sup>18</sup> The Song of Songs, for instance, can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the prototypical love of God and his people because its words refer to analogous intimacy between lovers. The literal is organically related to the *sensus plenior*.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Compare Robert D. Miller II, O.F.S., *Many Roads Lead Eastward: Overtures to Catholic Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 53.

<sup>18</sup> Recall here Hugh of St. Victor, who does not disapprove of allegorical moves, but cautions readers to slow down and acknowledge each move and its continued foundation in the literal: "What then does it mean to expound the letter if not to show forth that which the letter signifies? They say, 'But the letter signifies one thing according to history, another according to allegory. Indeed, *leo* signifies a beast according to the letter, but according to allegory it signifies Christ: therefore that sound, *leo*, signifies Christ.' I then ask you who hold this, how does *leo* signify Christ? Perhaps you will respond, as the response is often given, 'By the convention of similitude put forth for signification: because a lion [*leo*] sleeps with opened eyes,' or some other such reason." Hugh objects: "the vocable [*dictio*] does not sleep with opened eyes, but the actual animal which the vocable signifies. Understand then that when one says *leo* signifies Christ, it is not the name of the animal but the animal itself that is meant. For this [animal] is what, it is said, sleeps with opened eyes, according to which by a certain similitude it figures him, who slept caught in the slumber of death by his humanity but stayed awake with eyes opened by his divinity. And so you should not exult about your knowledge of Scripture while you are ignorant of the letter. To ignore the letter is to ignore what the letter signifies and what is signified by the letter. For what is signified by the first thing signifies the third" (*De Scripturis* 5 [*PL*, 175:13; my translation]).

<sup>19</sup> Rightly noted by Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 161–90.

Third, words do more than signify things. Phenomenologically considered, words and speech acts intend effects that are not merely referential or cognitive. Significant here is the matter of a communicative act's *illocution*, what the communicative act counts as in terms of a request, command, rebuke, and so on within the historical and rhetorical situation.<sup>20</sup> As an example, the statement "the light is green" directly makes a small claim simply that a light (known to communicator and recipient in the situation) appears or perhaps has just become green in color. But if I live in a society in which a red light commands ordered lines of vehicular traffic to stop but a green light commands the opposite, and my spouse utters, "the light is green," while I am keeping the car stopped, it *counts as* a rebuke and an implicit command ("Drive!") as much as informative speech. Indeed, the statement in that situation is not made without such intent; it is part of the *meaning* of the words themselves. For those who, within their own place in salvation history, hope to share the faith of the biblical writers, this is hermeneutically significant both for hearing the text's intent and for actualizing it.<sup>21</sup> But this hermeneutical task requires reconstruction of the original communicative situation at both the beginning and the end of the interpretive process, for modern readers must appreciate how the inspired

<sup>20</sup> See, classically, J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), esp. 94–106.

<sup>21</sup> Speech-act theory and illocution have been utilized for Scripture in, e.g.: *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); Stephen E. Fowl, "The Role of Authorial Intention in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 71–87; William M. Wright IV and Francis Martin, *Encountering the Living God in Scripture: Theological and Philosophical Principles for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 199–201. Though the mechanics of interpreting and transferring illocution are apparent in the moral hermeneutics of the Fathers, older systematizations of biblical "senses" are most often focused at the level of words, things, and reported acts, rather than the words *as* acts. The closest heading in the handbooks under which this may fit is perhaps the *sensus accommodatitius*, wherein the literal sense can be transferred by extension to another (originally unintended) word or thing under certain analogies, *as pars pro toto*, etc.: I. H. Ianssens, *Hermeneutica Sacra Seu Introductio in Omnes Libros Sacros Veteris ac Novi Foederis*, ed. C. E. Morandi, 4th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1922), 333; P. Michael Hetzenauer, O.C., *Epitome Exegeticae Biblicae Catholicae* (Innsbruck, AT: Wagnerian, 1903), 18–19; P. H. Höpfl, O.S.B., *Tractatus de Inspiratione Sacrae Scripturae et Compendium Hermeneuticae Biblicae Catholicae* (Rome: Institute of Pius IX, 1923), 140–44.



author responded or actualized the Gospel in a certain set of exigencies in order to determine whether and how we can do the same and in what analogous exigencies.

If the above has sufficiently reiterated that the historical aspect of Christian hermeneutics is entirely necessary, it has been woefully general or theoretical. Rather than continue in a theoretical vein, we may exercise ourselves with an illustrative example. The need for reconstruction for theological—especially moral—interpretation is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in Philemon, an inspired book whose meaning potential is tightly tethered to its illocution within a historical situation that is, unfortunately, less than clear.

### History, Illocution, and Christian Interpretation of Philemon

Philemon often receives scant treatment. The letter apparently depicts Paul returning a runaway slave to his master without any explicit pronouncements about human dignity or slavery as an institution. Indeed, it says little explicitly theological.<sup>22</sup> Treatments of Pauline theology, unless prefaced by treatments of individual letters, mention it infrequently.<sup>23</sup> Books on biblical ethics are more likely to use the table of duties in Ephesians or Colossians to discuss slavery.<sup>24</sup> A few argue that Paul *really* wants Onesimus manumitted, and so build an anti-slavery case with Philemon as precedent,

<sup>22</sup> Looking for traditional *loci*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., finds very little (*The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 34C [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008], 37–40).

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, John A. Kincaid, *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), mentions only Phlm 5 (163n4). Perhaps more proportionate, Phlm is mentioned on twenty-one pages out of the 737 pages of James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Udo Schnelle's developmental look at Paul (*Paulus: Leben und Denken*, 2nd ed. [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014]) includes a treatment of each letter, yet his theological synthesis employs only Phlm 2 and 9, according to the index.

<sup>24</sup> E.g.: Florence Michels, O.L.V.M., *Paul and the Law of Love* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1967), 56–57; L. H. Marshall, *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics* (London: MacMillan, 1950), 328–29; Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox, 1996), 225–27. C. Spicq, O.P., also, despite several sections on slavery (real and metaphorical), mentions Phlm only rarely, and mostly in relation to apostolic commands and the need for willing agency in love (*Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, 2 vols., Etudes biblique [Paris: LeCoffre, 1965], 2:581n2, 612n5, 662n3, 836n2). See also: Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1968), 94–95; Willi Marxsen, *New Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 220–24.



but the problem is that Paul does not quite say what he wants to happen.

The letter's lack of explicit theological statements leaves interpreters to follow the precedent set by (1) Paul's action of returning Onesimus and (2) the illocution of his words on the slave's behalf. Understandably, Paul's returning Onesimus is troubling to many readers. This leaves us with the illocution of Paul's epistolary intervention into the situation, but appreciating this requires understanding the situation. And herein lie the complications, for the letter leaves much unsaid.

The letter does not say outright exactly the relation between Philemon and Onesimus excepting "no longer as [*hōs*] a slave" (v. 16), and some have argued that this is mere simile (no longer *like* a slave) and that Onesimus was never a slave at all.<sup>25</sup> This reading has rightly received little following, but this hardly exhausts the reconstructive difficulties. Assuming that Onesimus was a slave, the circumstances under which he met Paul are unclear. Did he fit ancient landowners' stereotypes of thieving runaways? Or did he tarry too long on business in order to seek out Paul's intercession in a conflict with his master?<sup>26</sup> Was Philemon the master imagined by certain moralists, clement and justly manumitting loyal slaves after a few years? Or did Paul send Onesimus back to an abusive master? Is Philemon even his master? Based on letter introductions in some papyri, John Knox argues that the "you" who owns the slave is not the letter's first-named recipient, Philemon, but the second-named male Archippus.<sup>27</sup> Might the command that the Colossians "tell Archippus" to fulfill his "ministry" in Colossians 4:17 illuminate this, or is Colossians a later reception of Philemon by a pseudepigrapher?<sup>28</sup> Though we do not know what happened

<sup>25</sup> See Allen Dwight Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative Argumentum," *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 4 (1993): 357–76.

<sup>26</sup> For debates over whether Onesimus was "fugitive" or "truant," see, e.g.: Peter Lampe, "Keine 'Sklavenflucht' des Onesimus," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 76 (1985): 135–37; Sara C. Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 1–15; J. Albert Harrill, "Using the Roman Jurists to Interpret Philemon: A Response to Peter Lampe," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 90 (1999): 135–38; John G. Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus: A Defense of the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41 (1991): 97–119; Nordling, "Some Matters Favouring the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," *Neotestamentica* 44 (2010): 85–121.

<sup>27</sup> John Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul: A New View of its Place and Importance*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1959), 53–70.

<sup>28</sup> Most who take Colossians to be authentic see it and Philemon dispatched together. But see Vicky Balabanski, "Where is Philemon? The Case for a Logical Fallacy in the Correlation of the Data in Philemon and Colossians 1.1–2; 4.7–18,"

to Onesimus, interpreters certainly want to know what Paul *wanted* to happen.<sup>29</sup> The master is clearly to forgive his debt (vv. 18–19) and be reconciled with him (vv. 15–17). But does Paul want him *sent back* to himself to serve the Gospel, as he says he “would have liked” (vv. 14–15)? Does his rhetorical confidence that the owner will do “even more than I say” (v. 21) hint at manumission?

All these questions bear on interpretation. The earliest known commentaries or homilies featuring Philemon make their exhortations and interpretations based on their reading of the historical situation.<sup>30</sup> Slavery debates in nineteenth-century America did the same, with some seeing Onesimus’s return as affirmation of fugitive slave laws while some abolitionists rebutted that Onesimus was never a slave at all (cf. above). More recently, James Burtchaell’s study of grace in Christian ethics takes its starting point from Philemon, but only via a particular reconstruction of the background.<sup>31</sup> Modern commentaries often devote as much space to isagogics as to verse-by-verse exposition.<sup>32</sup>

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*Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (2015): 131–50, who argues these are written years apart.

<sup>29</sup> Some later episcopal lists identify this Onesimus with a bishop of the same name mentioned in Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 1.3, 2.1, and 6.2, implying a happy resolution to his trouble with Philemon. Knox has argued for the historicity of this view (*Philemon*, 91–107), but Scot McKnight is more accurate merely to “hope that is true” (*The Letter to Philemon*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017], 114).

<sup>30</sup> See: Margaret M. Mitchell, “John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Second Look,” *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995): 135–48; Ronald E. Heine, “In Search of Origen’s Commentary on Philemon,” *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 117–33.

<sup>31</sup> James Tunstead Burtchaell, C.S.C., *Philemon’s Problem: A Theology of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 6–7, tries to eschew a decision on whether Onesimus was a runaway or truant, but makes both about his desire for manumission, which frames his treatment.

<sup>32</sup> We may offer some examples. Fitzmyer’s *Philemon* spans 127 pages, but verse-by-verse commentary begins only on page 81, after introduction and bibliography. Compare: McKnight’s *Philemon*, with commentary spanning pp. 46–114; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an Philemon*, 4th ed., Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 18 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), with about thirty pages of commentary after the same length of introduction; John G. Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2004), an over-350-page volume with pages 1–150 dedicated to introduction. Nor is this a problem of recent commentary-on-commentary pileup in exegetical scholarship. J. B. Lightfoot’s commentary on Philemon spans pp. 301–46, and the introductory setup ends at p. 327 (*St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [London: MacMillan and, 1897]).

In brief, the letter is a snapshot of Paul's intervention into a household relationship in the name of the Gospel. This provides great promise for theology and ethics, even beyond the question of slavery, for those who would hear its illocution and seek to imitate Paul in their own circumstances. But this cannot be done without historical reconstruction. In what follows of this interpretive exercise, we will attend to two of the main aspects of the situation in order to illustrate their relevance and use for theological interpretation.

### *Onesimus and His Owner*

It strains credulity to argue that Onesimus is not legally a slave. Allen Callahan's argument, following on older abolitionist readings, is ingenious but implausible.<sup>33</sup> He is correct that the letter's only direct reference to Onesimus's status as a slave is Paul's statement that his master may now receive him back "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord" (v. 16). But he is incorrect, as Margaret Mitchell has shown decisively, to assert that Onesimus's enslavement was first innovated by Chrysostom.<sup>34</sup> Further, Paul's desire for permission and consent from the addressee even to keep Onesimus, along with *ouketi hōs doulon* (v. 16) and the nominal puns about his "usefulness" (vv. 11, 20), suggests his enslavement. It is perhaps possible that this suggests Onesimus had been the owner's natural brother "in the flesh" (*en sarki*; v. 16) in addition to being his slave; such relationships were not unknown. However, if the owner is as charitable as verses 4–7 describe, it is difficult to imagine that he would also have put his own kin in such potential terror as seems required by the forceful character of Paul's intervention.<sup>35</sup>

Is he owned by Philemon or Archippus? Knox's argument that Paul writes to Philemon as Church official, but addressing Archippus as the owner, is possible. However, Knox's appeal to the proximity of Archippus in the address to the singular "you" of verses 4–23 is weakened by the intervening plural grace wish (v. 3). Further, it is easier to read the object of closing greetings from other ministers in verse 23, clearly the same "you" as Onesimus's owner, as the same official thus greeted in verses 1–2 (Philemon). The majority view that Philemon is the owner remains preferable.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon."

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell, "Chrysostom on Philemon."

<sup>35</sup> Paul's choice of words in depicting the owner's charity are rhetorically chosen in anticipation of Paul's request (see below), but the appeal to his character is effective only if the description is accurate overall.

<sup>36</sup> Knox's reading is possible, but there is no textual signal that should cause us to

What has happened between Onesimus and Philemon? Onesimus has clearly gone “absent without leave”—otherwise Paul would not need to invoke divine providence about why he was “separated” from Philemon or send him back for Philemon’s consent (vv. 13–15). For how long, and why? The only other clear datum to follow is Paul’s insistence in verses 18–19 that Onesimus must be forgiven any injury to Philemon. As noted, scholars debate whether this suggests Onesimus was a stereotypical runaway who absconded with his owner’s goods *or* whether he would have been legally considered a truant, not intending to run away but being too long away (however defined), perhaps intentionally seeking Paul to intercede in a dispute with his master. Peter Lampe cites this legal rescript from Justinian’s *Digest*: “Whoever flees to beg intercession from a friend of his master is not a runaway; indeed, even if he intends not to return home should he not obtain this help, he is still not a runaway, for that is the term not only for the intention but also for the act of fleeing” (*Dig.* 21.1.43.1).<sup>37</sup> If we imagine Onesimus knowing prior Paul’s connection to Philemon—a plausible assumption if Philemon was a house or managerial slave who had some acquaintance with the worship assembly—it is difficult to imagine he would not avoid him if he were a thieving runaway. From that angle, it is more likely that Onesimus and Philemon had some falling out over a (perceived?) injury (mentioned in v. 18), Onesimus met Paul (intentionally or not) and delayed for baptism, and Paul now sends Onesimus back with a letter asking pardon for Onesimus regarding the injury and time lost while delayed with Paul.

However, the lines between runaway and truant blurred in practice and perception.<sup>38</sup> J. Albert Harrill offers an example from a jurist admitting as much: “Vivianus writes, ‘the common belief of laypeople [*quod plerumque ab imprudentibus*], which is that a slave who without the master’s consent stays away for a night is a *fugitivus*, is not true; one has to assess the slave’s purpose in so acting [*ab affectu animi*]’” (*Dig.* 21.1.17.4).<sup>39</sup> The distinction is a matter of intention. And intention can vary, even change. It is also possible that Onesimus did intend to run away but later encountered Paul or someone connected with the Pauline mission and saw an alternate opportunity that changed his mind.

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prefer it. Paul’s other references to house churches in greetings (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15) also offer no sufficient comparison to support such shift in address.

<sup>37</sup> Lampe, “Sklavenflucht,” 136 (my translation).

<sup>38</sup> Rightly Nordling, “Some Matters,” 89.

<sup>39</sup> Harrill, “Using the Roman Jurists,” 137.

The question of Onesimus's motivations and the circumstances under which he met Paul is significant, and our answer can affect other decisions about other situational components like the letter's provenance and date. Nevertheless, from where we sit as interpreters, any number of sequences must remain possible. Historically, it took only one sequence of events, perhaps even one which we on balance would deem implausible. "History, after all, is the arena of the unique rather than the average."<sup>40</sup> Hermeneutically, however, we are justified in prioritizing *perception* in this matter. For, even if Onesimus's intentions (which we do not know) would please the jurists, that hardly diffuses the situation into which Paul *writes*. The rhetorical situation addresses a master, not a jurist, and one to whom Onesimus's intentions and actions are not fully known (at least) until Onesimus returns with this letter.<sup>41</sup> The letter envisions a Philemon who has been left to fume over his slave's absence and an injury he perceives against himself. And this makes perception potentially a matter of life and death for Onesimus. The longer Onesimus is thus absent, the more Philemon is left to assume the worst and to fury over the slight. Philemon has every reason and legal right to punish Onesimus, perhaps harshly. Formed in his legal and social environment, he may fear that leniency would cost him honor (and consequently business) among his peers and set a poor precedent for other slaves. He may believe punishment will improve and sharpen this human "tool," as jurists and some philosophers classified slaves.<sup>42</sup> And, it must be stressed, he has every legal right to adjudicate this himself. The distinction between runaway and truant would be of no help to Onesimus unless he or Paul could sway Philemon's perception of the situation.

What of Onesimus's perception? If Onesimus's reasons for being gone in the past are hard to determine, the rhetorical situation draws us into the present tense of his return to Philemon. If a runaway, we may expect his hopes or expectations were dealt a blow when Paul urged (or commanded?) his return. But even if he were a truant intending to return

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Jewett, *Dating Paul's Life* (London: SCM, 1979), 54; similarly G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 368.

<sup>41</sup> Note the "if" (*ei*) in Paul's phrasing of v. 18—"If he has injured you or owes you anything"—which acknowledges the injury but leaves any reckoning to Philemon himself. Paul's appeal to God's intentions (v. 15) rather than Onesimus's may delicately pass over a runaway's guilt or simply assume truancy, so it offers inconclusive evidence here.

<sup>42</sup> See J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 18–21.

all along, we must imagine he stands in fear and trembling about how he will be received and treated by his master above all else. Burtchaell frames Onesimus's hopes and the stakes of Paul's appeal in terms of manumission: Onesimus was "desperate for his freedom," either as a runaway or as a dis-favored slave nervous that he would not receive a timely manumission.<sup>43</sup> I have no intent to sketch slavery as a pleasant form of life, no matter the differences between ancient Rome and the American South or Brazil, but we should beware assuming legal manumission meant "freedom" as the boon we moderns imagine.<sup>44</sup> Being a slave, especially a managerial slave, of a wealthy and just master afforded upward social mobility even without manumission.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, manumission could be just as harsh, depending on the will of the master. Manumitted slaves were still members of the *paterfamilias's* household, and manumission came with costs beyond the redemption price: a master might require, for the loss of a slave by manumission, that the freedman surrender his children to slavery; in some situations, a freedman's property would be returned to the master (or the master's heir) when the freedman died.<sup>46</sup> Onesimus's situation—whether he continues as a slave *or* is manumitted—is dependent upon Philemon's regard and choice of action regarding him. And this is precisely the nerve Paul's appeal means to hit.

### *Hearing Paul's Appeal*

Framed against Onesimus's potential fates and the duty or entitlement Philemon had to punish, Paul interjects his own theological perception of the situation when he sends Philemon back with this letter. Paul's choice to return Onesimus appears, frankly, offensive if we imagine it as disinterested compliance with fugitive slave laws. But Paul could also have appealed to another law. Deuteronomy commands: "You shall not hand over to his master any slave who has escaped to you from his master. Let him live with you, in your midst, in any place he chooses in any of your communities that

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<sup>43</sup> Burtchaell, *Philemon's Problem*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> For a broad analysis, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 209–96.

<sup>45</sup> Hence Paul's self-appellation *doulos Christou* (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; etc.). See Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 1–49. For a survey of various slave jobs and qualities of life, see Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57–106.

<sup>46</sup> See: Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 40–75; Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 95.



seems good to him. You shall not oppress him” (Deut 23:15–16 [16–17 in the Hebrew text]). If Paul does not impress the Torah comprehensively as a binding code in his gentile assemblies, he at least reads and applies its intentions and principles as expressive of God’s will (e.g.: 1 Cor 5:7–8, 13; 9:9).<sup>47</sup> And he is hardly unwilling to follow God despite the state (see: 2 Cor 1:8–9; 11:25). One assumes he has a reason beyond mere blind obedience to Roman laws here. So what is Paul up to?

We may first ask after Paul’s actual request. Explicitly, he asks relatively little. He emphasizes the value of Onesimus in Christ by noting his hypothetical desire to keep him along to serve the Gospel with Paul, and sending Onesimus back to Paul (legally freed or not) is clearly an implicit option for Philemon should he refuse to forgive. However, Paul’s threat of a future visit halts us from viewing Onesimus’s return as the primary request.<sup>48</sup> What Paul commands outright is reconciliation: to welcome Onesimus as he would Paul (v. 17) and charge any wrong to Paul’s account rather than seek retribution against Onesimus (vv. 18–19).

If the request appears minimal, however, the pressure he puts on Philemon is anything but minimal. Paul does not speak peer-to-peer about the fate of a subordinate; the Paul who intervenes here “is not as much Philemon’s friend as Onesimus’s advocate.”<sup>49</sup> With rhetorical savvy, he praises Philemon for his love for the saints and calls him now to exhibit the same in receiving Onesimus, who now is a saint.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Paul exerts considerable pressure and raises himself *over* Philemon in the power structure.<sup>51</sup> He appeals to Philemon’s love rather than give orders (vv. 8–9, 14), but still

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<sup>47</sup> See here Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 159–205.

<sup>48</sup> Despite, e.g., Knox, *Philemon*, 22–30.

<sup>49</sup> McKnight, *Philemon*, 39.

<sup>50</sup> Philemon is praised for refreshing the *splanchna* of the saints (v. 7) and is now called to do the same with Onesimus, who, now also a saint (v. 11), is Paul’s own *splanchna* (vv. 12, 20). Philemon is praised as having a partnership (*koinōnia*; v. 6) with Paul in ministry and now is commanded to receive Onesimus in the stead of his partner (*koinōnon*) Paul (v. 17). Philemon is praised for his knowledge and obedience to what good deed can be done do unto Christ (*en epignōsei pantos agathou tou en hēmin eis Christon*; v. 6), and Paul’s explanation for returning Onesimus calls Philemon to see this as just such a situation: “but I desired to do nothing apart from your knowledge [*chōris de tēs sēs gnōmēs*], that your good deed [*to agathon sou*] might not be done out of compulsion but willingly” (v. 14).

<sup>51</sup> See Timothy A. Brookins, “‘I Rather Appeal to *Auctoritas*’: Roman Conceptualizations of Power and Paul’s Appeal to Philemon,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77 (2015): 302–21.



expects “obedience” (v. 21) as an authoritative apostle (cf.: 1 Thess 2:6; 2 Thess 3:9; 2 Cor 13:10).<sup>52</sup> He superimposes the “usefulness” and spiritual debt that Philemon owes *Paul* in Christ over any comparatively petty evaluation of Onesimus’s usefulness to Philemon (vv. 19–20). Paul has become Onesimus’s spiritual “father” in his conversion (v. 10; cf. 1 Cor 4:15 and Gal 4:19), making Onesimus and Philemon both children together by the same means and with the same status in baptism (cf. Gal 3:28).<sup>53</sup> Paul *adopts and redeploys* Philemon’s perception of household obligations and authorities.<sup>54</sup> If Philemon had seen it as his personal business to judge what to do with a slave in his household, Paul calls Philemon to see himself instead as Onesimus’s brother, with both of them dependents who owe fealty and service *to Christ through Paul* in the “household” of faith (cf. Gal 6:10 and Eph 2:19). Even more, this public letter—not private—puts at least Philemon’s entire congregation on notice that Onesimus’s treatment of Philemon is a matter of obedience to Paul and to Christ.<sup>55</sup> The letter closes with a rhetorical threat that Paul, whenever he is released, will arrive unexpected to check Philemon’s compliance, and the guestroom requested would in the meantime remind all parties of Philemon’s duty in the Lord (v. 22).

Paul and Deuteronomy both—albeit differently—protect slaves from the wrath of their masters despite legal status or entitlements. But Paul’s return of Onesimus and the grounds on which he makes his appeal value

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<sup>52</sup> Despite Marxsen, *Foundations*, 222. See also Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 192, 196 (respectively): “Nor, however, are Paul’s admonitions a more-or-less optional contribution to the dialogue or an unauthoritative personal opinion. They establish the will of God with authority and demand to be followed (2 Cor. 2:9; 7:15; Phil. 2:12; Philem. 8–11). This is also the basis on which the apostle calls on his readers to imitate his conduct (1 Cor. 4:16–17; 11:1; Phil. 4:9; 3:17). . . . Conscience in particular does not dispense Christians from the authority of the apostle’s command, from accepting it freely and obediently.”

<sup>53</sup> Historical reconstruction of other matters may add weight to Paul’s appeal: if Colossians is genuine, and if Philemon’s congregation is the nearby church meant to read Colossians also (Col 4:16), then Philemon and his church would have to hear not only the household codes in Col 3:18–4:1 but also Col 3:11: “There is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and foreskin, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and is in all.” For this possibility, see, e.g., Knox, *Philemon*, 54–55.

<sup>54</sup> See Chris Frilingos, “‘For My Child, Onesimus’: Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 1 (2000): 91–104.

<sup>55</sup> Note the public address to the whole church and certain named officials in vv. 1–3, 25, and Paul’s publicized expectation that the whole church (“you” plural) is praying for his release and a future visit in v. 22.

an *ongoing* change in the parties' (especially Philemon's) perception of the situation and their *continued* moral and communal progress. Paul's appeal does not terminate in a single act or sequence of acts—not in sending Onesimus back, not in refusing to punish him merely “this time,” and not even in manumitting him. He offers instead a theological reality meant to renew thinking and behavior indefinitely (cf. Rom 12:1–2). Whatever specifically happened in Onesimus's departure and absence, Philemon (and Onesimus) must honor the use to which God has put it: “For perhaps this is why he was separated for a time, that you might receive him back eternally, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother—much so to me, how much more to you!—both in the flesh and in the Lord” (vv. 15–16).<sup>56</sup> Paul refers every aspect of the relationship and every potential decision of Philemon about how to treat Onesimus to the domain of God's evangelical economy, because all is changed by one fundamental fact: Onesimus and Philemon are now brothers, and in Christ both owe charity toward one another and obedience toward Paul, a relation that overlaps and even supersedes the quotidian order.<sup>57</sup> “For he who was a slave when called is the Lord's freedman; likewise, he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price” (1 Cor 7:22–23a).

“What does Paul want Philemon to do?” Ultimately, the answer must be “more.” Surely, Paul says suggestively, “you will do even more than what I say” (v. 21). Paul puts ongoing pressure on Philemon not only in his public request for a guestroom but in grounding his appeal on Onesimus's

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<sup>56</sup> Paul's phrasing *hina aiōnion auton apechēs* (v. 15) might use *aiōnion* as an adverbial accusative, though this use of *aiōnios* is otherwise unattested in the NT, indicating the duration of the receiving (“receive him back *eternally*”). Comparison of this to Septuagint passages about slaves choosing to remain “eternal” or lifelong slaves when offered manumission might hint that Paul means to call the offer of manumission and the slave's choice to mind for Philemon (see Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 431–32), but the letter does not otherwise press any OT echoes; further, those passages consistently use the adverbial phrase *eis ton aiōna* (Exod 21:6; Lev 25:46; Deut 15:17) rather than the adjective applied to a person (but cf. Job 40:28). It may rather be classified as a predicate complement to the pronoun *auton*, i.e., that Onesimus's person is now one that pertains to or is marked for the next age. In any case, seen with the fraternal ecclesial language of v. 16, the term must weight the new ecclesial relation between them. “Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus are now Christians, related in an eternal sense that not even death can undo. Clearly, Onesimus does not return as the same person who departed from Philemon's house” (Fitzmyer, *Philemon*, 113; see also McKnight, *Philemon*, 94).

<sup>57</sup> See: Michael Wolter, *Paulus: Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2011), 95; Burtchaell, *Philemon's Problem*, 14.

and Philemon's shared membership in the body of Christ (rather than on, say, the slave's contrition or promise not to repeat the offense).<sup>58</sup> So long as Philemon expects to remain in good standing with Paul, and so long as Onesimus is a believer, the terms of Paul's command remain unchanged. Giving no countenance to Philemon's or Onesimus's esteem or rights outside the communion of Christ, Paul calls Philemon (and Onesimus, though differently) to pursue obedience to the Lord and to deal with each other asking first and always this question: *how should I treat my brother?*

### From Illocution to Actualization: Philemon beyond Slavery

The above has focused on reconstruction of only certain elements of Philemon's background as they can inform exegesis. There are numerous others that add shades of meaning for interpretation and actualization. But those we have treated are productive.

The letter's brevity and subject matter often leave it to be interpreted only with regard to the question of slavery, and sometimes for that reason it is swept under the rug as morally outdated or embarrassing. This is unfortunate for a least two reasons. First, we simply should not expect this letter—addressed to one situation in which Paul knew both parties and a substantial bit of the back-story that eludes us—to address the entire anthropology necessary for our understanding of human dignity.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, modern embarrassment at the more explicit *Haustafeln* or “household codes” in the New Testament misses the fact that the commands to be willingly subordinate in the hope of eschatological reward (Col 3:22–25; Eph 6:5–8; 1 Pet 3:16–25) actually *humanized* slaves by ascribing moral agency and divine esteem to persons commonly classed as mere “tools.”

Second, and perhaps more unfortunate, a narrow focus on the institution of slavery blocks Paul's intervention from relevance to things analogous to slavery or other aspects of the letter's occasion and addressees. Even in Paul's own day, “the institution of slavery marked the character of the inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world in ways that will not always appear immediately to be associated with the practices of slavery.”<sup>60</sup> In our day as well, there are numerous analogues to the relational and institutional

<sup>58</sup> It is fruitful to compare the difference between Paul's appeal and that of Pliny the Younger, who interceded for a slave with his displeased master by appealing to the slave's contrition, the master's accrual of honor if he displays clemency, and the fact that Pliny has already reprimanded the slave sufficiently (*Epistulae* 9.21).

<sup>59</sup> See: Glancy, *Slavery*, 91–92; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, trans. J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 259.

<sup>60</sup> Glancy, *Slavery*, 152.

dynamics of Philemon's situation, despite the superiority over the ancients to which some pretend. Burtchaell is correct: "Paul's demand required of believers endlessly more than abolition: both before any laws could be changed, and after. Those who take the Gospel to heart often make poor subscribers to moral manifestoes and petitions and coalitions, because their imaginations usually run more wildly and deeply beyond the specific grievance at hand."<sup>61</sup>

Envisioning Paul's appeal, its grounds, and its force within the situation offers a precedent that applies beyond the specific situation. It leads us to interpret via "the fact that." Knowing the situation, what do we learn from *the fact that* Paul chose this particular way to intervene, *the fact that* he thought this truth should supersede these other considerations in Philemon's or Onesimus's mind? The text's illocution and the precedent it sets offers much to theological exegesis as it looks to actualize the biblical text in the lives of today's faithful. We may conclude by exploring three fruitful aspects that can be gleaned from the reconstruction above.

### *The Priority and Reality of Ecclesial Relation*

Paul often speaks of those in Christ as brothers and sisters (e.g., 1 Cor 7:15). This fits with the metaphor of adoption and inheritance, the saving boon of being children of God and, under God, of Paul by conversion and baptism (cf.: Rom 8:12–17; 1 Cor 4:15; Gal 3:26–29; 4:19). In that regard, his description of Onesimus's "birth" in Phlm 10 and his appellations "brother" and "sister" may seem unremarkable. But *the fact that* he asserts ecclesial relation (vv. 10, 16) as primary over relation in the legal and secular economy shows that, for Paul, it bears constant significance in ordering Christian behavior. Philemon has every legal right and every personal reason to punish Onesimus. But he must now see Onesimus as his brother, "in the flesh and in the Lord" (v. 16).

The ties and duties owed to real kin are, for Paul, binding on these two Christians now.<sup>62</sup> These duties go beyond mere polite greetings in liturgical gatherings; they flow from a real bond in which the one's honor and wellbeing is bound up in that of the other. The bond of brotherhood between believers must be *real*, more real indeed than blood. If Philemon is nervous, say, about what receiving Onesimus back might do to his business and thus the quality of his own children's or wife's life, he must also apply the same concern for wellbeing now to his brother Onesimus. If

<sup>61</sup> Burtchaell, *Philemon's Problem*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> If Onesimus was in fact also his owner's brother in the flesh (see above), Paul's emphasis on his conversion leaves our present argument unaffected.

Philemon has concerns about the “body” or “household” of the state, as his contemporaries often imagined society, and what forgiving this injustice might upset within it, he must see Onesimus’s relation to him in the “household of faith” as even more pressing, as the slave is now a beneficiary and contributor to that communion’s good in ways that societal norms did not countenance. And Onesimus, in returning, must likewise seek a reconciled life with his brother Philemon, rather than see him as a threat or a force to be escaped. If in Christ there is no longer slave and free (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), each must see the other not as enemy or competitor but as mutual body members of equal worth, with each having equal need of the other for edification, correction, and service (1 Cor 12:12–26; cf. Eph 4:11–16). This might mean Philemon obeying Onesimus inasmuch as Onesimus functions as Paul’s emissary or representative (cf. Col 4:7–9). It means Onesimus emptying himself for his brother in service—whether commanded or voluntarily—in imitation of Christ (Phil 2:1–11) and for Philemon’s own good. It means both being ready to lose to the other rather than let their minds and relations be ruled by pagan jurists (cf. 1 Cor 6:1–11). They must each strive to outdo the other in showing honor (Rom 12:10).<sup>63</sup>

Paul’s appeal, envisioned within its situation, shows that ecclesial relation is “not merely . . . a cognitive construction,” but has necessary “effects on the social relations between persons.”<sup>64</sup> In short, it means a real application and execution of all the general commands and exhortations Paul gives as he envisions the healthy and growing body of Christ, *within and despite* legal, social, and economic stratifications and ordering. It means charity over practicality, sacrifice over rights. Those who aim to hear Paul’s words and share his faith in a new context are invited to see and take up Paul’s stance anew in analogous situations. Paul’s voice intrudes into our habits of maintaining secular or legal strata within the liturgical assembly. It leads us to ask the duties of the Christian U.S. border guard toward the family praying rosaries and begging deliverance from the cartels. It leads us to actualize the precedence of ecclesial relation to the same degree that Paul does in societies that ascribe (or prescribe) precedence to one gender, race, and so on over another. And the echo of Paul’s words in his situation impress themselves on us all the louder the more we consider what other analogues there are in our own lives and relations. And in every relation in which we encounter another believer in Christ, it calls us to ask the same

<sup>63</sup> See Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul’s Letter at Ground Level* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 107–12.

<sup>64</sup> Wolter, *Paulus*, 238 (translation mine).

question Paul put implicitly to Philemon: *this is my closest kin, God's own child, so what should I do?*

### *Divine Opportunity in Human Folly*

From Philemon's perspective, Onesimus has wronged him. The degree to which he estimated the egregiousness of the offense is affected by the duration of Onesimus's unpermitted absence and how shocking it was to Philemon—hence our view of it depends on whether he was a runaway, sent to Paul, or a truant, and on how long he stayed with Paul and how far away Paul was from Philemon. But we can at least posit that Philemon, when he sees Onesimus and receives this letter, saw the wrong as willful and culpable.

Here a hermeneutical and ethical precedent emerges as we see Paul redirect Philemon's gaze from the culpability of Onesimus to divine opportunity in which both God's Church and Philemon benefit: "For perhaps this is why he was separated for a time, that you might receive him back eternally, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother" (vv. 15–16a). Paul does not here deny human folly or error—on the side of either party—in what has happened. He cannot erase Philemon's memory or his perception of any injury (see vv. 18–19). One recalls Joseph's words to his brothers: "You meant it for evil against me; God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20). But Paul's passive *echōristhē* focuses Philemon's eye simply on the fact of the situation in order to frame it as an opportunity for divine providence to work within the exigencies of human folly.

Beyond a mere deference to providence's "untraceable" ways (Rom 11:33), Paul's appeal to the providentially wrought benefit of gaining a "brother" presupposes a teleology and invites Philemon to reevaluate what is "good," or at least what is the higher "good" here. Onesimus's departure, resulting in his conversion and now return, has afforded another brother in the household of God. And this is not just a quantitative boon of increasing the number of the baptized as an end in itself; were that the case, their reconciliation would hardly be worth Paul's effort or the risks he demands of both parties. This new member of Christ is a boon to Philemon as well—and Philemon is a boon to Onesimus—in that they each gain a new object of affection and care, a new supporter and edifier in whom each may serve the Lord. The same perspective is expressed in the command in Ephesians 4:28 that the thief not steal but work, not primarily because stealing is wicked, but because by working he may earn a legitimate possession to "share with one who is in need." This is the ongoing "good" that Philemon should willingly do and a situation in which he should rejoice; Onesimus's conversion and return afford him a constant opportunity to love another



saint, and thereby do good *eis Christon*, unto Christ (v. 6).

Paul invites Philemon to a change of perspective that prioritizes providence and charity in Christ. Knowing the situation and imagining Philemon's perspective as he is encountered by Paul's text—or indeed imagining Onesimus's situation and the revaluation to which he, for his part, is called—should invite us to let the same take shape in our own lives. Do we cast aspersions on those who convert in questionable circumstances? Do we rejoice in added opportunities and obligations to charity, or see them as burdens or risks? Do we look on those whom God saves *through* the circumstances of their own folly and see only their own blame for those circumstances, or rejoice in the opportunity of grace and seek reconciliation? If the end of exegesis is actualization, the interpretation of Philemon calls for this and so much more among us who were ourselves “slaves in Egypt,” “sold under sin,” and delivered from our own folly (cf. Deut 15:15; 16:11–12; Rom 7:14).

#### *Not a Private Affair*

Thirdly, the fact that Paul intervenes at all—and the public way in which he intervenes—says much about what counts as public and private in the Church of God. It is baffling to encounter interpreters who, despite the conventions of Pauline letter reception generally and the plural addressees of this letter specifically (vv. 1–3, 22, 25), insist that this is a “private” letter and that Paul would never have aired Philemon's “personal affairs” before the community.<sup>65</sup> This not only flies in the face of the text's own address but misses a primary point of Pauline ecclesial ethics: sin against and forgiveness of our brethren is not a private affair. Paul is not afraid even to name names and call for the intervention of local believers (Phil 4:2–3; cf. 1 Cor 5:1–12). The body of Christ is interdependent, and if prudence discourages publicizing every detail of our affairs, each *person* is the business of the whole church. Paul's exhortations center on love, patience, and correction for “one another” (e.g.: Rom 12:5; Gal 5:13; 6:2; Phil 2:1–3).

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<sup>65</sup> See: Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 279; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 268, 273. Most, rightly, see the communal audience of the letter: James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 313; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 370, 379; McKnight, *Philemon*, 57–58; Fitzmyer, *Philemon*, 81. Note Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an Philemon*, 31: “At the same time, the address to the house church makes it clear that the trouble treated in our letter is no private matter of Philemon's, but a challenge for the entire congregation” (translation mine).



If Philemon might see this as a matter of choice as to how he will deal with his own unruly property, Paul makes it the business of the whole community—a community that likely included not only other communal leaders and slave-owning peers of Philemon, but also believing slaves (cf. Col 3:22–4:1). This is no private affair in which Paul gives advice and leaves Philemon to his own devices and considerations; it affects a brother's whole person, it affects the whole community, and it affects Philemon's and his congregation's fellowship with the wider Church in the person of the apostle (vv. 17–20).

If earlier we envisioned ourselves in the places of Philemon or Onesimus hearing and challenged by Paul's directives, this aspect of Paul's intervention also invites us to put ourselves in Paul's or the congregation's place. Paul intervenes at personal risk not only in his Christ-like offering to pay Onesimus's debt (vv. 18–19); he also risks his reputation among landowners who might side against Onesimus (and who might then withdraw support for Paul's mission). The other members of the congregation—of all social strata—are also invited to keep Philemon accountable and, surely, to encourage Onesimus, and likely at potential risk to themselves. Heeding this call in our own day, we might ask ourselves if we are ready to interject ourselves into what is legally another's business with self-sacrifice (beyond mere public indignation), like early Christians who searched out and raised exposed children. Do we toe party lines for fear or follow the Gospel no matter what it might cost us in the public square or business or within our families or ecclesial "politics"?

### Conclusions

As stated above, interpreters continue to investigate how the historical and theological tasks of exegesis relate in theory and praxis, and some question the relevance of historical study to theological interpretation and actualization. While we began with some theoretical observations defending historical study's relevance, this article has exercised itself in practical illustration.

Philemon is an inspired book which, due to its lack of explicit theological or ethical pronouncements and its subject matter, says little unless its historical situation is reconstructed and envisioned throughout one's reading and contemplation. If the letter does not say what those who know the boon of abolition want it to say about slavery, human dignity, or the natural law, the book has much to say about how Christians live the Gospel within the social structures of their day.<sup>66</sup> The force and grounds of Paul's appeal say much about ecclesiology—the reality and prominence

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Matera, *New Testament Ethics*, 226–27.

of relation in Christ, the communal and interpersonal nature of reconciliation, the duties of charity and obedience to apostle and community—and about the force of its realization amid practical quotidian concerns.

We suggested certain specific applications of Philemon. There are more; no essay can exhaust the potential actualizations of God's word. What our investigation does show, in the interpretive conversation, is that the theological and ethical data gleaned from the text's illocution require constant reference to the historical situation reconstructed. It is in the structure and dynamics of that situation that the force and implications of Paul's appeal are heard. And this is not superseded by other concerns at a second "level" or "stage" of interpretation. To embody Paul's stance or heed his words *mutatis mutandis* in an analogous situation requires that we investigate in what respects our situation is analogous and whether and how Paul's appeal addresses them; without continuing to envision Paul's situation, we risk either a fundamentalism that repeats his actions in all circumstances (as did those who used this letter to legitimize fugitive slave laws) or an arrogance that disregards his apostolic exhortation and precedent altogether.

Interpreters are not wrong to be wary about overly speculative historical reconstructions. We treated only certain aspects of the situation, and attempted to privilege the text's rhetorical situation in order to hear Paul's appeal where certain elements of the text's background were uncertain. This solution may not work in every instance, however, as some genres are not as overt in their address as are Paul's epistles. In the end, historical reconstruction is necessary even when it requires speculation. Thankfully, if the rule of faith and Christological canon of love govern hermeneutics anyway, our interpretations will not lead us off the rails even when specificities of our reconstructions are provisional.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, the amount of detail necessary to hear a text's illocution and actualize its meaning will differ on a case by case basis. Further studies will do well to explore the function of history and illocution in hermeneutics as it is affected by genre, single or multiple authors/editors, and a book's location within revelatory history and the divine pedagogy. Certain genres will require more or less, as will certain texts due to the specific way in which the inspired speech is directed. But this relativizes the *extent* of reconstruction needed, not its value. N.V

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<sup>67</sup> See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 3.15.23 and 3.27.38–28.39.



## The Christology of Hebrews

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### Premises

THE TASK OF DEFINING the Christology of Hebrews is fascinating and complex due to the presence of three phenomena peculiar to the script.<sup>1</sup> (1) *Hebrews* is an act of hermeneutics: some founding texts of the Jewish messianism of the day are interpreted in the light of the Jesus event as known by its preaching. The Christian proclamation too was already structured in speeches or writings. Therefore, the author's purpose is almost always the interpretation of the texts in their literal meaning, and almost never that of the factual reality.<sup>2</sup> (2) *Hebrews* is the product of a "school" issuing from the Pauline preaching, which elaborates some of its characteristic theologoumena. The letter therefore also operates as a hermeneutic of Paul's thought. (3) It is my belief that *Hebrews* is the fruit of successive

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the English translation of a transcript of my speech at a *two-day colloquium organized by the Thomistic Institute Angelicum*: "Theological Exegesis: Scriptural Theology." In the notes I will confine myself almost exclusively to the mention of my previous studies, in which the reader can find a broader discussion and a complete bibliography. For general problematics, see Paolo Garuti, *Alle origini dell'omiletica cristiana: La lettera agli Ebrei—Note di analisi retorica*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: FPP, 2002), and *Studi sulla Lettera agli Ebrei: Alcuni sviluppi dottrinali di scuola paolina riletti in prospettiva storico letteraria e storico antropologica (Eb 1,1-2 - 4,12-13 - 9,1-5 - 9,14 -10,29)* (Pendé, France: Gabalda, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> For this—among other things—it is often good to translate the verbal adjective *christos* with the more generic term "messiah," if it is a question *de iure*.

rewrites which led to the formulation of a “high” Christology (the heavenly aspect of the priesthood and the sacrifice of Messiah) after contemplating the more human and earthly aspects of the Christic mystery, as a journey toward heavenly fulfillment, passing through the painful ordeal of death.<sup>3</sup>

Since it is methodologically more relevant, let us start from the third point. To appreciate this phenomenon of rewriting it will be enough to bring two examples of Christological “correction” in verses otherwise very similar:<sup>4</sup>

2 :17–18	Therefore <i>he had to be made like his brothers</i> <b>in every respect</b> , so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because <i>he himself has suffered when tempted</i> , he is able to help those who are being tempted.	4:15	For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,  but one who <b>in every respect has been tempted</b> as we are, yet without sin.
5:1, 7, 10	For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, <i>to offer gifts</i> and sacrifices for sins. . . . <i>In the days of his flesh</i> , Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to	8:3–5	For every high priest is appointed to <i>offer</i> gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now <i>if he were on earth</i> , he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a

<sup>3</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “Due Cristologie nella Lettera agli Ebrei?,” *Liber Annuus* 49 (1999): 237–58.

<sup>4</sup> Biblical quotations are normally from the English Standard Version.

save him from death,  
and he was heard  
because of his rever-  
ence, . . . *being desig-  
nated by God a high  
priest* after the order of  
Melchizedek.

copy and shadow of  
the heavenly things.

In the first case, 2:17, the expression *kata panta* (“in every respect”) is attributed to the necessary assimilation of Christ to his human brethren, foreseen in the Scripture (Ps 22:23 and Isa 8:18 in Heb 2:12–13), and from which the solidarity in temptation originates. In 4:15, the *kata panta* is instead attributed, although not very logically, only to the temptation, and the similarity is further limited by the clarification *chōris hamartias* (“yet without sin”).

In the second parallel, in 8:3–4, after briefly resuming the generic definition of every high priest already given in 5:1–4, the description of the priestly offering of Jesus denies all earthly aspects of the priesthood (in both texts the verb *prospherō* is a technical term), correcting the perspective of 5:7–10.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the offering of prayers and supplications is presented as an act preceding the real consecration. Curiously, in the tenth chapter, therefore *after* 8:3–4, Hebrews contemplates the offering of the “body” of Jesus in our very “world” (*kosmos*; 10:5). Commenting on the Septuagint (LXX) of Psalm 39:6 (“Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; but a body hast thou prepared me”) the author says: “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10 :10).

### Two Dimensions of Christ’s Sacrifice

It is therefore realistic to talk about two dimensions of Christ’s sacrifice in Hebrews. The first involves the sacrifice of consecration of Aaron and his sons according to Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. This sacrifice is called in Hebrew, the “hands’ filling” (*milluim*), and in Greek “perfecting” (*teleiōsis*). A part of the *body* of a ram is placed in the hands of the priests as a sign of their right to participate in sacrifices. The Greek term reflects a consecration ritual taking place prior to the entrance into the space reserved for priests, imagined as a “goal, achievement” of an initiatory path (*telos*). From

<sup>5</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “Per una definizione del sacerdozio del re messia nella Lettera agli Ebrei,” *Sacramentaria e Scienze religiose* 50 (2018): 154–69.

here comes the embarrassing statement of Hebrews that the Messiah was “made perfect.”

The second dimension of Christ’s sacrifice, characteristic of chapters 8 and 9 but announced the 4:14–16, is the development of the type of *kippur*, the annual sacrifice of atonement. This sacrifice’s apex is the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies to sprinkle a few drops of the blood of a previously sacrificed goat. If the holy of holies represents the divine space, symbolic of the heavens (still the *telos*), the offering of the blood of the risen Jesus perfectly fulfills what was once only a symbol.<sup>6</sup> This second perspective, strongly middle-Platonic, replaces an axiological relationship with a teleological one between the “first tent,” the earthly level, and the “second tent,” the heavenly one. It constitutes the basis of all of the Orthodox and Catholic sacramentary, which actualizes in the militant Church, in time, Christ’s offering fixed in eternity.

The final result of this internal growth of the Christology in Hebrews is, in fact, a priestly messianism in two times: The Passion constitutes both the final step in the way to the *telos* and the initial act of the celestial exercise of the definitive cult.

### A Re-Elaboration of a Pauline *Locus Theologicus*

This is evidently a development, perhaps unexpected, of Paul’s statements about the sacrificial value of Jesus’s death and of the Eucharistic memory. If in Romans 3:25 the apostle says that Jesus was “exposed as (the slab of) the propitiatory” by God (*hilastērion*; see Exod 25:17), in all of Paul’s undisputed letters, in fact, he presents only two recurrences of the verb *thyō*, both of which are found in 1 Corinthians. In 5:7, he states, “Christ, our Passover (lamb), has been sacrificed,” and 10:20 says “I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.” In Romans 12:11 and Philippians 2:17 and 4:18, the noun *thysia* identifies the spiritual sacrifice that the believer, or Paul himself, makes of his life. Only in 1 Corinthians 10:16–19, by contrast, is the Eucharistic context present:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider Israel according to the flesh: are not those who eat the sacrifices [*tas thysias*] partici-

<sup>6</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “Le lien entre mantique et téléstique dans le *Phèdre* de Platon et dans l’Épître aux Hébreux (en passant par Paul),” *Revue biblique* 124 (2017): 231–44.



pants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols [*eidōlothyton*] is anything, or that an idol is anything?

Placed in tension between the idolatrous sacrifice and the blessing of the bread and the wine, the Israelite sacrifice maintains a certain value of “communion at the altar,” which Hebrews develops in a typological key, even if negative, in 13:9–10:

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them (on the road). We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

This is the same argument that we met in Hebrews 8:5: if the tent of the desert constitutes the prototype of the temple, it is only the antitype of heavenly realities (9:24).

### Already and Not Yet

A further extension of the Pauline theological principle concerns an exegesis of the text by combining two texts foundational to the neo-testamentary messianism.

In 1 Corinthians 15:21–27 we read an almost word-by-word exegesis of Psalm 8:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

The famous psalm, in fact, says in verses 2–6:

Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, *to still the enemy and the avenger*. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man [Heb. *ben ādām*] that you care

for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [Heb. *'ēlōhīm*; LXX *angeloī*] and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet

In his messianic reading of Psalm 8, Paul already employs a chronological displacement: what the poetic text says was realized at the act of creation for the *enos / ben adam*, for the human being as such the commentary applies to the future eschatological annihilation (*katargeō*) of angelic enemies (*pasan archēn kai pasan exousian kai dynamin* [every rule and every authority and power]), until the victory over death. This displacement, known as the logic of “already and not yet” is not arbitrary, but rather justified, by the parallel reading of another psalm which incorporates the terms “enemies” and “under your feet” but inserts an “until” which opens an indefinite but providential lapse of time between the crowning and the fulfillment of the promise. It is indeed the first verse of Psalm 110 (LXX 109):

The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

So, Paul quotes Psalm 110:1 in 1 Corinthians because it inserts an intermediate time between Christ’s ascension to the right hand of the Father and the definitive victory over God’s enemies. The same verse is used by the early believers in Jesus as the Messiah to affirm that, with the ascension to heaven, Christ fulfills his grasp of power.<sup>7</sup> Paul sees the continuation of the battle realized in the kingdom. Hebrews builds on these bases, applying the fourth verse of the same psalm to his reflection on the priestly role of the Messiah, and so comments:

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should

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<sup>7</sup> See Paolo Garuti, *Avant que se lève l'étoile du matin: L'imaginaire dynastique du Psaume 110 entre judaïsme, hellénisme et culture romaine* (Pendé, France: Gabalda, 2010).

make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (1 Cor 2:8–10).

It is appropriate in this context to translate the Greek *to pathēma tou thanatou* as “the painful ordeal of death.” The term *pathēma*, common to the mystery language,<sup>8</sup> indicates the act founding a memory or a cult where the hero or a god lived a painful and salvific vicissitude which can be vitally communicated to the believer. In this sense the Messiah is *archēgos tēs sōtērias*, the leader of salvation, brought to the *telos* for the benefit of his brothers.

### The Priesthood and the *Telos*

In Hebrews, the notion of being “crowned with glory and honor” coincides with the proclamation to the priest, according to another passage in which Psalm 8 is clarified by recourse to Psalm 110 and another fundamental messianic text: Psalm 2. In Hebrews 5:4–6 we read:

And no one takes this *honor* for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not *exalt* himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 5:1–10 is composed of two panels. One describes the condition of every high priest, while the second applies the description to the Messiah.<sup>9</sup> The verses quoted above act as a hinge between the two panels, with multiple functions. First of all, they constitute an exegesis of Psalm 8:6b “You have . . . crowned him with *glory and honor*.” This exegesis is accomplished on the basis of a clear recourse to the knowledge of the audience. Our hinge extends to the priestly condition of the expression “glory and honor,” perhaps in reference to the priestly vestments, of which Exodus 28:2 says: “You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty [LXX *eis timēn kai doxan*].”

To move from a regal messianism to a priestly perspective, Hebrews makes use of a combination of two texts. The move is rendered possible by the presence, in Greek, of a similar oracle.

<sup>8</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “Le lacrime di Cristo in alcune recenti monografie sulla Lettera agli Ebrei,” *Angelicum* 90 (2013): 609–16.

<sup>9</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “La coerenza des images de Hb 5,1–10 et le concept de εὐλάβεια en Platon, Plutarque et Porphyre,” *Revue biblique* 123 (2016): 217–29.

**Hebrew of Psalm 2**

(Yhwh speaks:) “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

I will tell of the decree: Yhwh said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”

**LXX of Psalm 110  
(translation mine)**

The Lord shall send out a rod of power for you out of Zion: rule in the midst of your enemies.

With you is dominion in the day of your power, in the splendors of your saints: I have begotten you from the womb before the morning.

The Lord swore, and will not repent,  
You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

In addition to its presence in the historical experience of the Hasmonean dynasty and in some current perspectives in Jewish apocalyptic literature, the double priestly and regal role was commonly admitted in Roman imperial ideology.

**The Son, the Holder of the Inheritance, Is the Founder of a City**

Already in the beginning of the letter, the author of Hebrews recalls the traditional datum: the old texts reveal the divine intention to establish as universal heir that son who will then manifest himself as the Messiah. In Hebrews 1:4, it is stated logically, with a reference to Psalm 110:1, that the son “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited [*keklēronomēken onoma*] is more excellent than theirs.” A few verses later, in a *catena* of seven Old Testament quotations intended to affirm the superiority of the Son with respect to the angels and perhaps due to compilation work, Hebrews gives to the son the Pauline title *prōtotokos*, “firstborn.” The verse is not easily interpreted, especially because the exact provenance of the quotation is uncertain: “And again [*palin*], when he brings the firstborn into the world [*eis tēn oikoumenēn*], he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” In the peculiar language of Hebrews, *oikoumenē* is the heavenly homeland, which, in the medio-Platonic perspective of the letter, coexists with our material world, called instead *kosmos* (10:5).

Introducing the text and the explanation of Psalm 8, which we have already seen rooted in the authentic thought of Paul, Hebrews 2:5 states as a known datum: “For it was not to angels that God subjected the world

to come [*hypetaxen tēn oikoumenēn tēn mellousan*], of which we are speaking.” It is in this *oikoumenē* that the Son is presented “again” to receive the *proskynēsis* owed to him as a firstborn. In chapter 12 we read that, in the heavenly Jerusalem, where the angels and the elect celebrate their *panēgyresis*, sits a council of the firstborn.

(You did not approach the Horeb) but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering [*panēgyresis*] and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled [*prōtotokōn apogegrammenōn*] in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect [*dikaiōn teteleiōmenōn*], and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22–24)

In this idealization, the town assembly is made up of firstborn: those regularly enrolled in the *Album* of the City (*apogegrammenōn*). The identification of these characters is disputed, but it is evident that Hebrews thinks that this exquisitely messianic title is in some way participated by other people.

This idealized description is another loan from Paul. In Galatians 4:22–26 he wrote:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai [Horeb] in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

However, in Hebrews, the contrast is not between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. It is rather an opposition between the terrifying theophany of Sinai, which occurred in the wild with the unleashing of natural forces in an environment hostile to human life, and the *civitas Dei* gathered around an unwritten law (*diathēkēs*; covenant and testament)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “L’aujourd’hui de l’écoute entre passé et futur (He 3 – 4),” in *Perceptions bibliques du temps*, ed. M. Staszak and M. Leroy (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2019), 364–76.

that bound the citizens to a common world of customs, with their descendants accepting the legacy.

### The Covenant/Testament

It is a common opinion that Hebrews extends the polysemy of the noun *diathēkē* and the verb *diatithēmi* (that is found in LXX Jer 38:33, and explicitly cited in Heb 8:10 and 10:16), both to the legal role (messiah; *christos*) and to the concrete person of Jesus of Nazareth, attributing to him the seemingly irreconcilable titles of *engyos*, “guarantor, bondsman” (Heb 7:22; a hapax legomenon in the NT, appearing only here), *mesitēs*, “mediator, intermediary” (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and *diathemenos*, “testator” (Heb 9:16–17). Given the composite character of the script, and other manifest cases of internal mutation in meaning of some lexemes, even of a certain weight, there would be no reason to be surprised if such a mutation occurs within the same pericope.

For that reason, Hebrews 9:15–17 has always been a true *crux interpretum*. I present it here according to the 2011 English Standard Version, which translates *diathēkē* alternatively with “covenant” or “testament,” depending on the immediate context.

Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

A recent study<sup>11</sup> summarizes the dilemma that this pericope presents to the interpreters:

In Hebrews 9:15, the context seems to demand the sense of “covenant,” since only a covenant has a mediator (μεσίτης) and reference is made to the first διαθήκη, which the author clearly regards as a covenant. However, in Hebrews 9:16, the requirement for the “death of the one who made it” would seem to suggest the translation “will” or “testament,” since covenants did not require the death

<sup>11</sup> See Scott W. Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15–22,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2004): 416–36.

of their makers. Likewise, in Hebrews 9:17, the statement that a *διαθήκη* takes effect only at death and is not in force while the maker is alive seems to apply only to a testament.

I believe that, even in this case, recourse to Paul may be useful.

In Romans 8:23 we read that the Spirit is *aparchē*, “firstfruit.” That term is known, in the idiomatic sense, as a document attesting to the payment of a fee for the recognition of a child, who is subsequently credited with the legitimate claim to an inheritance. In fact, in 8:23–24, Paul describes the faithful who “await to be recognized as children” (*huiosthesian apekedchomenoi*) following the payment of a “ransom” (*apolytrōsis*). But right now, they have the attestation of the Spirit: *aparchē tou pneumatos*.<sup>12</sup>

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits [*aparchē*] of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

The complex reasoning about the inheritance of believers in Christ starts in Romans 8:14–17.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God [*huiioi Theou*]. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery [*pneuma douleias*] to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of [adoption as] sons [*pneuma huiiothesias*], by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children [*tekna*] of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The *sententia* which opens the reasoning, for its generic nature, could be translated “who are led by the spirit of a god, they are children of a god.” The role of the *pneuma* in the transmission of life is evident to such an

<sup>12</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “Gesù ‘testatore’ della nuova alleanza nella Lettera agli Ebrei: l’apporto delle testimonianze romane per la comprensione di un punto fondante del pensiero di Paolo e della sua scuola (Rm 8; Eb 9; Gaio 2,102–103),” in *Philobiblos: Scritti in onore di Giovanni Geraci*, ed. A. Bencivenni, A. Cristofori, F. Muccioli, and C. Salvaterra (Sesto San Giovanni [Milan]: Jouvence, 2019), 359–422.



extent in the Hellenistic-Roman culture and in some texts of the Old Testament to allow me a simple reference to my previous studies.<sup>13</sup>

The distinction between *huiioi* and *tekna*, “sons” and “children,” seems to be essential in this passage. Far from being mere synonyms, they define respectively the entire process and the first stage of it (*pneuma huiiothesias: tekna* → *aparchē* → *klēronomoi*). The apostle imagines this process as opposite (also if following: *palin*) to the generation of the slave (*pneuma douleias*).

The link between these premises and Romans 8:23 can focus only on the word *eleutheria*, the “condition of being free,” connected with the term childhood (Rom 8.21):

That the creation itself will be set free [*eleuthepōthēsetai*] from its bondage [slavery] to corruption and obtain the freedom [*eis tēn eleutherian*] of the glory of the children [*tōn teknōn*] of God.

In Galatians 4:4–6), a text that seems taken up almost literally in Romans 8, Paul makes acquiring the condition of a child dependent on a ransom:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem [*hina . . . exagorasē*] those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons [“the sonship”: *tēn huiiothesian*]. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

The parallel of Galatians 3:13 seems to give a sacrificial or apotropaic meaning to the verb *exagorazō*, which elsewhere in the New Testament simply means “profit.” For the slaves in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses the simple verb *agorazō* (7:23).

### Recognition of the Child as Heir

The *huiiothesia* is not an act of adoption, but rather the recognition of the quality of the child entitled to the inheritance. This is made evident from another passage in the Letter to the Romans: “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption [“sonship”; *huiiothesia*], the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.” We observe an accumulation of terms characteristic of the foundational mythology, in partic-

<sup>13</sup> See Paolo Garuti, “Polisemia culturale e linguaggio religioso: lo ‘spirito eterno’ e lo ‘spirito della grazia’ nella Lettera agli Ebrei (Eb 9,14 e 10,29),” *Angelicum* 89 (2012): 279–315.

ular the events of the exodus, in reference to texts such as 4:22: “Then you (Moses) shall say to Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son [Heb. *bəni bəḳōrī yišrā’ēl*; LXX *huios prōtotokos mou Israēl*].” We have, so I think, a conceptual paraphernalia sufficient to address Hebrews 9:15–17.

As mentioned above, Hebrews plays on the double meaning of *diathēkē* in the Septuagint: the usual translation of *berit* as “alliance,” in preference to *synthēkē*. The popular etymology, accepted by the Bible, binds *berit*, “covenant,” to the verb *kārat*, “to cut.” A double etiology refers to Abraham’s alliance of Genesis 15 and to that of Moses in Exodus 24. This derivation is very close to the well-known conceptual Latin complex *foedus ferio*, *foedus icio*. In fact, the above-mentioned passage is followed by a quotation about the inauguration ceremony of the mosaic alliance in Hebrews 9:18–20.

Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated [*enkekainistai*] without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded [*eneteilato*] for you.”

Hebrews changes the solemn declaration of Moses in Exodus 24:8, already interpreted by the LXX: the Hebrew “[the blood of] the alliance that the Lord has ‘cut’ with you” becomes the Greek “of the covenant which the Lord has set for you.” In a similar nomistic perspective, the book takes the place of the altar in a rite which is originally intended to establish a sort of magic consanguinity between God and his people.

If the LXX chooses *idou to haima diathēkē hēs dietheto kyrios pros . . .*, it is evidently because the phrase describes provisions between unequals. More problematic is the perfect tense of *enkekainistai* in Hebrews 9:18, which can be interpreted as “was inaugurated” or “has been renewed several times.” In the second case, the obvious reference is the sprinkling of blood in the holy of holies on the *kippur*, aimed to *expiare* for the sins of the people, renewing the pact yearly. Hebrews 9:22–23, on the other hand, recalls the rite using the verb *katharizō* and extends the action to the “purification” of the celestial realities of which the objects of the Mosaic cult are earthly copies. Given the sacrificial context and the traditional cultic language of covenant, the shift to the legal and testamentary vocabulary in Hebrews 9:15–17 is even more strange.

### The *Emptor Familiae*

Even in this case, we do not understand the role of a *mesitēs*. If the deity has commanded (*eneteilato*) the terms of the pact and now calls for a death “in ransom of transgressions,” the *mesitēs* can be a kind of “medium,” an instrument, but cannot perform an active role, which is especially true regarding the disposition-maker. It is true that, in a certain sense, the *ex-piatio* (making one pious again) changes the will of God, but it is not up to the disposition-maker to affect the terms of the pact.

Ambrose, a consummate jurist, knows the problem of assigning an active role to the *mesitēs*, at least as for the interpretation of Hebrews:

And although the Apostle himself told the Hebrews that a testament is of no force, until the death of the testator happen, that is to say, a testament is of no strength while the testator liveth, but is established by his death, yet as in Jeremiah the Lord, speaking of the Jews, has said, *Mine heritage is unto Me as a lion*, he would not deny that they were heirs. But there are heirs without possessions, there are heirs also with them; and while the testator lives those whose names are written in the will are called heirs, though without possessions.<sup>14</sup>

The Jews of his time should, he continues, break free from the slavery of the letter to be truly free; they are *scripti* in the will, but they are *sine re*, for they do not acknowledge that the one who is dead is the testator. It is to say that his death unlocks a suspended situation:

For how can he say “Our Father” who denies the true Son of God, Him by Whom our adoptive sonship is obtained for us? How can he rehearse the will who denies the death of the testator? How can he obtain liberty, who denies the Blood whereby he has been redeemed?<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the polemical terms adopted by Ambrose, the same situation affects the faithful of any origin. They are destined by “disposition” to be children, but by that same “disposition” made needy of a ransom, because being offenders (*apolytrōsin tōn . . . parabaseōn*), and as such reduced to servitude, they must be able to receive the inheritance which was, at an

<sup>14</sup> Ambrose of Milan, Epistle 66 [to Romulus], no. 3, in *St. Ambrose of Milan, Letters*, trans. H. Walford (Oxford: James Parker, 1881), 401–3.

<sup>15</sup> Ambrose, Epistle 66, no. 6.

intermediate stage, in the hands (*engyos*) of only one (*mesitēs*). But, since the same “disposition” provided for the death of the testator, the inheritance can now pass to them. The text’s laborious recourse to the sacrifice of inauguration of the first covenant in Exodus 24 and to the typology of the *kippur* have precisely the function of demonstrating that the testamentary dispositions provided for such death.

In a recent study, without having the pretense to attribute to Hebrews or even to Ambrose a direct reference to the Roman testamentary costumes in the first empire, I registered the curious consonance of vocabulary between the passage of Hebrews, which is the object of our investigation, and a text of Gaius’s *Institutiones* 2.102–3:

[102] Afterwards, a third kind of will was introduced, which was executed by bronze and balance. Where a man who had not made a will at the *Comitia Calata* or in the face of the enemy was apprehensive of sudden death, he usually transferred his estate by sale to a friend, and requested him to distribute it to whomever he desired to have it after his death. This kind of testamentary disposition is styled a will by bronze and balance, because it is effected by the ceremony of mancipation. [103] The two kinds of wills above mentioned have, however, fallen into disuse; and only the one effected by bronze and balance has been retained, but it is now changed from what it was in ancient times. For formerly the purchaser of the estate, that is to say the party who received it by a sale from the testator, occupied the place of the heir, and for this reason the testator directed him with reference to what he desired to be given to anyone after his death. Now, however, another person is appointed heir under the will who is charged with the distribution of legacies, and differs from the one who, as a matter of form and in imitation of the ancient law, represents the purchaser of the estate.<sup>16</sup>

In the seventh chapter, Hebrews states that, by virtue of the divine oath, Jesus “became a guarantor of a better disposition” (Heb 7:22; *kreitonos diathēkēs gegonen engyos*). As a hapax legomenon in the New Testament, if *engyos* is translated as “guarantor,” we remain in the ambiguity above: for whom does Jesus offer a guarantee? The context suggests that, being instituted a priest by virtue of an oath (7:21; *horkōmosia*; see Ps 110:4a), he can better guarantee the truthfulness of the divine promises. But Hebrews, in

<sup>16</sup> *The Institutes of Gaius, Parts One and Two*, text with critical notes and trans., ed. Francis de Zulueta, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946).

6:13,17, definitely denies that God needs this kind of mediation.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself. . . . So, when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath [*emesiteusen horkō*].

The use of *mesiteuō* here, also a hapax legomenon in the whole of the Bible, suggests that those who produced Hebrews considered the presence of a third party as needed in oaths, which is generally God himself (cf. Heb 6:16). Only God is exempt from this necessity. In Hebrews 7, the divine oath “makes” Jesus “priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek,” *engyos* of the best disposition. We are not given to know whether, to the writer, the noun sounded closer to *engys*, “near,” or to *gyē*, “palm of the hand.” The Pauline parallel of Galatians 3:19 would suggest that the second meaning prevails in the communities marked by the thought of the apostle.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made [*to sperma hō epēngeltai*], and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary [*diatageis di’ angelōn en cheri mesitou*].

With an argument analogous to that of the oath in Hebrews 6, Paul’s Letter to the Galatians goes on to say that God, being one alone, does not need mediators. The text of Gaius describes, in the first instance, an intermediate character between the principal testator and the heirs, the *familiae emptor*. A friend of the owner is buying the whole *familia* (persons and goods) for a real price in the form of *mancipio*, and thereby “held the place of an heir” (*heredis locum optinebat*). By virtue of this mancipation, he acts as executor.

The *familiae emptor* originally covered in this institute an active role, being in all effects part of the *negotium*. If it concerns us here, it is, in addition to mere reasons of vocabulary, due to the different duties that the *familiae emptor* assumes, being both the guarantee of minors and being responsible for the eventual freeing of slaves by payment of the fee due. But the role is even more important because it witnesses the process created to transfer the inheritance to those who had no immediate right to it. This universal fictitious acquisition is not necessarily synonymous with fraud or unlawfulness, even if it should not be overlooked that the legal custom was originally born in circumvention of the law, to transfer property to benefi-

ciaries otherwise unable to receive *mortis causa*. It was the case of women, of the *latini iuniani*, the slaves tampered with in a non-solemn form, of celibates and orphans, pilgrims or public institutions, like the *ciuitates*, the *municipia* or the corporations.<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusions

For the author of Hebrews, the reason remains to be explained, by recourse to the covenant ceremony described in Exodus 24, why we should wait for the death of the *emptor familiae* to give full application to *his* testament.

An obvious first consequence of this vision is that the term *redemptio* does not refer to the purchase, at the price of blood, of anything from God or from the devil, but it describes the role by which the new testator was in real possession of the *familia*. Death is felt as necessary for the execution of the new will, not for the acquisition of the right to make a testament. Chrysostom has unfortunately taught the idea of a mutation of the Father's heart:

*And for this cause* (he says) *He is the Mediator of the New Testament*. What is a *Mediator*? A mediator is not lord of the thing of which he is mediator, but the thing belongs to one person, and the mediator is another: as for instance, the mediator of a marriage is not the bridegroom, but one who aids him who is about to be married. So then also here: The Son became Mediator between the Father and us. The Father willed not to leave us this inheritance, but was angry against us, and was displeased [with us] as being estranged [from Him]; He accordingly became Mediator between us and Him, and prevailed with Him. And what then? How did He become Mediator? He brought words from [Him] and brought [them to us], conveying over what came from the Father to us, and adding His own death thereto. We had offended: we ought to have died: He died for us and made us worthy of the Testament. By this is the Testament secure, in that henceforward it is not made for the unworthy. At the beginning indeed, He made His dispositions as a father for sons; but after we had become unworthy, there was no longer need of a testament, but of punishment.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> List given by F. Bertoldi, "L'heres *fiduciarius* in una prospettiva storico-comparatistica," *Studi Urbinati* 83 (2015): 157–235.

<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, homily 16, no. 2, Oxford trans., rev. Frederic Gardiner, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, series, 1, vol. 14, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004 [4th printing; original American ed.

A second consequence is that, in Hebrews, the Messiah, as the bearer of the promises, expands the range of the beneficiaries without excluding the first heirs. To use the terms of Ambrose, now they too can become heirs with possessions (*heredes cum re*). Asterius the Sophist, if he is the author of the homilies on the Psalms that bear his name, and with him fathers like Chrysostom, will use these texts to exclude from the testament the first heirs.

A Testament is made towards the last day, [the day] of death. And a testament is of this character: It makes some heirs, and some disinherited. So in this case also: *I will that where I am*, Christ says, *they also may be* (John 17:24). And again of the disinherited, hear Him saying, *I pray not for all, but for them that believe in Me through their word* (John 17:20). Again, a testament has relation both to the testator, and to the legatees; so that they have some things to receive, and some to do. So also in this case. For after having made promises innumerable, He demands also something from them, saying, *a new commandment I give unto you* (John 13:34). Again, a testament ought to have witnesses. Hear Him again saying, *I am one that bear witness of Myself, and He that sent Me bears witness of Me* (John 8:18) And again, *He shall testify of Me* (John 15:26), speaking of the Comforter. The twelve Apostles too He sent, saying, *Bear ye witness before God*.<sup>19</sup>

The greater consequence, for us, however, is that the priestly prerogatives, first reserved for an aristocracy internal to a determined ethnicity, are now transmitted to all the faithful, who in the Jerusalem of heaven are already spirits *dikaiōn teteleiōmenōn*, “of the righteous led to the *telos*.” On the other hand, Hebrews 11:39–40 says of the Old Testament heroes:

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect [*teleiōthōsin; be brought by the telos*].

The priestly people are created, therefore, by the transmission of the Christic prerogatives, passed from the testator to the co-heirs: this is the novelty of Hebrews. In the perspective of the oldest layer of its composition,

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by Christian Liberty Publishers, 1889]).

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, homily 16.



focused on the concept of *telos*, the texts we have considered develop, in a priestly key, our participation in the inheritance not only formerly belonging exclusively to the children of Abraham, but also to the sons of Aaron, with whom God had established a *diathēkē hierateias aiōnia*, a “covenant of eternal priesthood” (LXX Num 25:13). N.V



## Book Reviews

**Dogma im Wandel: Wie Glaubenslehren sich entwickeln** by Michael Seewald (*Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2018*), 334 pp.

**Reform: Dieselbe Kirche anders denken** by Michael Seewald (*Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2019*), 174 pp.

TWO RECENT BOOKS from Michael Seewald, professor of dogmatics at the University of Münster, are influenced by Walter Kasper and attempt to show that “there is more room for change [in the Church] than many people think” (*Dogma im Wandel*, 20). By analyzing the development of the magisterium (*Lebramt*) over the past 150 years, and especially under John Paul II, Seewald argues that some of the teachings we take to be definitive are, in truth, questionable. The Church is thus ripe for reform.

*Dogma* is prefaced by a German translation of Evelyn Waugh’s foreword to his 1964 *Sword of Honour* (a trilogy comprising his novels *Men at Arms* [1952], *Officers and Gentlemen* [1955], and *Unconditional Surrender* [1961]):

On reading the book I realized that I had done something quite outside my original intention. I had written an obituary of the Roman Catholic Church in England as it had existed for many centuries. All the rites and most of the opinions here described are already obsolete. When I wrote *Brideshead Revisited* I was consciously writing an obituary of the doomed English upper class. It never occurred to me, writing *Sword of Honour*, that the Church was susceptible to change. I was wrong and I have seen a superficial revolution in what then seemed permanent.<sup>1</sup>

This becomes programmatic for Seewald’s two books, addressed to a

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<sup>1</sup> However, instead of Waugh’s original English “superficial revolution” reproduced here, Seewald’s German translation has the equivalent of “revolution with permanent results” (*Dogma*, 9).

semi-popular audience. One of Seewald's concerns seems to be to demonstrate that those who are alienated by Pope Francis's changes in doctrine and complain of the Holy Father's innovations are themselves inheritors of a revolution in Church doctrine concerning the magisterium that occurred under the cloak of conservatism.<sup>2</sup> Those who oppose Francis's changes, it is implied, are like Waugh, who did not see that there is no historical end to the development of doctrine (*Dogma*, 294).

After an introductory chapter, an important second chapter of *Dogma*, "Definition of Terms: Dogma and Development" (22–73), provides a foreshadowing of the conclusion of the book. The first half of the chapter presents a history of the idea of dogma as both the whole of Catholic teaching and (later) individual doctrines. As is true of his analysis in both books, it is Seewald's presentation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas ("modernity") that are central to his argument. In the first half of chapter 2, Seewald argues that Pius IX's "Syllabus of Errors" was itself an innovation with an anti-innovation intention (36–42) and that the reception of the Second Vatican Council in the pontificate of John Paul II betrayed the desire of the Council to reposition the teaching authority of the Church in the entire college of bishops. Seewald also introduces here an inquiry into the change in the conception of dogma introduced by John Paul II that will be essential to his analysis of the present state of the Church in both books.

John Paul II's 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, says Seewald, contains a revolution in §88 when it says that dogmas are those truths that are either contained in revelation or those truths that have a necessary connection to the truths contained in revelation (*Dogma*, 45). There are two ways in which a secondary truth can be necessarily tied to revelation in such a way as to qualify as dogma: it can be bound to revelation either logically or historically (47). This is highly innovative and a significant departure or advance from the first Vatican Council, according to Seewald. However, he argues, secondary truths that were once thought to be dogmas can be overturned (51). Thus monogenism, declared a dogma in Pius XII's *Humani Generis*, is no longer held by the 1992 *Catechism*.

I would here make two suggestions. First, with Karl Rahner, I would argue that the teaching on monogenism had a conditional element to it. That is, it was dependent on whether or not the key claims about the Fall could be defended in any other way. Second, the *Catechism* both lacks

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<sup>2</sup> See *Reform*, 66. For opponents of Francis's *Amoris Laetitia*, see *Dogma*, 19–20 and 288. For a discussion of those opposed to changes in the *Catechism* concerning the death penalty, see *Reform*, 85–87 and 120.

the authority of dogma and does not contain all of the doctrinal claims of the Church.

In the following section, Seewald considers the notion of the development of dogma. Asserting that human beings are cooperators in God's grace, Seewald argues that those who exclude history from their understanding of dogma exclude humanity's role and are guilty of idolatry while those who see the development of dogma exclusively from a historical perspective do not see God at work in human affairs (*Dogma*, 54). This is central to Seewald's argument in both books. He thus concludes his second chapter of *Dogma* with a criticism of theories of the development of dogma that see it as a process in which, in Aristotelian terms, the potential of a subject is actualized. Seewald objects that such a conception does not include the active contribution of human beings. This seems to me to be something of a strawman, as such conceptions of development, while perhaps popular in the beginning of the twentieth century when John Henry Newman's were resisted by neo-Scholasticism, carry no currency today, when Newman's influence has become more pronounced. On the other hand, Seewald might argue that, when pressed, even advocates of Newman resort to the claim that the Church holds all future doctrinal development at least implicitly. Seewald argues that such a view does not account for the genuine human contribution to doctrinal development. However, I would ask: if truths not held implicitly are added on to the apostolic deposit, have we not altered the substance of that deposit and hence altered the substance of the Church?

Chapters 3–6 (*Dogma*, 74–229), which present a history of the idea of development of dogma, are engaging but do little to further Seewald's argument other than to demonstrate that the idea of change while preserving identity has been with the Church since her beginning. A few points are salient, however. Seewald, following the nineteenth-century theologian Adam Gengler, argues that it is only after a doctrinal dispute that the canon of Vincent of Lerins can be applied to determine true doctrine (137). From Johann Adam Möhler we learn that "the truth of ecclesial doctrine can only be truly understood within the Church. . . . The same can only be known by the same, *similis simili cognoscitur*" (190).

The seventh chapter of *Dogma*, "The Twentieth Century: From the Sphere of Anti-modernism to the Assimilation of the Second Vatican Council" (230–69), addresses the doctrine of the Assumption and the reflections of Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger, and Kasper. Consideration of the thought of the three German theologians leads to the important eighth chapter, "Synopsis and Prospect: More Leeway than We Thought" (270–93).

Seewald states that none of the theories of development of dogma that he has reviewed can say what must or must not happen in a particular situation. Those who are looking for such a theory view history as a “deterministic preprogrammed course of events” (*Dogma*, 270). I would ask here, then, whether we cannot rule out statements such as “Jesus did not rise from the dead.” I am not sure that Seewald’s account allows us to rule out such propositions. Indeed, it is quite difficult to determine what must remain and what must change, but Seewald sketches three aspects of what he thinks must be the basis for future theories of the development of dogma in the last section of the book (8.4, “A Look Forward” [281–93]).

First, dogma is not an end in itself, but rather has an instrumental character. Here Seewald positions himself as being in agreement with Vatican I. His further elaboration of what he means by “instrument” seems to leave Vatican I behind, however, for Seewald proceeds to distinguish sharply revelation, the word of God and the Gospel, from dogma. The Gospel is more important than the dogma which serves it (*Dogma*, 284). I wonder, however, whether if we are not bound by doctrine we will be tempted to distort the Gospel to fit our own cultural norms. Seewald does not address this question, but assures his readers that his proposal is the opposite of relativism, because dogmatic development is about better understanding the Gospel (285). This better understanding of the Gospel neither leads to an arrogance toward the past nor precludes a correction of the present. However, Seewald does not clearly articulate how this correction of the present might occur.

This strikes me as inadequate as a theory. It is true that dogma is not itself “the truth” as it exists in its fullness in Christ. But it gains whatever authority it has by being an adequate expression of that revelation; that is, dogma truthfully expresses the reality of the Gospel. If the revelation does not change (“Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever”), then, while it is true that dogmatic formulations may change, they can change only in the sense of being various attempts to express a revealed reality that does not change. If dogmatic formulations do not agree with one another, they can hardly be said to express the same truths of revelation. That is, contradictions of dogmatic statements imply either an incoherence in the revealed reality or that the unchanging apostolic deposit that defines the Church can in fact change.

Here we see a further weakness in Seewald’s account that is common in many contemporary Catholic accounts of the development of doctrine and that Orthodox theologians such as Andrew Louth rightly criticize. In such accounts, the present is in danger of becoming the criterion of judgment both of the past and of the apostolic deposit. There is a sense

that we necessarily know the Gospel or the deposit better than Gregory Nazianzen, Augustine, Aquinas, or Thérèse of Lisieux. Ideas such as Newman's corruptions or Matthias Scheeben's forgetting of aspects of the apostolic deposit seem an essential corrective to contemporary theology.

Seewald's second aspect for a future theology of the development of dogma is that continuity is an ecclesial desideratum, not just a doctrinal one. Pure continuity would be to stand still. The guarantor of continuity is the community of the Church, not doctrine. I submit that divorcing doctrine from the Church is a particularly dangerous move. How can we know what the Church is if our knowledge of the Church, expressed in dogma, is subject to radical reversal? Is not the Church herself historicized and her principle of continuity lost?

The third consideration is that we do not have a divine view of the development of dogma. There is no magic formula for dogmatic development which occurs in diverse languages and cultures and, therefore, necessarily appears contingent to us. Theology as a science of belief (*Glaubenswissenschaft*) never has the last word (*Dogma*, 293). The Church proceeds by the faith, not knowledge, so that she will not entirely lose the Gospel. However, I would argue that dogma here becomes an eschatological horizon, never attainable as a sure propositional judgment of truth prior to the eschaton. If so, then "Gospel" and "Church" are also eschatological in this same sense, and are not identifiable here.

An epilogue of *Dogma* reconsiders what Seewald calls Waugh's obituary for the Church and, harkening back to his earlier consideration of the Darwinian context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of development, concludes that "a healthy evolutionism allows her [the Church] to remain forever young" (295). Of course, one might suggest that an evolution, in Darwin's sense, is a gradual change to a new substance, or rather, for Darwin and perhaps Seewald, there is no species or enduring form to the Church. Of course, Seewald argues for a *Gestalt* or form to the Church, but his argument about dogma would seem to empty the *Gestalt* of its content.

In his 2019 *Reform*, Seewald elaborates many of the themes broached in his 2018 *Dogma*. Here, as in *Dogma*, Seewald does not propose a wish list of changes, but proposes to look at the history of the Church to reclaim different configurations (*Gestalten*) of the Church with the intention of bringing about reform (*Reform*, 10). As in *Dogma*, attention is drawn to the increase in papal claims under Vatican I, Pius IX, the reforms of Vatican II, and the re-entrenchment under John Paul II. As in *Dogma*, the second chapter of *Reform* is central to understanding the work and focuses on the development of the teaching authority of the Church from Vatican



I to John Paul II. Section 2.2, “The Catholic Church and Modernity” (21–49), concludes by stating that modernity refuses to accept Church authority and that the Church can respond in two ways: by giving reasons for her doctrines (which she rarely has done) or by increasing her claims to authority (which she has done) (48). Allow me here to interject and ask whether it is true that, for instance, John Paul II and Benedict XVI did not provide extensive theological and philosophical arguments in support of dogma.

The following section, “The Teaching Office, a Modern Construct” (*Reform*, 49–64) covers much the same ground as did “The Contemporary Concept of Dogma” in *Dogma* (42–51), although in greater detail. His argument in this section of *Reform* is central to the book. In the nineteenth century, the pope was elevated to the status of supertheologian by Joseph Kleutgen and others (52). The increase in papal authority in teaching the faith was not, according to Seewald and Herman Josef Pottmeyer, a logical or organic development of the Petrine idea. “Rather,” in Seewald’s citation of Pottmeyer:

Much more it was an increase of the consciousness of the Church as not only a protector and witness to the inheritance that was given her, but also a more active creator of this inheritance, in contemporary terms, she is the active subject of her own history. (55; citing p. 29 of Pottmeyer, *Die Rolle des Papstums im Dritten Jahrtausend* [1999])

This development is traced through Vatican I, Scheeben, the Code of Canon Law of 1917, and the seismic shift at Vatican II. And yet, as in *Dogma*, Seewald is keen in *Reform* to point out that the operative definition of dogma in these texts extends only to revealed truths (60). No mention is made of ancillary truths as dogma. This remains the case at Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* §25. And yet there is a great change at Vatican II in that there was an attempt to mute or dampen the pope’s role in the magisterium by emphasizing the infallibility of the Church as a whole (*Reform*, 57) and by speaking first of the role of the bishops, and only then the pope, in the articulation of doctrine (*Reform*, 59).

Seewald argues that this self-limitation of the Church’s infallible teaching authority as limited to revelation—in the texts of Vatican I and Vatican II—ended under John Paul II (*Reform*, 62) and the emphasis on the bishops was overturned under the same Pontiff (61). These changes, Seewald argues, were made with the stated goal of preserving perennial Church teaching but in fact amount to a revolution in the Church in the name of

conservativism (66). Once we put the development of the magisterium in its historical context as Seewald does, we can go about the work of reform by considering other *Gestalten* of the Church (64).

In chapter 3, Seewald analyzes the three ways that the Church has gone about dogmatic development. The first, and most rare, is self-correction (*Reform*, 74–87). Seewald gives the example of the matter of the sacrament of Holy Orders. At the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century, the matter of the ordination of priests was defined with the very highest binding (*allerhöchster Verbindlichkeit* [81]) as the giving of the chalice with wine and the paten with bread by the bishop to the priest (79). In his 1947 *Sacramentum Ordinis*, Pius XII declares that the matter of the sacrament is the laying on of hands, not the giving of the chalice and paten.

This obviously created a problem. Two infallible subjects (an ecumenical council and the pope) have stated in authoritative documents a contradiction about important issues (*Reform*, 83). Pius XII responded to this dilemma with two strategies. First, and this may be surprising to find in 1947, Pius said that the Church can change what she has established (*Sacramentum Ordinis*, §3). This may not be surprising *in ius mere ecclesiasticum*, but the question here is about a sacrament, about the substance of which the Church has no authority, since Christ himself established them (*Reform*, 83). Secondly, Pius declares with great solemnity (*declaramus . . . decernimus . . . disponimus . . . statuimus . . . constituimus* [*Reform*, 84]) that the laying on of hands by the bishop is the matter. In this text, Pius XII distinguishes in §§3–4 between what was once (*aliquando*) taught and what the Church will hold in the future (*in posterum*) (84–85). Seewald concludes that “it is possible in principle that the Church can correct herself even in important matters” (85). For what is more substantial than the office of priest, which Christ himself established? (One might suggest here that clarity about the interpretation of a rite of the Church may take centuries, just as it took centuries for the Church to define that marriage is a sacrament.)

Seewald then compares Pius’s self-correction of the Church teaching with Francis’s 2018 change of the *Catechism* regarding the death penalty. Like Pius’s language of *aliquando* and *in posterum*, the revised *Catechism* contrasts teaching on the death penalty as it stood for a long time with how the Church thinks about it now (§2267 [*diu* and *hodie*; although one might quibble that there is quite a difference between *aliquando* and *diu*]). Although Seewald believes it to be an issue of less dogmatic import than the transmission of the priestly office, the question of the revision of Church teaching on the legitimacy of the death penalty has been grounds for accusing Francis of heresy, as can be seen in *First Things*’s August 2018

“An Appeal to the Cardinals of the Catholic Church” (*Reform*, 86). It is ironic that those who think so highly of Pius XII, seeing him as a preserver of Church teaching, do not see that Francis is less an innovator than his predecessor (87).

The second way is by forgetting earlier pronouncements. Here Seewald brings up the example of monogenism, which was proposed as dogma in Pius XII’s *Humani Generis* and silently passed over in the 1992 *Catechism* (*Reform*, 92). Although the magisterium has never thematized how this process of forgetting works, it has often employed it. Mother Church nourishes her children with the milk of knowledge and the water of Lethe. Seewald asks whether the Church can forget in the same way John Paul II’s ban on the ordination of women (95). Here, I might ask: is there not something more fundamental at stake than the question of the paten or the laying on of hands?

The third way the Church teaching can be changed, according to the author, is by camouflaging the innovation. As an illustration of this, Seewald provides an analysis of religious liberty and Vatican II’s *Dignitatis Humanae*, which presents a new understanding of religious liberty under the cloak of continuity.

Of course, in his example of the new dogma of religious liberty, Seewald is not presenting a novel argument or one that does not have opposing accounts. Ian Ker and Avery Dulles, for instance, have argued that the articulation of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae* is not novel but rather preserves the type of the perennial Christian teaching about the duty of human beings toward the truth. Earlier ecclesial condemnations of religious liberty, rather than contradicting *Dignitatis Humanae*, in fact agree with it, for both the earlier condemnations and Vatican II condemn the idea that one can choose whatever religion one pleases. Indeed, *Dignitatis Humanae* does not teach that one can choose just any religion, but rather that the conscience bears the duty of seeking and adhering to the truth (§1). Even the conscience has its limits, for freedom of conscience is allowed as long as “the requirements of public order are observed” (§2). In other contexts, such as in the Latin Middle Ages, when public order was grounded in a shared religious vision, the shape of religious liberty would appear differently from how it does in the twentieth century.

In his ante-penultimate chapter in *Reform*, Seewald reminds us of Hugh of St. Victor’s distinction between *affectus* and *cognitio* (124; cf. *Dogma*, 156–67). The substance of the faith, known by the *affectus* accessible even to the uneducated, has primacy over the propositions of theologians. What is central to the faith is not doctrine, but conviction that God has proven

his power in raising Jesus from the dead (*Reform*, 128).<sup>3</sup>

In these two books, Seewald presents an argument for a kind of continuity and another of discontinuity. He wants a continuity of the Gospel and discontinuity of dogma. That dogma has changed is a historical fact, according to Seewald (although certain illustrations of that claim can certainly be challenged). That it should change is a theological possibility.

It is noteworthy that Seewald is not arguing for either continuity or discontinuity (an impasse in contemporary theology, it seems), but rather for both continuity and discontinuity: continuity of the Gospel and discontinuity in dogma (in one sense of the term). The discontinuity in dogma is both historical fact and theological possibility, according to Seewald. Certain changes in dogma would in fact better preserve the continuity of the *Gestalt* of the Church, while preserving fossilized doctrines might distort the Church. Here Seewald differs from some contemporary American theologians and ecclesiastical historians in that he is not criticizing R. G. Collingwood's "substantialism" in history, for Seewald sees a substance to the Church, but that substance is not as closely linked to the dogmas that many would consider definitive.

On the other hand, I wonder whether divorcing dogma from the Church would allow the Church to retain her *Gestalt*. Without the supra-historical claims to truth that dogma entails, what is left of the Church? The implication of Seewald's argument is that history (meaning the present) judges divine revelation rather than revelation judging history. One cannot help but suggest that Seewald's argument is grounded in a kind of historicism in which there are no fixed truths articulated in the past that shape the present or future.

In the end, Seewald's books are marked by a kind of confusion present in his use of the foreword to Waugh's *Sword of Honour*. Waugh never criticized texts such as *Dignitatis Humanae*. Indeed, he did not think that Vatican II fundamentally changed the dogma of the Church. That Waugh calls Vatican II a "superficial revolution" points to this. He abhorred the liturgical changes of the Council because he thought that they would unravel far more than was intended, but he never lost his faith in the Church. Seewald's opponents—and they are rarely mentioned directly—similarly have not lost their faith in the living authoritative magisterium of the Church, but they are concerned that there is a temptation of certain

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<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, one might argue that the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead is itself a doctrine! Rather than a dichotomy between faith and propositions, one might consider the propositions of theologians are simply expressions of the substance of the faith.

members of the hierarchy to change the form of the Church by preaching a Gospel without dogma. N.V.

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**That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation** by David Bentley Hart (*New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019*), 222 pp.

THE FACT THAT Paul Griffiths calls David Hart “the most eminent living Anglophone theologian” (back cover), despite Hart’s rebuttal to annihilationist proposals (see 86-87 and 194) like that advanced by Griffiths’s book *Decreation*, is quite significant, given Griffiths’s own prestige. However, no matter how esteemed a theologian might be, he may not claim either infallibility or immunity to criticism. As an Eastern Orthodox theologian, Hart feels particular freedom to follow the Cappadocian Father St. Gregory of Nyssa in affirming the salvation of all creatures in the new creation, subsequent to purification appropriate for each. In addition to Nyssa, Hart invokes Origen, St. Basil the Great, St. Maximus the Confessor, Evagrius Ponticus, and a couple lesser-known Eastern thinkers who follow in the same line. Scholars have questioned some of these invocations (e.g., Brian Daley, S.J., has a different view of Maximus, at least). Catholics, of course, are constrained by a broader and more developed tradition, which is therefore more restrictive. I will focus on Hart’s more expansive, speculative argumentation proffered against the notion of an eternal hell.

The book is structured into three parts: “The Question of an Eternal Hell,” which contains two chapters more or less introducing his reasoning concerning the problem; “*Apokatastasis*: Four Meditations,” the meat of the book (four chapters); and “What May be Believed,” which is simply an epilogue of sorts. I think Hart eventually makes some robust arguments for his position (especially in the final meditations of part 2), even though I respectfully disagree with them for reasons to be explained. However, the tone of the book—a revised compilation of talks delivered by Hart on the topic—strikes this reader as incredibly arrogant, which does not make for healthy intellectual debate. Besides the lack of source citations (although he appends a few bibliographic notes to the end), which I suppose is to be expected in this type of publication (although one would think Yale had higher editorial standards), repetitive *ad hominem* attacks

against those who profess belief in an eternal hell, whom he calls “infernalists,” cannot help his cause, even though he claims not to be interested in persuading anyone, given the apparent remoteness of such a possibility (4–6, 18, 202–3, and 207–8). He provides, perhaps, a window into his own psychology by continuously attempting to psychoanalyze the reasons people believe in an eternal hell (e.g., 19–21, 146–51, and 206): in adolescence he experienced a philosophico-theological dilemma (see 10–16), similar conceptually to the one I also suffered—simply put, an indignation towards any god that would not be so good, wise, and powerful as to convert everyone to his love.

Throughout the various chapters of this collection are the same fundamental arguments, articulated in slightly different ways and contexts. He repeatedly asserts that there is no reason why an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God would will or even permit the eternal condemnation of any of his (intellectual) creatures, whom he created precisely for everlasting communion with him. He argues that such a God would be a failure or a contradiction because, only if He could ensure the salvation of all, would an infinitely loving, powerful, and wise God create at all. He sees the view that the condemnation of some is necessary for the greater manifestation of God’s glory as both merciful and just in nature as simply sadistic. Hence, in the penultimate meditation of the second part, he takes particular umbrage at the claim of Aquinas and others that the blessed must rejoice at the justice manifested in the punishments imposed upon those who are eternally condemned (see especially 169).

Probably the strongest part of the book is the final meditation of the second part—“What is Freedom? A Reflection on the Rational Will”—which I cannot address here in adequate detail. He argues there that creatures are incapable of making eternal or everlasting decisions; that is, there is no reason to suppose it even possible for intellectual beings limited in freedom to possess the power to determine their unending futures. He is staunchly committed to an “intellectualist,” even determinist, view of freedom (see especially 178), according to which there is no such thing as indifference between two apparently equal goods, but only rational process that guarantees eventual attainment of the ultimate good toward which all things are directed by the supreme good. He does not even deem the contemporary compatibilist–libertarian debate worth addressing, although it is not difficult to determine on which side he lands, assuming the debate can be so nicely separated into two basic camps (a questionable division, indeed).

He takes it as axiomatic that perfect freedom would be required for an everlasting choice to be possible, and at the same time, he insists that



choices are free only insofar as they are good. But, if only perfect freedom is true freedom, why would God grant us the capacity for evil at all? If only the good must be chosen in the end, why must it not be chosen now? In other words, if it is incompatible with God's omnibenevolence to permit eternal self-exclusion from glory, why would it not be incompatible with God's omnibenevolence to permit evil at all? Hart never seeks to answer this obvious rebuttal to his rhetorically aggressive case against the goodness of a God that would create immaterial beings capable of self-condemnation. Is it not incumbent upon him to show why it is not plausible for God to create imperfectly free beings capable of determining their everlasting destinies precisely by deciding finally (before disembodiment transports them into aeviternity) between loving self above God and loving God above self? The most he can do is point out that the power to choose evil must not be essential to created freedom, given that Christ was truly human and could not have chosen evil (see especially 212). Still, is not *non posse peccare* the fulfillment of freedom rather than its beginning or means (*posse non peccare*) [see 173]? Furthermore, it might be argued just as easily that it is fitting for most (if not all) intellectual beings, besides the God-man, to be granted, in accordance with their imperfection as mere creatures, the possibility of choosing evil precisely so that the good of choosing good *when evil was really possible* would also exist alongside the perfect freedom granted a select few (at least the Blessed Virgin). In this way, *bonum est diffusivum sui* (the good is diffusive of itself) in truly Dionysian fashion—hierarchically!

I agree with his view (articulated in part 1) that we ought to scrutinize the goodness of purported divine acts. I also agree that the notion of the blessed rejoicing at the justice of family members languishing forever in flames is repellant to the (modern) Christian imagination, as he displays in the penultimate meditation of part 2. It is certainly hard, at least, to imagine "a heaven above [a hell]" (as Ratzinger says in *Eschatology*, 188). At the same time, there are good reasons for believing that some (perhaps few) people have chosen recalcitrance in evil, despite the prayers of all the saints, and yet true suffering ought not to touch the blessed any more than it does the divine essence, as they see him even as he sees himself (see 1 John 3:2 and 1 Cor 13:12). Part of the reason why Hart finds an eternal hell incomprehensible is his prior commitment to *epektasis*, an everlasting dynamic "reaching out" for God, Nyssa's term for the creature's temporal relationship to the only timeless One in the afterlife (see 191 and 203). I am inclined to agree that, if hell is metronomic (to use Griffiths's characterization of *chronos*), everlasting anguish for any sin seems disproportionate, in which case either hell is not metronomic, the anguish we imagine in hell



is not everlasting (as Hart argues), or it is not actually disproportionate. The argument for the last option is that turning toward evil not merely as a means but as an end (albeit proximate, given that the ultimate good must always be intended implicitly) at the moment when the human being ceases to live as an embodied whole (i.e., death in the state of mortal sin) is a relatively infinite offense because of the infinite dignity of the good offended and the intrinsically perverse nature of the object of the act. Nonetheless, I do not see why the time of hell cannot be complete *stasis* (as Newman suggests it might in “Note III” appended to the 1930 Longmans reprint edition of *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*) or why this should be reserved to God alone. If, however, time beyond this world must be progressive, rather than aeviternal (a notion Hart does not engage), why not admit the possibility of an ever-increasing natural beatitude granted miraculously in the new creation to those without the beatific vision?

In terms of the channels of divine revelation, Hart does not address here the condemnations of Origenism by Pope Vigilius or Pope St. Martin I (although he briefly addresses the former in a *First Things* article) or the subsequent papal and conciliar restatements of the doctrine of hell. He does, however, address some of the scriptural arguments. He appeals ultimately to his recent translation of the New Testament (see 3 and 95–105), also published by Yale, and lays out a number of passages he thinks plainly speak of universal salvation, compared to the passages traditionally invoked against such a position, which he interprets as merely parabolic, figurative, and misinterpreted due to misleading translations (see 93–95, 106–14, and 119–20). Particularly, he makes a Nyssan argument that the Greek word typically translated as “eternal” or “everlasting”—*aiōnios*—ought to be understood, rather, as an “age” that will pass away when God becomes “all in all” (see 103–4 and 121–26). Despite Hart’s argumentation, which is to appeal to third- and fourth-century Greek Christian authorities (see esp. 123), it remains unclear, at least to me, as to whether there were better ancient Greek words that could have been used to convey “eternal” or “everlasting” (he grants that there were no Hebrew equivalents [see 125–26]).

Furthermore, many of the apparently universalist passages may be fairly interpreted simply to refer to God’s intent to save all, not the actual accomplishment of saving all from perdition. Obviously, the question then circles back to whether God can truly desire something and not bring it to fruition. I suggest that the Scriptures, read within the larger tradition, clearly indicate the plausibility, at least, that God desires all men to be saved, but more specifically to *convert without being coerced*, and absent such conversion, permits some to fall down the rabbit’s hole, as it were. Bishop Robert

Barron would say it is simple “spiritual physics” that those who choose evil consistently have less and less ability not to choose it. In other words, evil is a spiritual addiction that eats away at the very desire to escape it and, thus, ultimately destroys the freedom of the one persistently lured by its snares. Since it is possible for finite intellects to choose myopically to focus in on a finite good out of love of self and fear of losing such, that is, to turn a blind eye to what is beyond that which is *apparently* good for self, it is possible for the free creature to become “absorbed,” as it were, by the chaos to which it succumbs. But Hart, in the end, finds it intolerable to imagine a good God willing to permit this (see 6 and 166).

Thus, the question ultimately boils down to how one understands the divine economy of supernatural grace and finite freedom. While Hart, in other places, seems to reject the predestinarian logic and argues even here against “the late Augustinian tradition” and its “early modern variants” (199), he still—at least, tacitly—accepts the premise that the grace–freedom dynamic ought to be conceived in terms of infinite versus finite power (see 13, 140–41, and 183–84). I have argued elsewhere that this is a mistaken paradigm for understanding predestination and providence, if we are to grant the *apparently* conflicting realities of persistent moral evil and divine innocence. I think, however, the crux of the issue for Hart is the question of the nature of human freedom, or at least that is the aspect of the problem on which he seems fixated. At the same time, I think a more developed understanding of the relationship between nature and grace in general would benefit Hart in making further distinctions with regard to how God may become “all in all” without simply overriding the obduracy in evil that some evidently choose during their lifetime. (Why are they guaranteed to change?) For instance, Jacques Maritain’s proposal for how God might permeate all things (not merely ontologically speaking, but morally speaking) in the new creation includes the universal restoration of all creatures on the *natural* level, not the supernatural (i.e., those who exclude themselves from the beatific vision are possibly granted eternal *natural* happiness, despite not receiving perfect union with the triune God). As is mentioned even in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *Dare We Hope* (see 245n21), whose universalism Hart thinks too timid (see 66 and 102–3), Maximus the Confessor interprets Gregory of Nyssa’s final *apokatastasis* as a universal restoration *of nature*, not *of grace*, wiping away all remnants of evil, as if evil men will be restored to their original childhood innocence after aeons (*aiōnion*) of purification (see Maximus, *Questiones et dubia* 13). Perhaps, then, the following words of Jesus provide the best reconciliation of the so-called universalist scriptural passages (esp. 1 Cor 15:28) and the many passages that speak of final judgment (e.g., Matt 25:

31–46): “In my Father’s house [*oikia*], there are many dwelling-places [*monai*]” (John 14:2). N.V.

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**That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation** by David Bentley Hart (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019*), 222 pp.

WHAT CAN ONE SAY about David Bentley Hart’s *That All Shall Be Saved*? It does not seem to be a text which admits of moderate responses. Its readers seem almost exclusively to laud it as a new epoch in Christian theology or to condemn it as a screed of *ad hominem*s which rejects the vast majority of Christians throughout history. Still, one wants to be as positive as one can, if for no other reason than that after reading *That All Shall Be Saved* one thirsts desperately for even a drop of irenicism. I have three major thoughts about Hart’s work, which is broken up into four “Meditations.” My first thought deals with the mode of Hart’s prose and argumentation; the second and third deal briefly with two of the arguments themselves.

First, much has been made about the form of Hart’s delivery (both here and in previous works), and I think justifiably so. Even after completing the work, I am still unsure as to what Hart’s intentions with the book were. It often reads more like a personal journal or the beginnings of a comprehensive work which is still gestating than a work of speculative theology. Hart spends substantial time earlier in the book discussing his own experiences and history. He never directly engages any particular theological text, historical or contemporary. Names and ideas are referenced in passing but never cited. A single contemporary text is mentioned but hardly explored (Brian Davies’s *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* takes that honor). One keeps expecting the rhetorical setup to punch through to a complete argument on the next page, but the blow never lands. There are the beginnings of very interesting ideas here, but the times in which they are argued forcefully or even fleshed out are few and far between. The work concludes with a basic re-hashing of the post-modern trope on the genesis of the doctrine of hell: the Church, especially when it mixed with temporal powers, duplicitously concocted an error to keep the rabble in line. The rhetoric is rich, but there is not an ounce of historical evidence to back up the claim. On the very final pages of the book, Hart seems to be alert to

the lack of argumentation, saying: "I could go on. I could, if nothing else, spend a few hundred pages more dealing with certain highly technical issues of Christian metaphysical tradition. . . . But I do not think that it would actually add anything to the essential arguments of these pages," (207–8). It is hard to overstate how frustrating it is to find this statement nestled at the end of over two hundred pages. Indeed, the debate about the existence of an eternal hell is *in so many ways* a debate which absolutely *must* take place upon the metaphysical level. I would like to see this argument in its fullest and most robust form. Instead, all we receive is, frankly, a lot of preaching to the choir with rhetorical flourishes. Hart's grasp of the English language is probably unmatched by any living theologian, and yet he transgresses the fundamental principle of writing: show rather than tell.

One particularly disappointing trend throughout the work is the use of false dilemmas. Hart tends to pick the lowest hanging fruit as a bogey man, threatening you with the most radical of positions as the only alternative to his own. One is either a Hartian or a double-predestinarian, Calvinist infernalist. And gleeful about it too! One agrees with Hart that St. John's Revelation is "hazy to the point of unintelligibility" or else one is looking for "some kind of visionary script for the end of time, a magic mirror for scrying out things yet to come" (108). Either universalism or else radical individualism where "the ethos of heaven turns out to be 'every soul for itself'" (149). The second meditation *does* attempt to give some scriptural evidence for Hart's claims. However, immediately after Hart mocks the idea of being "swayed simply by the brute force of arithmetic" (95), he proceeds to list scriptural passages for seven pages straight without any commentary at all.

But setting aside the style of Hart's work, his most interesting thoughts are to be found in the final two meditations. In the third meditation, Hart contemplates the truly social character of personhood, emphasizing the notion that resurrection does not merely mean receiving a reconstituted body, but is indeed the dying off of the selfish nature and the self's transformation into a "communal condition," the Body of Christ. Hart considers the question of whether persons could be saved individually, in such a way that would ontologically permit that others would fall. If being a person means that we are intimately united with one another, how can it be the case that certain persons could be saved and others not saved? Would we not really be *losing* essential parts of ourselves, thus making it impossible to be truly *found* in God?

But this reflection, as beautiful and penetrating as it is in itself, is still insufficient evidence for the overarching claim of universalism. The questions posed above are good ones, but Hart never gives serious response to

possible tertiary positions. Perhaps in the direct vision of God and the providential plan for the cosmos, the love of persons is subordinate (not just morally but indeed ontologically) to the love of God and the totality of his plan. Indeed, some of us have been significantly shaped by strong bonds made with pets or even inanimate things like a work of art, a landscape, or a building. True, our relations to these things are not the same as that between two persons, but they can significantly shape the person that I am all the same. I can scarcely imagine the rest promised by Hebrews or St. Augustine without some *contactus* with elements from my childhood, things that I now *ache for* with all of the sting of nostalgia. How can I be me without my relation to these ephemeral goods continuing on into the eternal? Well, presumably such relations are not quite so substantive in themselves as they are echoes of God, the goodness of which still subsists in him. I need not go back to precisely the location of my childhood happiness, for what I long to return to is found not in things or even people themselves, but is to be found *in toto* in God alone. The good of relationships that we experience, as constitutive of ourselves as they are, are only borrowed goods. They are good because they participate in the divine. Those relationships are not lost, but consummated in one's direct gaze upon God, for without him, they are nothing.

I see no immediate reason why such a position would necessarily obliterate all personhood, but Hart does not allow for these kinds of speculative thoughts to breathe. He scarcely considers what such an objection might look like or how it might be answered. The closest we get is a hasty condemnation of any view besides his own, since it would "reduce each personhood to nothing," (152) the "annihilation of everything that ever made us who we were" (156).

The irony in this particular argument is that it is Hart himself who maintains a radical individualism. For Hart, the success or failure of the cosmos (and the success or failure of God) begins and ends with the fate of individual souls, related yes, but each considered in and of themselves. What Hart does not adequately consider is that the final judgment is not particularly a judgment of individuals, but of the whole of creation. Hart contends that maintaining this necessitates universal salvation, for all individuals make up the whole of humanity. However, in this case, the success of the providential plan for the cosmos is contingent upon amassing successes on the scale of the individual. In contrast, the tradition (or at least the tradition which flows from Sts. Augustine and Thomas) maintains that the universe as a whole is not simply the sum of individual parts. It is its own organic whole, its own creature, and its end is not the greatest number of individual successes, but rather the greatest manifestation of

God's creative self-revelation. In short, the cosmos does not have so many ends as there are men in history, but rather has one, collective end. This is what many minds in the tradition have maintained in their own way: St. Augustine's language of the chiaroscuro; St. Thomas's manifestation of the divine justice and mercy; Julian of Norwich's "sin is behovely."

The universalist argument cannot be based in a lack of imagination. Hart presents us with the picture of a parent who is saved and yet also aware of a child who is damned. He gestures at it wildly with his words as if to say: "See how strange this looks! Look at how ugly this picture is. It could not possibly be the case." I admit that it appears strange to me. So do many aspects of the Faith. But strange does not equal contradictory. Since none of us really understand what heaven *is*, my first takeaway from the image is that I am indeed contemplating a mystery, the reconciliation of which necessarily extends beyond my temporal purview. For Hart, however, the mystery has been cast aside. Either the child is saved or the parent cannot taste heaven. The issue is that the argument is presented as an appeal to the emotions. If one even begins to contemplate how these two truths might be reconciled, one can almost hear Hart already begin to question one's qualities as a parent. As with many arguments within this text, one has the feeling that Hart is pushing the *analogia entis* to its breaking point. At times, he seems to push it straight into univocity. We cannot forget that parental imagery is just that: imagery meant to aid but not exhaust our contemplation of the divine. It does not take much theological acumen to see how quickly the metaphor can fail. The human father owes many things to his son by nature, while participation in the divine life of God is radically unowed to man on account of the infinite disparity between natures. We might say that the Father owes the divine life to the begotten Son, but it is in no way owed to the creature qua creature. This is the very definition of grace: *supernatural* and utterly gratuitous.

Finally, the fourth meditation ought to be applauded for rejecting the free-will defense and adding to a growing tide of voices recovering the traditional understanding of the compatible relation between divine causality and human free will. As Hart says, "Real omnipotence would require a power coterminous with the whole of being, from its innermost wellsprings and principles to its outermost consequences and effects; it would even require possession of the power belonging to the deepest source of all the facts of every rational will, without operating as a rival force in contest with those movements" (182). In fact, at times Hart even sounds downright Báñezian, stating, "Insofar as we are able freely to will anything at all, therefore, it is precisely because he [God] is *making* us to do so" (183).

However, as with the third meditation, Hart takes this to mean more than it actually does. For Hart, compatibilism and a rejection of the free-will defense necessitate universal salvation. Since all men are oriented by nature to the Good and would infallibly choose the Good if they were presented with it, it is impossible for any truly free and rational creature ultimately to reject God. As such, Hart argues, no one could rationally choose to abandon the Good. As he says, “Only one truly *free* choice is possible” (179).

But this thesis is rooted in the error of collapsing free will and freedom into a singular reality. True freedom is indeed characterized by the possession of that to which the will is inclined, the Good. But the power to pursue ends and choose means is what we call free will, and by its operation for good or ill we merit reward or punishment, as well as find rest or restlessness. Freedom or liberty, the possession of the Good as such, is therefore the perfection of the power of free will and is not synonymous with its operation. In the same way, winning the World Series is not the only way to play professional baseball. According to Hart’s view, it would be hard to conceive of how sin could exist at all, for man is either acting in a subhuman manner (and thus nonculpably), choosing lesser goods, or he is in the beatific vision! Indeed, even meriting such vision would also be impossible since the only truly free choice is the exhaustive embrace of the Good itself. One would have to already have achieved one’s supernatural end to merit, in which case such merit would be superfluous, since the object merited is already possessed.

In all, I found *That All Shall Be Saved* to be a disappointment. While I am not a universalist, I recognize that such a view has some striking theological force behind it. At the very least, the universalist thesis helps to prune the wilder and less theologically robust edges off of the so-called infernalist position. Unfortunately, Hart’s work largely falls short. N.V

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**Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus** by Andrew Hofer, O.P. (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013*), xiii + 270 pp.

SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS challenges first-time readers with his abundance of self-referential tropes throughout his orations and



poetry. "Upon whom are you fixated, Gregory, yourself or Christ?" The Nazianzen seems to be the most narcissistic of all the Church Fathers. Further, Gregory does not give us the satisfaction of a "*dogmengeschichtliche* Christology," and so it seems one may even question the extent to which he deserves to be called *the* Theologian. But Andrew Hofer, O.P., in his book *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus*, shows that it is not narcissism at the heart of Gregory's preaching. Instead, it is precisely Gregory's love for Christ that propels him to discover all convergences with his own life and the life and mystery of Christ. Hofer writes that Gregory's "writings exude a highly sophisticated and profoundly personal insight into the mystery of Christ. He crafts his presentation to persuade others to be purified and, with Gregory himself as their model, to become like Christ in deification" (195).

The text is well-structured around Hofer's thesis. Hofer observes that Gregory is "the most autobiographical of all the Greek Fathers," but not in the modern sense of the term "autobiography" (4). Gregory is eager to set himself up as an example of discipleship to his audience. Gregory writes about his life to show Christ hidden in it. Plus, it is not only Gregory's life that is interwoven into Christ's and Christ's into his. Gregory presents other saintly figures, such as his sister, Gorgonia, an exemplar of biblical living (45). Athanasius, too, rides triumphantly into Alexandria upon a colt like "my Jesus" (206). Confronting the injustice of Emperor Valens, Basil of Caesarea becomes "the fleshless one," a bloodless martyr standing like "my Jesus before the judgment seat of Pilate" (208). For Gregory, that is the point. The commingling of one's life with that of the Incarnate Word is not only a mark of discipleship but even the path to deification.

Hofer organizes the book in the following manner. He builds a case in chapter 1 for a logo-centric theology, one that remains integral throughout the book. Gregory, often referred to as the second Demosthenes for his powerful rhetoric, is interested to claim rhetoric from the secular domain for his preaching, because his love for words is really a love for the Word. Contrary to the accusations of Emperor Julian that Christians were without reason (*alogos*), Gregory shows that Christ has assumed our rational nature (*logikē physis*). Hofer makes several key points: that "Gregory's words must not be separated from his faith in the Word"; that "the attention to words should be seen in relation to Gregory's training as a rhetor who seeks to persuade others to accept this philosophy of living by the Word"; and that "the Word in Scripture is channeled through Gregory's own earthly life and teaching for people to worship rightly" (53). Hofer argues that Gregory's autobiography is "Christomorphic," a notion he develops in chapter 2. Further, Gregory's Christology is "autobiographical," which

Hofer develops in three parts in chapters 3–5. Chapter 3 explores a theological challenge in the “mixture” language that Gregory uses concerning his life and that of Christ. Gregory even uses mixture language to describe the Incarnation itself, though the Word does not become a single nature after the Incarnation (94–95). When Gregory ponders the rational soul of Christ, he exclaims: “O new mixture! O unexpected blending! He who is has come to be, the uncreated one is created, the limitless one is contained, through the mediation of a rational soul standing between divinity and the coarseness of flesh” (115; quoting Brian Daley’s translation of *Or.* 38). Chapter 4 focuses on Epistle 101 and the ten anathemas from the perspective of Gregory’s own salvation, and the impossibility of Gregory’s salvation under the account of Apollinarius or Paul of Samosata. For example, if Christ had no human soul, then he did not really experience death, the separation of the soul from the body, but rather the separation of the godhead from the body (142), a theological point in anticipation of the formula of Chalcedon. In chapter 5, Hofer expounds what he calls “the distinctive blend of *logos* and *bios*” in Christ’s and Gregory’s respective lives (154). Gregory claims for his possession *all* of the mysteries of Christ’s life for his own sanctification. For example, Gregory finds no small parallel between the stoning of the Word in the Gospels and Gregory’s own stoning at Constantinople by anti-Nicene monks. Finally, in chapter 6, Gregory’s ministry—like his autobiography—is “Christomorphic,” which is to say patterned upon the life and ministry of Christ. As Hofer puts it, “Gregory articulates his relationship with Christ for a pastoral purpose. Indeed, this exemplifies how all Gregory’s writing, which so frequently appears self-referential, could be read as expressing Gregory’s ministry to others” (195). Indeed, by his priestly ministry he wishes to transform his flock one sacrifice at a time themselves into a deified offering (199).

Though the reader may initially find Hofer’s terminology unnecessarily cumbersome, such as “Christomorphic ministry,” or intentionally ambiguous, such as the seeming interchangeability of “autobiographical Christology” with “Christomorphic autobiography,” the patient reader will net rewards in wrestling with them. By such terms, Hofer carefully carves boundaries around notions vital to his project. It is important for any instructor who uses this text in coursework to locate the definitions of these terms in the text, which I include here. Hofer explains that the “phenomenon of Gregory’s rhetorical blend of Christ and himself is so comprehensive and penetrating that Gregory’s teachings on Christ could be called an ‘autobiographical Christology’” (5). But what does Hofer mean by “Christomorphic autobiography”? After a bit of digging through the text, “Christomorphic autobiography” is best illumined by an example

from the *Epitaph and Summary of His Earthly Life* (*Carm.* 2.1.92). Gregory's own life takes the form of Christ's, which is what Hofer suggests by defining Christomorphic autobiography as "Christ's omnipresence in Gregory's writings on his own life." He explains: "Through the high literary arts and deep personal faith of his Christomorphic autobiography, Gregory repeatedly evokes Christ in a way that blends Christ into the troubles, fears, and joys of his own life" (56). Thus, also, Gregory's pastoral ministry likewise becomes Christomorphic in that it patterns itself after the form of Christ's own ministry.

On the one hand, it may seem to the reader of this review that "autobiographical Christology" and "Christomorphic autobiography" remain logically indistinct. To what extent is there any real, logical difference in Gregory's self-referential Christology and his locating his own life within Christ's? This presents, in my view, the biggest challenge to Hofer's text. On the other hand, the challenge of unmixing what Gregory has intentionally mixed proves paradoxically that Hofer really has put his finger on something. The terminological challenge does not obscure what Hofer carefully develops throughout, which is a very simple idea at the heart of discipleship and especially in the episcopacy. Gregory's life and Christ's life are perichoretic—that is, mutually interpenetrating—lives that shed light upon one another. "Christomorphic" means that Gregory's life takes the "form" (*morphē*) of Christ's life. "Christologic" means that Christ's life is a word (*logos*) that illumines the trials and mysteries of Gregory's own life.

In many ways, Hofer's text represents a significant contribution to the study of Gregory Nazianzen. The unfortunate cost of the text may prove prohibitive for students and theologians outside of academia, but faculty whose institutions have access to Oxford's digital texts will find a valuable resource to incorporate into their coursework. Despite the minor challenges I mentioned above, Hofer's text is remarkably accessible and enters deeply into ongoing conversations about the Theologian, as evidenced by the copious footnotes. He does so as a fair and careful interlocutor. Readers will find impressive erudition in Hofer, who engages the secondary literature broadly (see also his bibliography [229–48]). What's more, Hofer deftly navigates the Theologian's works, incorporating oft-neglected theological resources, especially Gregory's poetry. As evidence of this, see the useful index of citations to Gregory's work (249–55), wherein one sees that Hofer has cited or quoted in his text six index columns of Gregory's poetry, about fifty of his letters, and all of Gregory's orations. And the text is full of gems, both from Gregory and from Hofer. If I may tease the reader of this review with only a small taste, one of the images I found most striking was soteriology as cheese-making: the blood of Christ unites all of

mankind in the way a little curdling agent makes milk into “one block of cheese” (190). Such fine theological churning has aged well.

In closing, I echo Hofer’s epilogue, wherein he identifies the importance of recovering Gregory’s theological significance. Hofer identifies four gains to be attained in recovering the mutual interpenetration of the mystery of Christ and Gregory’s own life. First, one has to understand Gregory’s “rhetoric prowess” in order to fully understand his doctrinal elucidations; secondly, one can set aside certain judgments against what appears “too ambiguous or too narcissistic” to contemporary readers; thirdly, Hofer encourages readers to wrest the theological wheels from the deep tracks created by patrologies of preceding centuries, which paid too little attention to Gregory’s theological poetry; finally, one can understand that Gregory’s prominent reception history among the later Greek Fathers is not unmerited, but derives from Gregory’s contribution “to the Christian spiritual vision” as “the most autobiographical of the Greek Fathers [who] wants to write continuously about God at work in his life” (228). N.V

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**Conferences on the Six Days of Creation: The Illuminations of the Church** by St. Bonaventure, translated by Jay M. Hammond, Works of St. Bonaventure 18 (*St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2018*), 588 pp.

HOW TO READ ST. BONAVENTURE, and whether it is important to do so, is a lively, though rarely explicitly voiced, question in historical theology. A handful of texts have become standard in undergraduate and graduate theological study even among non-specialists: *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, at least portions of the *Breviloquium*, and the disputed questions *De scientia Christi* are widely known, with such texts as the *Lignum vitae*, the *Legenda maior*, and *De triplici via* not unknown to students of the history of spiritual theology. The Franciscan Institute is to be commended for great service in continuing to bring out translations in the “Works of St. Bonaventure” series, including two recent volumes of translations from his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.

Into this field comes a new translation of Bonaventure’s last major work,

the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* (*Conferences on the Six Days of Creation*), by Jay M. Hammond. The only previous English translation—by José de Vinck (Franciscan Herald Press, 1970)—has been out of print for some years and has been widely criticized as deficient in terms of accuracy, helpfulness to the reader, and even de Vinck’s occasional obvious frustration with the text. (The reader is bemused to see an escalating frustration in de Vinck’s footnotes, culminating in expressions of disdain for “the childish medieval delight” in the coincidence and significance of numbers).

This review therefore consists of two parts. In the first, I will summarize and comment on Hammond’s introduction and translation. In the second, I will comment more broadly on the recovery of the *Hexaëmeron* as an important text today.

Hammond’s introduction is divided into three parts. Part 1, “Historical Context,” very helpfully contextualizes the *Hexaëmeron* in light of practices of medieval reading, the influence of Aristotelianism at the University of Paris, the secular–mendicant controversy, and, perhaps most striking, Bonaventure’s concerns as minister general for the reform and renewal of the Franciscan order. Hammond argues that all three sets of collations should be regarded as part of Bonaventure’s attempt to reform the friars’ identity-ministry: in accord with the law (collations *De decem praeceptis* [1267]), in accord with grace (collations *De septem donis Spiritus sancti* [1268]), and unto glory (collations *In Hexaëmeron* [1273]). The delay between the second and third sets of collations was, according to Hammond, accidental and due to the need to defend the order after the death of Pope Clement IV in 1268. Hammond makes the important claim that Bonaventure intended these collations for the reform of the whole order: Paris being the “epicenter of the Franciscan *studia* network” (24), Bonaventure is instructing those who would be returning to their provinces to implement his pastoral directives—he is teaching the teachers of the order.

In part 2 of the introduction, “The *Hexaëmeron* and the Contemplative Praxis of Reflexive Reading,” Hammond orients the reader to the reading of the text. The bulk of the *Hexaëmeron* is a reading of the six days of creation as corresponding to a sixfold vision of understanding: (1) implanted by nature (colls. 4–7), (2) lifted up by faith (colls. 8–12), (3) taught by Scripture (colls. 13–19), (4) suspended by contemplation (colls. 20–23), (5) enlightened by prophecy, and (6) absorbed into God by rapture. (Bonaventure completed only the first four before having to leave for the Second Council of Lyon, where he died on July 15, 1274.) The three collations that form the introduction take as their theme Sirach 15:5: “In the midst of the Church the Lord will open one’s mouth and will fill one

with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and will clothe one with a robe of glory.” Bonaventure explains this in terms of who is addressed by this discourse (i.e., what it means properly to be “in the Church”), Christ as the center of all sciences (“midst”—medium), and the fullness of wisdom and understanding.

Most of Hammond’s commentary in his introduction concerns the first three collations. With respect to each, he offers an interpretation that emphasizes the pedagogical purpose of the text, and the way it should be understood as a patterned whole.

In collation 1, after an introductory consideration of those to whom the text is addressed in *Hexaëmeron* 1.1–9, Bonaventure speaks at length about Christ as the center (*medium*) of all the sciences: metaphysics, physics, mathematics, logic, ethics, law, and theology. Hammond emphasizes that to begin one’s classification of the sciences with metaphysics runs contrary to a philosophical view that regards metaphysics as the culmination of the sciences. Bonaventure is addressing friars whose primary concerns should be the understanding of Scripture, and by this prioritizing of metaphysics, he is in effect urging them to engage in their studies from the top down, centering on their knowledge of God and interpreting lower knowledge in this light. (Hammond refers to this as a deductive rather than an inductive approach.) Moreover, Bonaventure’s emphasis in this presentation of metaphysics is the exemplarity of Christ. The conclusion seems to be that, if the friars approach their studies from the perspective of the metaphysical exemplarity of Christ, they will have a proper orientation to the divine truth that is indeed present in other sciences. According to Hammond, Bonaventure is allegorizing the sciences, rather than allegorizing Christ.

Hammond says little about the sciences treated in general here, other than noting that the first three are theoretical and the last three are moral or practical. The center of this classification of the sciences is therefore the only “rational science” that Bonaventure mentions in this context, logic, which he associates with doctrine and with the resurrection. As Hammond puts it, Christian reasoning centers on the crucifixion and resurrection.

Collation 2 concerns wisdom. Bonaventure himself speaks of it as a continuation of the treatment of the gift of wisdom in collation 9 on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The first part of the collation concerns the *door* to wisdom, that is, the proper disposition toward it. This involves an ordered progression from desire, to justice, to discipline, to love, to sanctity, and ultimately to a wisdom that involves a rightly ordered “affective subjectivity” (45).

The larger part of the collation concerns the fourfold *form* of wisdom.



Hammond's interpretation of the *Hexaëmeron* in terms of the formation of the friars leads him to postulate the following division in Bonaventure's doctrine here. (1) Uniform wisdom, which is the impression of the rules of the divine law, prepares the reader to understand the literal sense of Scripture. (2) Multiform wisdom, the openness of the reader to the mysteries of Scripture in faith, hope, and love, leads to the understanding of the spiritual sense. (3) Omniform wisdom is the reader's openness to seeing the vestiges and images of God in all of creation; it is the highest achievement of the intellect as transformed by grace. (4) Nulliform wisdom is rather affective: it is the perfect disposition of the reader in his affection to the presence of God. Fourfold wisdom may thus be divided in two: uniform and multiform wisdom "[prepare] the exegete for discerning Scripture's intentionality," literal and spiritual; while omniform and nulliform wisdom "[reform] the exegete's intentionality." Bonaventure is urging not only the understanding of Scripture, but the formation of the reader of Scripture according to both intellect and affect.

Collation 3 concerns understanding. The "key to contemplation" in *Hexaëmeron* 3.2 is an understanding of the threefold Word: the uncreated Word, "through whom all things are made"; the incarnate Word, "through whom all things are restored"; and the inspired Word, "through whom all things are revealed." Hammond presents this as "a Trinitarian dynamic of exit-exemplar-return, which unfolds *per Verbum*" (54). These are not really separable elements. Understanding how the truth of things is related to the eternal generation of the Word prepares one for illumination by the incarnate Word; understanding the incarnate Word is the key to understanding Scripture, and requires participation in the inspired Word; and participation in the inspired Word returns one to the Trinitarian source of all that is. Finally, Bonaventure turns from the discussion of the inspired Word in general to the specific visions that are inspired, which are the six forms of vision that correspond to the six days of creation.

Hammond closes his introduction with a few comments on the translation and the editions of the text. The *Hexaëmeron* comes to us not as a text written by Bonaventure, but only via the *reportationes* of his listeners. There are two such *reportationes* that are important: one that exists in multiple manuscripts and was published in the Quaracchi critical edition in 1891; the other, of which there is a single manuscript, which was published by Ferdinand Delorme in 1934. While the two editions are remarkably similar, they differ on certain points that have received considerable attention. For example, the more apocalyptic passages in Bonaventure's theology of history are peculiar to the Quaracchi edition, while the greater elaborations of Aristotelian philosophy belong to the



Delorme edition. Hammond uses the Quaracchi edition as the basis for his translation, but he also, throughout the book, identifies in his footnotes the notable variation in Delorme, giving the full variant text in Latin when it is practicable to do so.

Hammond's knowledge of the *Hexaëmeron* is profound. It would be too-faint praise to say that readers will be better served by this translation than they were by the earlier one. Hammond's orientation to and explication of the text in his introduction are packed, and most readers will be hard-pressed to digest them at a first reading; however, they will prove rewarding for the reader who will take the time to refer back to them after pondering the text itself.

Bonaventure specialists have long considered the *Hexaëmeron* to be a text worthy of special note. Its scope is obviously impressive, encompassing philosophy, theology, and spirituality, and as Bonaventure's last great work, it is obviously important to consider for his mature thought on a variety of subjects. Recently, some scholars have promoted the idea that the *Hexaëmeron* is especially important as a testimony to Bonaventure's unique proposal for a way to do theology. Hammond clearly falls into this camp. But if this is to happen, if the *Hexaëmeron* is to receive the attention it merits, there needs to be a "buy-in" from the theological community at large. It is therefore worthwhile to explore reasons why someone other than a Bonaventure specialist should particularly care about the *Hexaëmeron*.

In one way, this is easy to see. If there is a single word that expresses the topic of the *Hexaëmeron* as a whole, it is "understanding." The whole of the text is undoubtedly pertinent to the intellectual life of Christians, which by itself justifies its interest for the theological academy today. It is also easy to enumerate specific topics in the text that are of speculative interest: Christ as the center of all sciences, the divine exemplarity, a theology of history, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and so on.

In another way, the text can seem impossibly opaque. Even a reader sympathetic to the use of symbols in medieval theology can wonder whether Bonaventure's myriad distinctions and patterns are important. Hammond, recognizing this, includes in the volume a detailed outline of the whole, something of an "at a glance" summary. Yet that summary/outline runs 110 pages (the text itself is 345 pages). It is a useful tool, but may not do much to convince the modern reader of the text's contemporary interest. Examples of the same thing in smaller portions of the text abound. The philosopher can easily appreciate Bonaventure's division of "the truth of things" (i.e., natural philosophy) into metaphysics, mathematics, and physics in *Hexaëmeron* 4.6–17. But what is he to make of the multiplication of the four cardinal virtues by the three theological virtues

so as to make twelve—and their doubling “in prosperity and adversity” to make twenty-four in *Hexaëmeron* 7.22? To return to the theme of “Christ the center”: most commentators focus, like Hammond, on the claim that Christ, as the uncreated Word, is the center of metaphysics as the exemplar of all things. Many readers will rightly understand this to mean that exemplarity is for Bonaventure to be understood in light of the eternal procession of the Word, and that this is a clue to the philosophical truth of exemplarity. But how is one to understand the very next topic, that Christ as the incarnate Word is the center of physics? Is there in Bonaventure’s view a clue in the incarnate Christ to a necessary truth of physics? More generally, if the reader wants to speak about a “Christocentric” theology here, is this more than a generality? Can one really answer on the basis of this text how this theology is Christocentric while that of another medieval master is not?

If the modern reader is at all inclined to read the *Hexaëmeron*, I want to suggest two foci that are necessary for understanding it: on the one hand, its *summa*-like quality; on the other hand, its program for the reformation of the life of understanding.

The comprehensive nature of the undertaking of the *Hexaëmeron* is apparent when Bonaventure lays out the visions corresponding to the days of creation in *Hexaëmeron* 3.24. Turning to the actual collations on the days, the reader sees a trajectory from philosophy in collations 4–7 to the upward reaches of contemplation in collations 20–23, via theology. This theme of the ascent of the mind is a familiar one in Bonaventure. Not only is there something like it in the *Itinerarium*, but he lays it out also in *De septem donis* 4, when the sciences are divided into philosophical, theological, graced, and glorious. All this is to say the reader of the *Hexaëmeron*—especially one with any familiarity with other major texts of Bonaventure—immediately has a sense of this comprehensive ascent.

In its comprehensiveness, the *Hexaëmeron* is *summa*-like. To be sure, Bonaventure does not here use the disputed-question format common among the *summae* of his contemporaries (though he could use that format, as we see in his commentary on the *Sentences* and his various disputed questions), nor does he endeavor to give a treatment of all of even the most obvious topics that fall within the purview of the text (as he does, by contrast, in the *Breviloquium*, which he himself describes as a *summa*). But the reader can and should have the sense that to follow Bonaventure in what he says about philosophy, faith, Scripture, and contemplation is to get to the heart of his understanding of each. It therefore becomes important to explore with precision exactly what he says about the different subjects, comparing it to pertinent passages in other works, as well as to

the architectonic structure of the whole *Hexaëmeron*. For example, what is the relation between day 2's understanding lifted up by faith and day 3's understanding taught by Scripture? There is an obvious way in which they both belong to theology, though neither of them is called that. Why should they be separated, when they both seem to fit his earlier description of theological science (from *De septem donis* 4) as "the pious knowledge of things having to be believed"? To ask this is not to impose a rationality on the text that is foreign to it; it is to see more precisely what Bonaventure regards as essential to his topic.

The other necessary focus for the understanding of the *Hexaëmeron* is Bonaventure's repeated evocation of the reformation of the understanding. This is a topic of perennial interest in theology, and so should strike the modern reader of the *Hexaëmeron*. Bonaventure is perhaps an especially important figure to consider here, because he was not only a university master but also a pastoral leader, called by Pope Leo XIII the "Prince of mystics," and because the Franciscan tradition to which he belongs is sometimes compared to the Dominican tradition as the affective to the intellectual. In any case, examples abound in the *Hexaëmeron* of exhortations to a right view of a reformed understanding. Collation 2 describes the way the *affectus* is involved in the attainment of wisdom. The detailed definition of the philosophical sciences is followed, in *Hexaëmeron* 5.19, by a description of the way they all "ran wild." Collation 6 excoriates the errors of Aristotelian philosophy, while collation 7 lists the errors of the Platonists, who did not understand the way true philosophy requires the healing of the affect. Collation 10 lists twelve "speculations" of faith, truths that are not so much revealed as self-evident to the mind that is raised by grace. Collations 17 and 18 speak of the way Scripture nourishes both the intellect and the affect, and the danger of the former without the latter. Collation 19, ostensibly the last of the collations on Scripture, is more significantly a kind of pause within the whole *Hexaëmeron*, explaining the transition from knowledge to wisdom by means of holiness.

Such passages, and more, testify to the thoroughgoing and profound nature of Bonaventure's conviction regarding the intellectual life of the Christian. The translation of this into simple maxims—such as "theology should be done on one's knees" and "metaphysics must ultimately be theological"—will not suffice. Instead, the reader should pay attention to what Hammond says in his introduction: Bonaventure is concerned with the whole formation of the friars. Therefore, the modern reader is invited to explore the whole vision of the intellectual life on display here. The promise is that it will prove to have a contemporary relevance.

One may expect to see Hammond's translation of the *Hexaëmeron* on

library shelves, thanks to its inclusion in the “Works of St. Bonaventure” series. Because of the clarity of the translation, one may also expect it to prompt increased conversation about Bonaventure at academic conferences. But my hope—and indeed my expectation—is also that it will find its way onto the reading list of more and more courses and comprehensive exams. The new interest in Bonaventure today makes this an apt moment for discussion of his significance within the theological tradition; and if Bonaventurians do their work well, the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* will more and more be seen as essential to understanding the Seraphic Doctor.

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N.V

**Revelation, History, and Truth: A Hermeneutics of Dogma** by Eduardo J. Echeverria (*New York: Peter Lang, 2018*), xxi + 199.

CATHOLIC FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGIANS ought to attend to Eduardo Echeverria’s wide-ranging new book, appearing when foundational theological issues stand in the foreground, as witnessed by debates over *Amoris Laetitia*, critiques from the *Dubia* Cardinals, controversies over the death penalty, and the 2019 Amazon Synod. The scope of argumentation in Echeverria’s work is ambitious, encompassing essentialist-versus-historicist disputes over Vatican II (1–45), the nature of revelation, Scripture, and Tradition (47–92), questions of epistemic and theological foundationalism (93–152), and definitions of a Lérinian hermeneutics of tradition (153–74), as well as the development of dogma (175–95). While each theme might have filled out an entire volume, Echeverria in surveying each theme provides a compact yet comprehensive vision. The book is a contemporary manifesto for Catholic fundamental theology.

Catholic readers will be struck by the many Protestant (and especially Protestant Evangelical) authors cited here, including such luminaries as G. C. Berkouwer, G. E. Ladd, Colin Gunton, Paul Helm, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Oliver Crisp. This engagement with non-Catholic authors reflects Echeverria’s earlier, PhD-level training in Protestant dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam. Nonetheless, this work is not a mediation between Catholic and Evangelical reasoning, but rather a *constitutively Catholic argument* that selectively deploys ideas from Protestant as well as Catholic sources. Protestant insights here serve Catholic purposes. It is

not just that non-Catholics have good things to say, but that Evangelical thinkers in their two-century-long battle against modernist Protestantism have accumulated their own rich repertoire of arguments that prove useful. For Echeverria, ecumenism involves co-belligerency: the enemy of my enemy may prove to be my friend.

Among the Catholic thinkers whom Echeverria cites appreciatively are Thomas Aquinas, Yves Congar, Pope John XXIII, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Avery Dulles, Pope Benedict XVI, Aidan Nichols, Germain Grisez, Thomas Guarino, and (more surprisingly) Karl Rahner and David Tracy. Edward Schillebeeckx receives a mixed review in the book in light of his mid-career shift from realism to non-realism (24), as does Gavin D'Costa, since D'Costa rejects relativism but offers a position that Echeverria says is in need of a more robust metaphysical underpinning (27–29). Catholic historians and theologians who serve as a foil, against whom Echeverria reasons, include Giuseppe Alberigo, John O'Malley, Massimo Faggioli, Richard Gaillardetz, Lieven Boeve, and Christoph Theobald.

Echeverria opens his book by stating that “I am centrally concerned with the matter of diversity and discontinuity in theological expressions and formulations within a fundamental unity of truth” (1). As collectively “the specter of relativism, antirealism, or fideism” (97), he opposes a cluster of interrelated ideas: that theological assertions make no objective claims regarding the world (non-realism), involve no intellectual or propositional content (non-cognitivism, non-propositionalism), and are always subject to revision or replacement by some new assertion (fallibilism). He writes that “the rejection of a realist notion of truth and language is behind why many find implausible the normative truth of dogmas, creeds, and confessions” (129). The author displays constructive as well as polemical intent in his book, seeking not only to refute false ideas but also to propose better, alternative formulations.

Continuity and change in Catholic teaching, argues Echeverria, can be properly understood only if one distinguishes the universal and unchanging truths of the faith from their particular and time-bound forms of expression. What remain changeless are not specific words, nor even doctrinal concepts *per se*, but the underlying theological judgments and patterns of judgment (xvi). This core claim sets Echeverria at odds with John O'Malley, who uses the words “substantialism” or “essentialism” to typify those who in this way distinguish unchanging truths from their changing expressions (11). Echeverria argues that the truth-expression distinction is not only legitimate but necessary, and that it serves a central purpose in what he calls “the Lérianian legacy of Vatican II” (11). In defense of the truth-expression distinction, Echeverria appeals to

Congar's claim that the *nouvelle theologie* distinguished the "deposit of faith" from its "concrete expressions" (9). In "properly dogmatic formulas," wrote Congar, "this evolution [of dogma] can only mean development by way of clarification" (quoted on 10).

Echeverria takes issue with Alberigo's historicist (or Bologna) school of interpretation of Vatican II. For Alberigo, the "event character of the Council marks it as a 'rupture,' 'break,' or 'discontinuity'" vis-à-vis pre-Vatican II Catholicism (5).

By focusing on the "event" or "spirit" of Vatican II, Alberigo and others like him have held that the council's "spirit" is only partially captured in the texts emanating from the council (4). "The central thesis of the Bologna School is that the Council's texts . . . are not its primary elements." Instead, "primacy should be ascribed to the event itself, that is, the event of an emerging '*conciliar* consciousness'" (5). Echeverria notes the epistemic problems posed by this focus on "consciousness": Where exactly does this "consciousness" exist? In the minds of the council fathers? In all of them? In some of them? In the minds of later scholars? Among the Catholic faithful? Echeverria states the obvious by noting that one must read the texts to discern their "spirit." The carefully constructed compromise statements in the council texts need to be read on their own terms, and not reconstructed through a *Tendenzkritik* that purports to identify the textual "tendencies" in the documents and then aligns itself with preferred progressive "tendencies" (e.g., greater collaboration of the Vatican with the bishops, empowerment of the laity, cultural adaptations of liturgy and theology, etc.).

Echeverria appeals to Pope Benedict XVI's "hermeneutics of continuity," which he thinks Faggioli has misunderstood as a total continuity, and not as nuanced in terms of the truth-expression distinction (2). As noted already, O'Malley rejects "essentialist" notions of doctrine in favor of a "historicist" model, repudiating "the notion that dogma is immutable and irreformable, for historical expressions are always mutable and contingent and not divine truth per se" (quoted on 23). On the other hand, O'Malley seeks to deploy history as a means of challenging the *status quo*, as he writes: "*Ressourcement* is skeptical of the present because of what it has discovered in the past. It entails a return to the sources with a view not to confirming the present but to make changes in it" (quoted on 8). O'Malley takes issue with Newmanian development as an ever-richer understanding of age-old truths. In favor of Newman's—and his own—understanding of doctrinal development, Echeverria cites *Dei Verbum*, §8: "The Tradition that comes to us from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is growth in insight into the realities and



words that are being passed on” (quoted on 8).

Echeverria defends “doctrinal essentialism” in the sense that there is a core of truths—such as the Trinity and the Incarnation—that does not change when doctrines are expressed in differing historical contexts (22). If not only the formulations of truth, but the truth itself, were perpetually subject to revision, then the Church’s dogmatic tradition would itself be constantly subject to revision. In such a case the deposit would no longer function as a foundation for the Church, and the Church would become a free-floating entity, continually subject to revisions of all sorts (19). The anti-essentialist line of reasoning thus ends up in a very un-Catholic sort of Catholicism. Yet Echeverria wants to free “essentialism” and “propositionalism” from misunderstandings, stating the “essentialist position” is consistent with “the need for new expressions,” and that “there is no reason to think that the acceptance of truth as propositional leads to the claim that doctrinally correct formulations or expressions of revealed truth completely express such truth” (22). Following Congar, Echeverria argues that contrasting formulations of theological truth may be juxtaposed to give a more complete truth, and yet contrast is not the same thing as contradiction (17). Echeverria argues “that nonfoundationalism is incompatible with realism” (95) and refers to his own position as a “weak foundationalism,” like that of Alvin Plantinga (101, 113). He is attentive to the biblical foundations of Catholic dogma, and situates divine revelation in a nexus that includes events as well as words: “Jointly constitutive of God’s special revelation are its inseparably connected words (verbal revelation) and deeds, intrinsically bound to each other because neither is complete without the other” (57). Divine revelation also involves personal encounter, per *Dei Verbum* (63).

Echeverria’s book highlights a number of key issues in fundamental theology. An unremittingly historicist interpretation of Christianity runs headlong into the modernist problem regarding the Church’s founding—how can the contemporary Church look to an earlier Church for guidance if the Church in every era must always be judged in terms of its own historical context?—and the equally distressing Christological dilemma: why should Jesus remain religiously central for all times and places, when Jesus was a particular man, limited to one place, time, and culture? Echeverria’s argument also underscores an often unacknowledged difficulty for the Catholic progressive. If he or she adopts a discontinuous or “rupture” interpretation of Vatican II, then this might serve to legitimate change in Church teaching and practice away from the *status quo*. Yet, logically speaking, such an interpretation might equally legitimate further changes as well, including changes in the reverse direction. No one need suppose



that any change will be permanent, and so the progressive notion of being on “the right side of history” becomes untenable when founded on the premises of a discontinuous history.

The Vatican’s theological practice contradicts a historically relativized view of Catholic teaching. Not only such compendia as Denzinger’s *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, but Vatican webpages too, offer abundant quotations and annotations linking present-day affirmations with texts stretching back for decades, generations, centuries, and millennia. Why all this fuss with documenting the Church’s past teaching if the teaching is wholly contextualized in each new generation? Vatican documents read in some sense like a legal code, with continual references to past precedents. Thus the very form of Vatican documents manifests a “hermeneutics of continuity” and suggests that theories of basic discontinuity are out of step with the content and format of the documents. In May 2019, German Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck predicted that the Amazon Synod later in the year would bring the Church to a “point of no return” and that thereafter “nothing will be the same.” Yet Echeverria’s argument rules out any future Catholicism in which “nothing will be the same.”

Echeverria’s argument against anti-foundationalism is, in my view, a weak part of his argument. Here the theological discussion of the “deposit of faith” becomes entangled with philosophical questions regarding the relation between epistemically foundational or derivative truths. To me these seem to be different sorts of issues. Perhaps because of my own training (partly at Yale, in the 1980s, under post-liberal thinkers), I am not initially convinced that realist epistemology and orthodox theological commitment to a “deposit of faith” rule out all versions of nonfoundationalist epistemology. Echeverria comes down hard on “critical realists,” including hermeneutical thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer (128), who emphasized the essentially finite and limited nature of human understanding, along with the possibility and actuality of progress over time from less to more adequate formulations of the same truth. Phenomenologically speaking, is not Gadamer’s position congruent with daily experience? Pope John Paul II viewed Gadamer’s historically rooted yet non-relativistic conception of human understanding as foundational to his own theological work, and at Gadamer’s death the late Pontiff commented that “Gadamer was a committed defender of the importance of tradition for a correct way of knowing” (“Death Saddens John Paul II,” *Zenit*, March 17, 2002). Gadamerian “critical realism” might thus be sympatico with Catholic theology.

To continue this point: Echeverria opposes fallibilism in all forms, and yet there are construals of Charles Sanders Peirce that interpret his

fallibilism as a realist and non-relativist account of how truth is gradually uncovered through a convergent process within a community of inquiry. Peirce's fallibilism does a rather good job of accounting for continuity and change in scientific investigation, and I suspect that Peirce's ideas—including his fallibilism—could have a legitimate Catholic theological application. One of my worries regarding *Revelation, History, and Truth* is that Echeverria's argument against theological relativism may not be sufficiently safeguarded on the other side to escape the opposite error of theological rationalism. As Thomas Aquinas argued, divine revelation is conditioned both by the character of the Revealer (as infinite, all-knowing, perfectly truthful) and by the character of those receiving revelation (as finite, limited in knowledge, and biased against certain truths). Yes, God is Truth itself (or himself), but we know God always and only in a finite and human fashion. *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur.* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 5, and elsewhere).

Because of Rahner's influential, non-referential rendering of biblical eschatological language, I would like to have learned more as to what critique Rahner's overall project might receive on the basis of Echeverria's premises. Moreover, I suspect that contemporary Evangelical thinkers may be sympathetic to his account of the nexus of word, event, and experience in divine revelation, and the gradual appropriation of divine revelation through Church Tradition. Evangelical thinkers today generally acknowledge a traditioning process in Church history. Yet Marian dogma remains a stumbling block to Evangelicals. Echeverria states that he is concerned with "level 1 teachings: *de fide* dogmas of the faith" (175), yet this must include Marian dogma, which is discussed only in a brief footnote (192n25). Marian dogma is a crucial though undeveloped test case for Echeverria's fundamental theology and for understanding how magisterial teaching regarding the Virgin Mary arises out of revelatory word-event-experience.

Setting aside these quibbles over certain details, the main line of argument in *Revelation, History, and Truth* is both clear and compelling. In his battle against doctrinal relativism, non-realism, and non-cognitivism, Echeverria has made an utterly convincing case. He summarizes: "Doctrinal relativism and its corollary of a perpetual hermeneutics is rejected because of its emphasis on doctrinal discontinuity, not merely discontinuity in expression of formulation, but a discontinuity that denies the enduring validity of truth, recognizing nothing but interpretations of interpretations, with our judgments never reaching the reality that makes them true" (26). Echeverria quotes Dulles: "If we are to worship, speak, and behave as though the Son of God were himself God . . . is it not

because the Son really and ontologically is God, whether anyone believes it or not?" (quoted on 24). Unremitting historicism and non-cognitivism among Catholic thinkers will lead finally to the same sort of intellectual dead-end and ecclesial shipwreck that modernist Protestantism arrived at via Ernest Troeltsch and Rudolf Bultmann. May God preserve the Church from such an outcome! And may such works as Echeverria's *Revelation, History, and Truth* point Catholic teachers toward a balanced understanding of how divergent and changing expressions of Catholic truth cohere with a foundational deposit of faith and unchanging Catholic dogma.

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N.V.

**The Indissolubility of Marriage: *Amoris Laetitia* in Context** by Matthew Levering (*San Francisco: Ignatius, 2019*), 223 pp.

MY FIRST OBSERVATION on obtaining this book was that Professor Levering appears from the footnotes and bibliography to have read every academic article that has been written on the subject of *Amoris Laetitia*. The book considers the issue of the indissolubility of marriage from every imaginable perspective. Its form is broken into four chapters: "Eastern Orthodox, Patristic, Protestant, and Historical-Critical Perspectives on Marital Indissolubility"; "Marital Indissolubility from Trent through to Pope Benedict XVI"; "Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* and Marital Indissolubility"; and "Theological *Ressourcement*: Aquinas on Marital Indissolubility."

The macro-level conclusion is that *Amoris Laetitia* does not change the Church's doctrine of marital indissolubility and, indeed, that Jesus "strongly affirms marital indissolubility, more clearly than he does almost any other Catholic teaching" (15). It is also shown that the Church Fathers of the first three centuries supported the idea and that the majority of the Church Fathers in the following centuries also affirmed the idea. Moreover, Levering observes that even those interpreters whose views have been explicitly commended by Pope Francis have all agreed that the Church's traditional teaching on marital indissolubility has not changed. From this fact Levering concludes that discussions around the topic of *Amoris Laetitia* should focus upon this shared ground of agreement.

Levering does however acknowledge that part of the problem surrounding interpretations of *Amoris Laetitia* is the absence of shared agreement among theologians on the principles of fundamental theology. Some theologians do not accept that revelation includes a specific truth content. For some revelation is nothing more than the awakening of the human spirit to divine love. As Arnauld Join-Lambert claims, different cultural contexts make different interpretations of revelation possible. If this is so, then the theological tradition which recognizes a common set of doctrines, truth claims, and moral principles as one of the so-called “marks” of the Church is obsolete. And if doctrinal unity is no longer necessary, then this has flow-on effects for how we understand the Petrine Office, and in particular the power of the “keys.” The Petrine Office loses its unifying charism. Moreover, if the power of the keys is limitless, which is another way of saying that the exercise of the power of the keys is not circumscribed by the deposit of the faith, by Scripture or by Tradition, classically understood, but is a kind of prerogative of the pontiff, analogous to a U.S. presidential pardon, then this represents a seismic shift in the field of ecclesiology. Although it is not often presented in this way, divisions over the interpretations of *Amoris Laetitia* are rooted in different approaches to fundamental theology. We have arrived at a moment in ecclesial history where the fact that something is a mortal sin in one archdiocese and a mere pastoral concern in another is seen by some theologians to be *prima facie* evidence of a *de facto* schism in the Church, and thus a cause for alarm, while for others this is not a problem at all but simply a manifestation of the Church’s cultural diversity.

Perhaps it is precisely because there is so much disunity at the level of fundamental theology that the drafters of *Amoris Laetitia* decided to deal with the most contentious issues in the footnotes. The footnotes in Levering’s work were also of greater than usual interest, and in particular footnote 67 on page 49 seemed to me to address the nub of the pastoral problem in the minds of many Catholics. To paraphrase the footnote, the question is: “does someone whose wife left him and his four children for a lesbian have to remain single for the rest of his life?” My own response to this question—much like Levering’s response (113)—is to endorse the position of Nicholas J. Healy Jr. discussed in footnote 6 on page 93, to the effect that a more promising alternative to Cardinal Kasper’s “follow the Eastern Orthodox” position is to expand the annulment process.

Levering also acknowledges that some theologians, following Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., are of the view that once a marriage breaks down it has “dissolved”; the bond has broken. For those in the tradition of Schillebeeckx, all doctrine is radically contextualized and “therefore identifies

the present cultural moment as the sole context in which any concrete propositional teaching can be deemed authentic" (123). If this principle is adopted as a foundation stone of fundamental theology then the notion of doctrinal unity or unity on matters of faith and morals is definitely obsolete because the cultural contexts will vary from one part of the world to another. In parts of Africa, for example, the practice of polygamy is part of the cultural context. Footnote 31 on page 168 fires a missile into Schillebeeckxian contextualism. Here Levering quotes Stephan Kampowski to the effect that "Christ can be the redeemer of mankind only if there actually *is* a humankind," that is to say, only if there is a human nature to be redeemed. Kampowski also observes that proponents of cultural contextualization always seem to want to play this card in relation to the sixth commandment. They do not seem to use it to endorse the practices of ritual murder among the Aztecs or the infanticide of the Spartans. This footnote was, however, written before the recent Synod on the Amazon, when cultural contextualization arguments were put forward to defend such practices as deliberately not baptising the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin and otherwise affirming practices that seem to some to be in violation of the first commandment. As a matter of logic, if contextualism is a valid approach to fundamental theology then there would seem to be no reason to limit it to sexual practices, but also to expand the principle to apply to attitudes regarding property rights, social responsibilities to relatives, and even to conceptions of what idolatry might mean.

Levering has done the world of Catholic theology a great service by painstakingly trawling through the patristics, combing the works of St. Thomas, scanning the magisterial documents from Trent to our own times, sifting through the statements of the two great scholar popes, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and actually reading the unusually long documents of the current pontificate and the off-the-cuff statements of Pope Francis and his favorite theologians—people like Archbishop Victor Fernandez, and, of course, Cardinal Kasper. In bringing together all of these sources Levering has defended the case that, apart from Schillebeeckx and some of his followers, popes, councils, and theologians have been in agreement from biblical times to the present on the point that a validly contracted marriage is indissoluble. This is the empirical data to be concluded from his research, while his own take on the data is that it should form the foundation of all theological reflections on *Amoris Laetitia*. His underlying point is that the data should prompt urgent re-thinking of the pastoral practices favored by some of the more liberal interpretations—that some of the pastoral practices and the theology associated with them have the inevitable (and, for some, intentional) result of undermining the doctrine

that a validly contracted sacramental marriage is indissoluble.

A secondary conclusion however, which is glaringly obvious from both the footnotes and the material covered in the body of the text, is that *Amoris Laetitia* is controversial because many leading theologians today are far from being in agreement with the magisterial tradition and the doctors of the Church about matters of fundamental theology. This of course includes the relationship between doctrine and pastoral practice, the powers of the Petrine Office, principles governing scriptural hermeneutics, the standing of pre-Christian sexual practices in cultures that have only recently encountered Christianity, and the relationship between moral theology and sacramental theology to name but a sample of the contemporary neuralgic flash points. As Levering perceives, what is really at stake is whether any doctrine can be held definitely by the Church. The path down which many theologians are going is one already traced out by the Protestant Reformers, but the current “reformers” lack their predecessor’s trust in the truth of Scripture, with the result that the danger of what St. John Henry Newman called “liberalism in religion” is real. NV

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**The Holy Family: Model Not Exception** by Mary Shivanandan (*Glen Echo, MD: KM Associates, 2018*), xxix + 292 pp.

IN 1981, Monsignor (later Cardinal) Carol Caffara († 2017) wrote a letter to Sister Lucia, the last living Fatima visionary, to ask for her prayers as he undertook the founding of the John Paul II Institute on Marriage and Family in Rome. He had no expectation of a reply. And so, he was surprised when, just a few days later, he received a response directly from Sister Lucia herself. In it she assured him of her prayers and expressed deep gratitude for his work. This was already more than he had asked for. But the letter went on. For Sister Lucia took the occasion as the moment to reveal the final aspect of the message of Fatima and quoted the now widely known and clearly prophetic words of Our Lady: “The final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan will be about marriage and the family.”

That Sister Lucia chose such an avenue to reveal Our Lady’s final message is noteworthy on its face. It is almost eerie to consider what has

happened since. And there is no small measure of irony in the fact that Cardinal Caffara, the first president of the John Paul II Institute in Rome and a well-known defender of marriage and the family, is likely watching in dismay as both the name and the founding vision at the heart of the Institute seem to be changing, perhaps irrevocably, to correspond with the signs of the times.

Clearly the battle for marriage and family is underway. Indeed, it has raged all around us for many years now. It can be difficult to remain steadfast in our confidence in the future. But we know we have every reason to remain so. For Sister Lucia recounts that Our Lady added these words of hope: "Don't be afraid; . . . Anyone who works for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be fought and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue."<sup>1</sup> However, Our Lady has already crushed its head.

We can be confident that our work to defend the sanctity of marriage and the family will bear fruit. And in her new book, *The Holy Family: Model not Exception*, Mary Shivanandan, an early graduate of the John Paul II Institute and professor for many years at its U.S. offshoot in Washington, DC, takes up the challenge. Here Shivanandan, now retired, offers us new insights into the best weapon we have. We can start, she argues, by recognizing that the sanctity on display in the Holy Family is not an exception, not some otherworldly reality or something meant only for a chosen few. Just as each of us is called to be a saint, so every family is called to reflect the communion of persons it is meant to reflect. As John Paul II says in his encyclical on the family, *Familiaris Consortio*, families must become what, in reality, they "already are." And this, argues Shivanandan, is a human reflection of the constant exchange of love and self-gift present in the inner life of the triune God. The Holy Family is a model for *all* families to follow, both shield and armor in our responsibility to bear witness to the culture of life and in our efforts to establish it. Each human family bears within itself the potential to become a conduit of grace and an ambassador of the new evangelization.

I first encountered the work of Shivanandan in her book *Crossing the Threshold of Love*, published in 1999. The work revealed an expert grasp of the meaning and significance of John Paul's theology of the body at a time when most people were just beginning to realize it. And John Paul's landmark teaching certainly remains the undercurrent of this most recent

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this letter and Cardinal Caffara's comments on it, see Catholic News Agency, "Fatima Visionary Predicted 'Final Battle' Would Be Over Marriage, Family," July 8, 2016, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/fatima-visionary-predicted-final-battle-would-be-over-marriage-family-17760>.



volume. But here we find a dedicated and knowledgeable scholar bringing the work of a lifetime to bear on perhaps *the* challenge of our age. Shivanandan's purpose is to shed light on what we have so far failed to understand about the deeper meaning of the Holy Family.

The book is both historical and theological in its analysis. Shivanandan gives us a careful and thorough account of the historical development of the Catholic understanding of the family as the "domestic church," a descriptor first referenced by St. Augustine but one that required centuries to take formal shape. This scholarship is valuable in and of itself and surely will be plumbed for its rich historical citations from the Church Fathers, writings from the Middle Ages, the twentieth century, and the present time. But she also provides an analysis of the family as a reflection of the self-revelation of God as a Trinitarian communion of persons, highlighting the important contribution made by personalism to our understanding of this analogy. The notion of "person" had been developed well by Aquinas and others as a means of explicating the mystery of the Trinity. But Shivanandan argues that it really was not until the twentieth century that a new appreciation of the dignity of the person shed light on the family as a communion of persons. With this development, a new vista of research into the salvific meaning of the family was opened, terrain the author sets off to explore more fully throughout the book.

Within the context of the call to self-gift, Shivanandan provides important insights into the deeper meaning of spousal relations, of paternity and maternity, and of childhood, both divine and human. Presence to one another is the key to the enactment of the gift of self, she argues. Indeed what "makes the Holy Family a model par excellence for all Christian families" is "above all the faith of Mary and Joseph, both challenged and permeated by the presence of Christ" (95).

Here I would offer what I think is perhaps the most significant contribution of the book: an insightful exploration and explication of the significance of the role St. Joseph played and continues to play in salvation history. In exploring the communion of persons as a reflection of the Trinitarian vision of the family, Shivanandan shows that, without a proper understanding of Joseph, our understanding of the Holy Family—and by implication our own—is greatly impoverished. Shivanandan traces the gradual emergence of a fuller account of St. Joseph, describing the fluctuations in the Church's own thinking on his identity. This on-again, off-again history led, in the end, to the development of her teaching on him. Understandably, the Christological controversies in the early Church resulted in a singular emphasis on the person of Mary. But this began to shift in the Middle Ages when St. Thomas and others began to give more


attention to the person of Joseph and his attributes as father of Jesus. Devotion to him arose at the same time. The author lays out the trajectory of thought as St. Joseph's importance faded again in the chaotic years after the Reformation and subsequently during the Enlightenment and its culmination in the French Revolution. We learn of his reemergence during the nineteenth century as Pope Pius IX declared him the patron saint and protector of the Church. But what surprises is the fact that it was not until 1989—and St. John Paul's apostolic exhortation on St. Joseph, *Redemptoris Custos*—that the significance of his role in the communion of persons began to take shape.

Shivanandan demonstrates that our understanding of the Holy Family requires an appreciation of the full truth about Joseph as husband of Mary, as father of Jesus, and as protector of the Church. This fuller account begins with his role as Mary's true husband. Though the procreative dimension is not a part of their union on the earthly plane, he still makes of himself a gift to her: through the exchange of the sacred chastity in which they both share. For it is consent, not physical consummation, that renders the sacrament valid.

Second, we must grasp the meaning of the declaration that St. Joseph is patron saint and protector of the Church. It is not merely a label, a reverential mark of devotion to Jesus's earthly father; it is a real sign of something deeply meaningful. It points to and is a reflection of the fact that he served as protector of the Church's very inception in the womb of the Virgin Mother, and then as the child grew and matured. Being the protector of the Church was Joseph's fatherly mission, one that transcends merely earthly realities.

But it is Shivanandan's demonstration of the truth about Joseph's fatherhood that completes the picture. She points out that Joseph has been called many things: a putative father, a foster father, or an adoptive father. But she argues that Joseph is not only Jesus's earthly father, nor is he father to the divine Son in name only. St. Joseph must be seen as the "essential link between the majestic fatherhood of God and human fatherhood" (106). He is, in a sense, the earthly representative of fatherhood. Without Joseph, the Trinitarian reality at the heart of the communion of persons that constitute the Holy Family would be incomplete.

Shivanandan has provided us all with a rich resource for future research and an insight into the Holy Family that should give us a clear direction and hope. In an age when fatherhood—and fathers themselves—are variously maligned, marginalized, or ridiculed, we would do well to reconsider the model Joseph is for the men of our time. His significance for their lives as well as the life and future of the family goes well beyond earthly

concerns. For, without fathers, clearly, families would find it impossible to “become what they are.” And it may be that the future of humanity depends upon us fulfilling that call. 

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