

Summer 2021 • Volume 19, Number 3

et Nova Vetera

The English Edition of the International Theological Journal

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NOVA ET VETERA
The English Edition of the International Theological Journal

ISSN 1542-7315

Summer 2021

Vol. 19, No. 3

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The English edition of *Nova et Vetera* is published quarterly and provides an international forum for theological and philosophical studies from a Thomistic perspective. Founded in 1926 by future Cardinal Charles Journet in association with Jacques Maritain, *Nova et Vetera* is published in related, distinct French and English editions. The English edition of *Nova et Vetera* welcomes articles and book reviews in theology, philosophy, and biblical studies that address central contemporary debates and discussions. We seek to be “at the heart of the Church,” faithful to the Magisterium and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and devoted to the work of true dialogue.

Nova et Vetera (ISSN 1542-7315; ISBN 978-1-64585-165-3) is published quarterly by St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, 1468 Parkview Circle, Steubenville, OH 43952. *Nova et Vetera* is distributed to institutional subscribers for the St. Paul Center by the Catholic University of America Press. Institutional subscriptions, notifications of change of address, and inquiries concerning subscriptions, back issues, and missing copies should be sent to: JHUP Journals Division, PO Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211-0966. All materials published in *Nova et Vetera* are copyrighted by St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology.

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POSTMASTER: Please send address change to

Nova et Vetera,
1468 Parkview Circle,
Steubenville, OH 43952.

Periodical Postage Paid at Steubenville, OH.

This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Catholic Periodical and Literature Index® (CPLI®), a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, USA. Email: atla@atla.com, www.atla.com and is indexed and abstracted in the Emerging Sources Citation Index.

***Nova et Vetera* Subscription Rates:**

- **Individuals:** one-year \$40.00, two-year \$75.00
International: one-year \$60.00, two-year \$115.00
- **Students:** one-year \$30.00, two-year \$50.00
International: one-year \$40.00, two-year \$70.00
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one-year \$110.00, one-year print + electronic subscription \$150.00
International: one-year \$135.00

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Penance as Sacrament of the Sacrifice of the Cross

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EACH OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS was instituted by Christ as a channel of his grace for the needs of his people. Saint Thomas Aquinas begins his treatise on the sacraments with an affirmation that God acts through the sacred humanity of Christ in each of the sacraments. *The saving power must necessarily be derived by the sacraments from Christ's Godhead through his humanity.*¹ The Catholic doctrine of the sacraments flows from and, in a sense, is an extension of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God. Each sacrament has a material and verbal component, the former a sign of the humanity assumed by the Son of God in the Incarnation, the latter, a reminder that it is the *Divine Word who became flesh* for our salvation who acts in the sacraments.

For five of the sacraments, a material sacramental sign (*matter*) and a sacramental word (*form*)—that is, a prayer formula that accompanies and specifies the meaning of the sign—are easily identifiable. For instance, in Baptism, the minister of the sacrament either pours water over the head of the catechumen or immerses the catechumen in a pool of water, with the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The sacramental sign (*matter*) of Baptism is the pouring of

¹ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST], III, q. 62, a. 5: “A sacrament in causing grace works after the manner of an instrument. Now an instrument is twofold: the one, separate, as a stick, for instance; the other, united, as a hand. Moreover, the separate instrument is moved by means of the united instrument, as a stick by the hand. Now the principal efficient cause of grace is God Himself, in comparison with Whom Christ's humanity is as a united instrument, whereas the sacrament is as a separate instrument. Consequently, the saving power must needs be derived by the sacraments from Christ's Godhead through His humanity.”

water or immersion in water; the sacramental word (form), the words that Christ himself taught us. In the sacrament of confirmation, the candidate is anointed on the forehead with Holy Chrism as the minister of the sacrament prays, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." The matter of confirmation is the anointing with Chrism, the form, the words determined by the Church. In the Holy Eucharist, the matter is unleavened bread and wine mixed with water, the form, the words Christ used to institute the sacrament of his Body and Blood at the Last Supper. Together matter and form constitute the sacrament through which Christ communicates grace to the recipient.

In the Sacrament of Penance, there is no immediately perceivable material sign such as water in Baptism, chrism in Confirmation, the oil of the sick in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, bread and wine in the Eucharist, and the laying on of hands in Holy Orders. In attempting to identify the matter of the Sacrament of Penance, some have inaccurately identified it as the reality and effects of sin that inhere somehow in the sinner. Although the matter of the sacrament is intimately related to the sins of the penitent, Saint Thomas Aquinas explained that the sacramental sign is not sin per se but rather, a sincere sorrow for sin that is inspired by God: "The proximate matter of this sacrament consists in the acts of the penitent, the matter of which acts are the sins over which he grieves, which he confesses, and for which he satisfies. Hence it follows that sins are the remote matter of Penance, as a matter, not for approval, but for detestation, and destruction."² If this contrition is authentically supernatural, it will include, at least implicitly, the willingness to do all that God requires for forgiveness, namely, confession to a priest and the readiness to make amends through acts of penance.

Since the Christian who commits mortal sin is incapable of meriting reconciliation with God through any good work, he must seek the grace of repentance from the Holy Spirit. This plea for grace is itself the gift of the Spirit of God who draws the sinner to the heart of Christ, inspiring sorrow, the desire to confess the sin to a priest, and the need to make amends. The penitent responds to the Holy Spirit by accepting the grace of repentance and sincerely repenting.

The Angelic Doctor stressed that the sacramental sign of Penance is made up of human acts inspired by the Holy Spirit and the absolution of the priest: "In those sacraments which have a corporeal matter, this matter needs to be applied by a minister of the Church, who stands in the place of Christ, which denotes that the excellence of the power which operates

² Saint Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 84, a. 2.

in the sacraments is from Christ. But in the sacrament of Penance, human actions take the place of matter, and these actions proceed from internal inspiration, wherefore the matter is not applied by the minister, but by God working inwardly; while the minister furnishes the complement of the sacrament, when he absolves the penitent.”³ The acts themselves reveal that the sinner has already been responsive to God by accepting the grace of repentance. The Lord who begins the process of repentance through actual grace brings it to completion through the absolution of the priest who acts in the person of Christ.

Since the sacramental sign of Penance is not as immediately obvious as, for instance, the sacramental sign of water in Baptism or bread and wine in the Holy Eucharist, it is important to identify what constitutes the sign of the sacrament of penance with as much precision as possible. To do this, theologians have referred to the acts of the penitent—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—as the *quasi-matter* of the Sacrament of Penance. *Quasi-matter* means literally *as if* matter, or to use a modern colloquialism, the acts of the penitent are *kind of like* matter.⁴ Let us step back to see what the sacrament looks like. Remember that a sacrament is a sign of a particular grace of Christ that causes that grace. In the sacrament of reconciliation, a contrite sinner comes to Christ in the person of the priest. The penitent names the sins, expresses sorrow for committing them, and agrees to do penance for offending God and wounding the Church. The priest, acting *in the person of Christ the head of the Church (in persona Christi capitis)*, forgives the sin.

Sacramental reconciliation has been signified throughout the Christian centuries in various ways: the laying on of hands, the bishop leading

³ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 84, a. 1, ad 2.

⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 84, a. 1, ad 1: “By corporeal things taken in a wide sense we may understand also external sensible actions, which are to this sacrament what water is to Baptism, or chrism to Confirmation. But it is to be observed that in those sacraments, whereby an exceptional grace surpassing altogether the proportion of a human act, is conferred, some corporeal matter is employed externally, e.g. in Baptism, which confers full remission of all sins, both as to guilt and as to punishment, and in Confirmation, wherein the fulness of the Holy Ghost is bestowed, and in Extreme Unction, which confers perfect spiritual health derived from the virtue of Christ as from an extrinsic principle. Wherefore, such human acts as are in these sacraments, are not the essential matter of the sacrament, but are dispositions thereto. On the other hand, in those sacraments whose effect corresponds to that of some human act, the sensible human act itself takes the place of matter, as in the case of Penance and Matrimony, even as in bodily medicines, some are applied externally, such as plasters and drugs, while others are acts of the person who seeks to be cured, such as certain exercises.”

the penitent to the altar, the anointing of the penitent with oil, or as it is today, a declaration of absolution from sin in a formula established by the Church. The sacramental sign properly-so-called includes the encounter of penitent and priest and their conversation that has absolution as its end. The sacramental sign of Penance is the contrite penitent confessing sins to a priest who imposes a penance (matter of the sacrament) and grants absolution with the power and authority of Christ and the Church (form of the sacrament).

In teaching that the Sacrament of Penance has its own particular matter and form, the Catholic Church emphasizes that, although sorrow for sin surely originates in the sanctuary of conscience, it must manifest itself in a physical, concrete manner to be a sacrament. The physicality of Penance—the tangible act of the penitent coming publicly⁵ to a priest to confess his or her sins in the most secret conversation known to humankind—ensures its sacramentality. In other words, although contrition is the most important act of the penitent, it alone is not sufficient. The penitent comes with a sorrowful heart to Christ who was wounded by every sin in his Passion. The penitent likewise acknowledges that the Church has been wounded by the sin. The penitent confesses sin, that is, admits it to the priest plainly, bluntly calling it by its proper name and resolving never to commit the sin again. The self-disclosure of the penitent is often embarrassing, and painful from a human point of view.

In humbly confessing to a priest, who is the guarantor of the presence of Christ and the Church, the penitent venerates the sacred humanity of Christ and makes an act of faith in the divine origin of the Church and her sacraments. He admits that he has wounded the Church by destroying the ecclesial grace of Baptism through sin. The penitent owns up to the need to do penance for the harm caused by the sins. The penance imposed by the priest in confession, subsequent acts of penance done freely out of love, and the acceptance of the sufferings of life join the penitent to Christ in his great act of reconciliation and thereby effect the healing of the penitent who has been wounded by sin.

The priest and penitent concelebrate the Sacrament of Penance, together

⁵ Because the sacrament of penance is always an act of both Christ and his Church, it is public. Most people who receive the sacrament stand in line in a Church and publicly enter the place where the priest hears confessions. That a person goes to confession is a public fact. What the penitent confesses is a different matter. The matter of the confession is protected by the absolutely binding sacramental seal of penance. The public nature of the sacrament does not deny that the penitent always has the right to confess anonymously, that is, behind a screen.

positing the sacramental sign (*sacramentum tantum*) that has the forgiveness of sins as its effect. The absolution of the priest *re-presents* (that is, *makes present*) the sacrifice of Christ. The penitent's contrition (perfect or imperfect), the integral confession of mortal sins, and the willingness to do penance surge forth from the Savior's act of expiating sin. Through the absolution of the priest, Christ's sorrow for sins, confession of sins on the Cross, and satisfaction for sins are made sacramentally present. In Christ and through Christ, the penitent makes a perfect act of contrition (*res et sacramentum*). The effect of this perfect act of contrition is the forgiveness of sins (*res tantum*). We shall return to this point.

Saint Thomas Aquinas explains the sacramentality of Penance with his usual acumen: "As Gregory says [Isidore, *Etymologiae* 6.19], 'a sacrament consists in a solemn act, whereby something is so done that we understand it to signify the holiness which it confers.' Now it is evident that in Penance something is done so that something holy is signified both on the part of the penitent sinner, and on the part of the priest absolving, because the penitent sinner, by deed and word, shows his heart to have renounced sin, and in like manner the priest, by his deed and word with regard to the penitent, signifies the work of God Who forgives his sins. Therefore it is evident that Penance, as practiced in the Church, is a sacrament."⁶

To appreciate the deep Christological significance of the Sacrament of Penance, it is important to acknowledge that the forgiveness of sins has only one source, the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Saint Peter acknowledged this unambiguously before the Sanhedrin: "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12). Christians claim Saint Paul's boast as their own: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Saint Paul's use of the singular "me" is significant. Paul acknowledges that Jesus loved him and gave himself over to death to save him!

Traditional soteriology embraces this view of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. It holds that Christ, in beholding the face of his Father in the Passion, saw and loved every person, and suffered on behalf of every sinner. When our brothers and sisters in Evangelical ecclesial communities claim that Jesus is their *personal Lord and Savior*, they mean that the God-man held them personally in his heart as he suffered and died on the Cross. They believe that Christ saw them, loved them, and willingly suffered in

⁶ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 84, a. 1.

their place. The singular pronoun used by Saint Paul is of utmost importance: “Christ loved *me* and gave himself up for *me*.” Some Christians, including Catholics, influenced by various forms of *low Christology* hold that Christ offered his human suffering and death for the forgiveness of sins as any man might offer his last agony for a specific intention. Some go so far as to claim that Jesus’s faith, a virtue that the Church has never attributed to the God-man, was stretched to the limit in his Passion, leading him to the brink of despair. Hence his cry from the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).

In his Treatise on the Sacraments in the *Summa theologiae*, Saint Thomas Aquinas stressed that the Passion of Christ is the one source of the grace that comes to Christians in each of the sacraments: “A sacrament properly speaking is that which is ordained to signify our sanctification. In which three things may be considered; viz. the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ’s Passion; the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; and the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life. And all these are signified by the sacraments. Consequently a sacrament is a sign that is both a reminder of the past, i.e. the Passion of Christ; and an indication of that which is effected in us by Christ’s Passion, i.e. grace; and a prognostic, that is, a foretelling of future glory.”⁷

The Lord’s Passion is the *efficient cause* of the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. The acts of the penitent constitute the *material cause* of the sacrament. These acts, inspired by the love of Christ, are united to the Passion of Christ through the absolution of a priest. Absolution, the form of the sacrament that communicates Christ’s grace and virtues to the penitent, is the *formal cause* of the forgiveness of sins. The justification of the sinner is the *final cause*, the ultimate purpose, of the sacrament that is the source of eternal life.

In another question, Saint Thomas not only lays emphasis on the Passion of Christ as the source of sacramental grace but also notes that in the sacrament *the virtue of the Passion is in a manner united to us by our receiving the sacrament*. This reference is important for our understanding of how the Sacrament of Penance unites the contrition, confession, and satisfaction of the penitent to the Passion of Christ as the formal cause of forgiveness:

Now sacramental grace seems to be ordained principally to two things: namely, to take away the defects consequent on past sins, in

⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 60, a. 3.

so far as they are transitory in act, but endure in guilt; and, further, to perfect the soul in things pertaining to Divine Worship in regard to the Christian Religion. But it is manifest from what has been stated above (48, 1,2,6; 49, 1,3) that Christ delivered us from our sins principally through His Passion, not only by way of efficiency and merit, but also by way of satisfaction. Likewise by His Passion He inaugurated the Rites of the Christian Religion by offering “Himself—an oblation and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). Wherefore it is manifest that the sacraments of the Church derive their power especially from Christ’s Passion, the virtue of which is in a manner united to us by our receiving the sacraments. It was in sign of this that from the side of Christ hanging on the Cross there flowed water and blood, the former of which belongs to Baptism, the latter to the Eucharist, which are the principal sacraments.”⁸

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, enriched by liturgical theology and, in particular, the *mystery theology* of Dom Odo Casel and his confreres, explains how the *virtue of the victim* is made present and supernaturally effective in the liturgy of the Church. This explanation is helpful in coming to an understanding of the unique *representation* of the sacrifice of Christ that takes place in the sacrament of reconciliation:

In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present. During his earthly life Jesus announced his Paschal mystery by his teaching and anticipated it by his actions. When his Hour comes, he lives out the unique event of history which does not pass away: Jesus dies, is buried, rises from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father “once for all.” His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered for all men—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the

⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 62, a. 5. In discussing the Priesthood of Christ, Saint Thomas points to the eternal saving significance of the “virtue” of Christ’s Passion: “Although Christ’s passion and death are not to be repeated, yet the virtue of that Victim endures forever, for, as it is written (Heb. 10:14), ‘by one oblation He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified’” (*ST III*, q. 22, a. 5, ad 2).

Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life.
(§1085)

The virtue of the victim is surely the perfect obedience through which Christ, offering himself as victim for sin on the Cross, embraced his mission as Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. However, it is more. The *virtue of the victim* includes all the interior dispositions of Christ's heart as he gave his life to glorify his Father and save the sinful human family from eternal death in hell. The *virtue of the victim* is the love that motivated the mysterious substitution through which the sinless Christ took on all human sins as if they were his own so that sinners might be forgiven and transformed in his holiness.

This substitution of Christ for the sinner, his willingness to bear the overwhelming weight of sin and its guilt so that the sinner might receive the gift of eternal life is adroitly articulated by Saint Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "For our sake he [the Father] made him [Christ] to be sin who did not know sin, so that we (who accept the grace of repentance) might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). The identical teaching is found in the First Letter of Peter: "He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

The *Catechism* explains that Christ suffered in the place of every human person: "It is love 'to the end' (Jn 13:1) that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life (Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25). Now 'the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died' (2 Cor 5:25). No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all" (§616).

The *Catechism* also teaches that Christ knew and loved each human person for whom he suffered and died. This document of faith clearly affirms that the Savior saw all the people he saved in every place and every age in his vision of the Heavenly Father: "Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us: 'The Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). He has loved us all with a human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation (Jn 19:34) 'is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that . . . love with which

the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings' without exception." (§478).

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, reflecting on Christ's internal anguish in Gethsemane, offers this description of Our Lord's experience in the garden that likely intensified until he breathed his last on the Cross. It cast a great light on what Jesus suffered in his human psyche, an agony more terrible than the physical torture of crucifixion: "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:7–10).

Two statements in this text—"he learned obedience" and "when he was made perfect"—have provoked a great amount of reflection especially among systematic theologians who understandably seek to defend and explain the dogma of the Hypostatic Union, the revealed truth that the man Jesus Christ, from the first moment of his existence as man, was and is the eternal Son of God made flesh.

As the *New Adam*, Christ, the true head of the human family, has a relationship with every man and woman. "To learn obedience" means that Jesus, in fulfilling his Father's will to save the human race, consented to become sin, or to put it more shockingly, vicariously to become the sinner. In his Passion, the sinless Lamb of God experienced how it feels to disobey the Father, reject his love, and deserve punishment. He expiated everyone's sins by grieving over them as if he himself had committed them. He confessed the sins of every person to the Father. He made satisfaction for them through his suffering, both physical and mental, and in his Passion implored forgiveness for all men and women.

Exegetes point systematic theologians to the literal meaning of "when he was made perfect." This literally means, "when he had finished the task for which he was sent" or "when he had attained his end." What precisely was/is this *end*, this condition of being *perfect*? Christ attains the end for which he was sent into the world in his "hour." In the garden and on the Cross, Christ does what the Father asked him to do: he suffers in the place of sinful men and women, offering them the possibility of the remission of their sins in him and through his obedience to the Father. Bearing all sins with an infinite love for his Father who is infinitely offended by sin and with an infinite love for the sinner who has lost the way to God, Christ reconciled man and woman to God. To be forgiven, the sinner must receive Christ's love, enter into his obedience and appropriate his

loving surrender to the Father's will. By consenting to suffer in the place of every sinner, Christ, the sinless victim of sin, *became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.*

Pope John Paul II, in his 1984 Apostolic Letter on the Meaning of Human Suffering, *Salvifici Dolori*), commenting on the fourth Suffering Servant Song of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 52:13 through 53:12), explains how Christ was able to substitute himself for every sinner and accomplish the redemption (the passages that are particularly apropos are emphasized here):

The Song of the Suffering Servant contains a description in which it is possible, in a certain sense, to identify the stages of Christ's Passion in their various details: the arrest, the humiliation, the blows, the spitting, the contempt for the prisoner, the unjust sentence, and then the scourging, the crowning with thorns and the mocking, the carrying of the Cross, the crucifixion and the agony.

Even more than this description of the Passion, what strikes us in the words of the Prophet is the depth of Christ's sacrifice. *Behold, He, though innocent, takes upon himself the sufferings of all people, because he takes upon himself the sins of all. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all": all human sin in its breadth and depth becomes the true cause of the Redeemer's suffering.* If the suffering "is measured" by the evil suffered, then the words of the Prophet enable us to understand the extent of this evil and suffering with which Christ burdened himself. It can be said that this is "substitutive" suffering; but above all it is "redemptive." The Man of Sorrows of that prophecy is truly that "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." *In his suffering, sins are cancelled out precisely because he alone as the only-begotten Son could take them upon himself, accept them with that love for the Father which overcomes the evil of every sin; in a certain sense he annihilates this evil in the spiritual space of the relationship between God and humanity, and fills this space with good.*

Here we touch upon the duality of nature of a single personal subject of redemptive suffering.

He who by his Passion and death on the Cross brings about the Redemption is the only-begotten Son whom God "gave." And at the same time this Son who is consubstantial with the Father suffers as a man. His suffering has human dimensions; it also has—unique in the history of humanity—a depth and intensity which, while being

human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only-begotten Son himself: “God from God.” Therefore, only he—the only-begotten Son—is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: in every sin and in “total” sin, according to the dimensions of the historical existence of humanity on earth. (§17)

The Sacrament of Penance in its unique way *re-presents* the sacrifice of the Cross, not under the appearance of bread and wine as at Mass, but in the inner sanctuary of the penitent’s conscience. Through sacramental absolution, the penitent’s contrition, or at least attrition, the integral confession of mortal sins, and the willingness to make satisfaction for them are transformed into a real participation in the Passion of Christ. In Penance, Christ’s perfect act of contrition for sins, his confession of our sins to his Father, and his perfect expiation of sin through love are re-presented, that is, made present and communicated to the penitent. Absolution makes Christ’s sacrifice present and unites the sinner to the Lord in his act of expiating sin. In the expression of contrition, perfect or imperfect, the honest confession of all mortal sins by name and number, and the willingness to do penance to expiate sin, the penitent meets Christ in his perfect worship of the Father and receives a share in his charity. The absolution of the priest unites the dispositions of the penitent to the perfect disposition of Christ crucified. This meeting of the sinner and the Savior renders the penitent’s contrition perfect and acceptable to the Father.

The communion of the penitent with Christ in his Passion brings about the forgiveness of sins. The sincerely contrite penitent under the impulse of grace turns to Christ and adores him as the one who saves from sin and death. If the penitent’s contrition is motivated either by the love of God or merely by the fear of punishment in hell, the simple recognition of Christ as Savior brings the penitent into Our Lord’s perfect act of love for the Father as he hung dying on the Cross. The confession of mortal sins brings the penitent into communion with the agony that Christ suffered because of these individual sins. Christ’s confession of sins on the Cross gives merit to every confession of sin in the Church. The acceptance of the penance given by the priest manifests the penitent’s willingness to join Christ in his work of expiating sin. This Christocentric understanding of the acts of the penitent and absolution elucidates exactly what Catholics mean when they make the claim “Christ is my personal Lord and Savior.”

There is a holy exchange in the sacrament: Christ, who took every sin as his own and suffered in the place of every sinner, gives the penitent a share in his holiness through the remission of sins. He does this only when the

sinner is ready and willing to share in his sorrow for sins, to confess the sins that afflicted Christ in his Passion and his great act of expiation of sin through charity. The readiness of the sinner to do penance is itself the manifestation of God's saving grace.

This explanation of the sacrament casts light on Saint Thomas's teaching that the *res et sacramentum* of Penance is interior repentance. Aquinas explained that the sacrament supplies whatever is lacking in the contrition of the penitent and causes the penitent to make an act of perfect love of God. In other words, if the contrition is imperfect, absolution renders it perfect. Through absolution, God infuses an act of perfect contrition in the will of the penitent. This perfect act of charity causes the penitent to turn against sin and adhere to God in love. In response, God forgives the sins.

In summary, Saint Thomas explained that in the Sacrament of Penance the *sacramentum tantum*, the sign (matter and form) that causes grace, is, on one hand, the acts of the penitent that have been prompted by grace and, on the other hand, the absolution of the priest. The immediate effect of the sacrament, the *res et sacramentum*, is an act of perfect contrition in the heart of the sinner. This act of sorrow, flowing from the heart of the crucified Christ, is made present by the absolution of the priest. Therefore, the redemptive love of Christ freely received by the sinner *destroys the sin* that stands between the penitent and the Heavenly Father. Divine forgiveness is the ultimate effect of the sacrament—the *res tantum*.

Saint Thomas's explanation of interior repentance as the *res et sacramentum* of the sacrament has immense value. Among other things, it highlights the personal engagement of the penitent in the forgiveness of sins. However, there is a subtlety in this explanation that people find difficult to grasp, and for several reasons. Theologians and spiritual writers have noted that the immediate effect of absolution, interior repentance, need not be and most frequently is not felt by the penitent. As a result, the Thomistic position, although accurate, is not always immediately appealing. People ask, "how am I forgiven by making an act of love that I neither feel emotionally nor experience in any way except perhaps as an act of faith?" The confusion is aggravated by the assertion that an act of perfect contrition, which is impossible to identify with the certainty of faith, remits mortal sins before the reception of absolution as long as the penitent intends to confess the sins. Explain this as you will, it can and does tempt people to consider confession as ultimately superfluous.

For these and other reasons, some have either rejected or not understood Aquinas's teaching that interior repentance is the *res et sacramentum* of Penance and opted for a simpler explanation: God forgives the sins

confessed through the absolution of the priest. This position does not address the *res et sacramentum* of Penance at all. Presuming the sincerity of the acts of the penitent, it claims that the absolution of the priest per se causes the forgiveness of sins.

If the acts of the penitent (the matter) and the absolution of the priest (form) make the grace and virtues of Christ's Passion immediately present to the penitent, and if Christ the Savior communicates his own sorrow for sin, his confession of sin, and the efficacious satisfaction of Calvary to the penitent as his own, one begins to envision a renewal of the sacrament at the level of Christological mysticism. This mystical view of Penance reconciles the Thomistic position on the *res et sacramentum* with the speculation of more contemporary theologians who claim that the immediate and abiding effect of the sacrament is reconciliation with the Church which causes reconciliation with God. The interior reconciling communion that Penance effects between Christ and the penitent concomitantly effects reconciling communion with the Church. Finally, the *re-presentation* of Christ's Passion in the Sacrament of Penance explains why only a man who has the capacity to *re-present* the sacrifice of the Cross in the mystery of transubstantiation has the power to forgive sins in the name of Christ and the Church. N&V

The Crisis of Faith and the Crisis of the Church

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THE CRISIS IN THE CHURCH is becoming more and more evident. Therefore, right at the beginning, a thesis should be presented which describes one of the main problems connected with it. Then further explanations and analyses will be presented in order to justify the following thesis: Many in the Church have begun to turn away from God, pretending to turn to man.

This thesis contains some explosive power in itself regarding several aspects, above all because the turning to man is considered as positive, and at first glance there does not seem to be any compelling reason why a turning away from God must be associated with it. Rather, the love of God put into practice—as Scripture testifies—leads to a more perfect love of neighbor (see Matt 22:37–40). But evil rarely occurs in its pure form, rather it often presents itself as something “good.” This problem is addressed, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew, where it says: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15). The situation is similar with regard to this thesis put forward. The turning to man is indeed desirable and supposed to be something positive, but it leads to disastrous consequences if it should mark the point where the faithful are lead away from God and the Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. In this case this “turning” would be a Trojan horse to alienate man from God.

Such a decoupling process has been going on for many years and has brought “believers” away from God, which is shown above all in the fact that the Revelation of God, witnessed in Scripture and Tradition, is losing or has already lost its significance and normativity. The procedure is subtle, because the appearance of “piety” is preserved and people are left to believe that they are still “Catholics,” although they are turning away or already have turned away from the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. This can be seen, for example,

in the fact that basic beliefs are no longer known and/or are no longer accepted or believed.

Even with regard to fundamental beliefs, this rejection is becoming more and more evident. Nevertheless, it is considered taboo to state that these “non-believers” have lost their faith. In the 1950s Joseph Ratzinger had already warned in an essay that paganism would spread in the heart of the Church, a statement for which he was criticized at the time.¹ Since then this development has accelerated further, whereby the warning of the apostle Paul in the Second Letter to Timothy gains new actuality: “As they make a pretence of piety but deny its power” (2 Tim 3:5). True piety is a gift of the Holy Spirit and leads to the fear of God, the beginning of wisdom (see Sir 1:14). In other words, true piety is guided by that wisdom which comes from God and which is foolishness according to human knowledge (see 1 Cor 1:18–20). The semblance of piety is based on purely human criteria; it is ultimately a house built on sand (see Matt 7:24–27).²

Using theological terminology, this process of “turning to man,” which has different facets and accents, is usually referred to as the “anthropological turn.” This term is inseparably connected to the name Karl Rahner.³ It has quickly gained great influence in its effort to think of God from the human perspective and has become the mainstream of Catholic theology. It has taken on ever more radical traits and has ultimately become an anthropocentric turn in which man is at the center.⁴ Wherever such a

¹ See Joseph Ratzinger, “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche, in: ders., *Kirche—Zeichen unter den Völkern. Schriften zur Ekklesiologie und Ökumene*,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8/2 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010), 1143–158. This process has also affected many priests. See also: Ralph Weimann, “Die Krise der Kirche als Krise des Klerus,” *NOrd* 73 (2019): 244–56.

² See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §83.

³ Karl Rahner has introduced this concept into theology; see “Theologie und Anthropologie,” in *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 7 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1966), 43–65, at 43. A critical evaluation is presented by Cornelio Fabro, *La svolta antropologica di Karl Rahner*, 3rd ed. (Segni: EDIVI, 2011), 83–136. See also Peter Eicher, *Die anthropologische Wende: Karl Rahners philosophischer Weg vom Wesen des Menschen zur personalen Existenz* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1970), 330–31. Even if not without a certain polemic, Giovanni Cavalcoli made it clear that Rahner was the trigger of a theological revolution based on a new anthropology and thinking theology; see *Karl Rahner: Il Concilio tradito* (Verona: Fede & Cultura, 2009), esp. 170–76. A similar conclusion is presented in David Berger, *Karl Rahner: Kritische Annäherungen*, *Quaestiones non disputatae* 8 (Siegburg: Schmitt, 2004).

⁴ Philip Trower has analyzed this development in a detailed study, bringing to evidence that such an approach is mainly based on philosophical concepts. Cf. Philip Trower, *The Catholic Church and the Counter-Faith: A Study of the Roots of*

turning to the subject “man” is consistently applied, a turning away from the revealed faith is the necessary consequence, because the new criterion for “faith” is the human person with his/her ideas and preferences.

Dead Ends and Difficulties

The dimensions which this process has already assumed can be seen from numerous developments within the Church. The so-called “synodal way” in Germany is just as inspired by this as the “Initiative Maria 2.0,” which in its call of May 2019 describes its own goals as follows: “We women want a genuine renewal of our church. We want to participate in shaping and setting the tone.”⁵ Parts of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Amazon Synod reflect the same thrust with even more drastic statements. In §126d, for example, the proposal is made that communities should receive from the episcopal conferences the authority to “adapt the Eucharistic ritual to their cultures.”⁶

Man defined and determined by his culture takes the place of the revealed truth. The faith would be deprived of its universality and unity if such an approach were to prevail. These statements show how far this process has already come. In the same *Instrumentum laboris* this human-centered understanding of religion is extended even to ecology. In §19 the demand is made that the territory (Amazonia) be declared a theological place, “where faith is lived, and also a particular source of God’s revelation: epiphanic places where the reserve of life and wisdom for the planet is manifest, a life and wisdom that speaks of God. In the Amazon, the ‘caresses of God’ become manifest and become incarnate in history.”⁷ In other words, the place itself is declared a source of God’s revelation, which would contradict the Christian concept of revelation and relativize it to be in line with various other experiences of God.

In all these approaches, man is apparently at the center, but basically, he is deprived of the most precious thing: his faith and his relationship with God. The Second Vatican Council had strongly warned of this when it rejected in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* a false autonomy of temporal things and concluded: “When God is forgotten, however, the

Modern Secularism, Relativism and de-Christianisation (Oxford: Family Publications, 2006), esp. 67–81.

⁵ Aktion Maria 2.0, mariazweipunktnull.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Maria20AufrufAktion.pdf. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

⁶ The Synod of Bishops, “The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology,” *Instrumentum laboris*, Vatican City, June 17, 2019, §126d.

⁷ Synod of Bishops, “The Amazon,” *Instrumentum laboris*, §19.

creature itself grows unintelligible.”⁸ And yet exactly this tendency has paved its way into theology.

The question arises how this more or less horizontal view of man could come about and why divine revelation increasingly has lost its normative power? Surely it would be wrong to want to simplify this complex process too much, and yet it seems to have become possible—to express it in the words of Ratzinger—because paganism has arrived at the heart of the Church. When the Christian is no longer fundamentally rooted in God, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, everything else becomes “crooked.” This also has implications for the belief that God is truly present in the sacraments of the Church and it has strong repercussions regarding the moral life.

The question that everything boils down to is a very personal one. Is faith in salvation and eternal life in the community of the Triune God really the treasure for which one is ready to sell everything (see Matt 13:44–46)? Faith and the supernatural sense of faith connected to it have often been replaced by a horizontal vision of man in which the human person becomes the measure of all things. To stick to the biblical image, the “modern Christian” seems to claim to have bought the field with the treasure in order to be able to dispose of the treasure at will, since he believes himself to have it in his possession. But this is precisely the problem, for we can neither possess God nor subject him to our criteria, but—as the apostle Paul says—“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor 4:7).

Modern times with their premise of feasibility and under the dominance of technology—like the sirens of Greek mythology—have led many Christians away from God. This is evident in the rejection of the traditional faith, which—even by some Church representatives—is openly opposed with aversion, contempt, and prohibitions. Thus, a process is repeated, which already Basil the Great described in a letter to the bishops of Italy and Gaul about the Arian persecution. He complains bitterly that “the persecutors themselves bear the name ‘Christians.’ The conscientious observation of the fathers’ traditions is now being punished as a terrible crime. The God-fearing are expelled from their homeland and banished to the wastelands.”⁹ Those who are not prepared to submit to the “new” and to adopt its princi-

⁸ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, §36. This is a poor translation of the Latin: “Immo, per oblivionem Dei ipsa creatura obscuratur.”

⁹ Basil the Great, Letter to the Bishops of Italy, in *Lektionar zum Stundenbuch*, vol. 1/7 (Trier: Pustet, 1979), 233–35, at 233–34.

ples often experience what Saint Basil had described in the fourth century.

This roughly describes the dead ends in which parts of the Church are now to be found. It is not just a matter of different views, but the *raison d'être* of the Church is at stake. Is it still possible to convey what the Church actually stands for? The high number of Christians leaving the churches in Europe points in a different direction.¹⁰ In consequence, the Church is perceived as a merely human organization which needs to be changed entirely, because of the abuses and the bad publicity and because the Church does not match up to the standards of the so-called *Zeitgeist*, which is above all man-centered. The essentials are not even seen, such as: What is the cause of the abuses and the actual crisis? Or even what is the actual task/purpose of the Church? Related to these questions is that of which hermeneutic should be used in order to approach the topic. Is a man-centered perspective sufficient? A theological answer will only be possible if it is given based upon revelation and faith, through which—and only through which—the Church receives and retains its *raison d'être*. Benedict XVI, in his letter on the abuse scandal, made this evident, when he wrote: “A society without God—a society that does not know Him and treats Him as non-existent—is a society that loses its measure.”¹¹ The same has to be applied even much more with regard to the Church.

Ecclesiological and Theological Dimension in the Context of the Anthropocentric Turn

Before possible solutions and ways out of the crisis can be delineated, it will be necessary to recall some fundamental points for the understanding of the Church and faith, without, however, being able to deal with this topic exhaustively. Again, a thesis is to be laid down at the beginning: The Church is from God or she is not. This “either–or” does not sound good in the ears of modern people and in the age of dialogue, tolerance and relativism. Should we not think of the Church from a “human perspective”; thus, are “we” not Church? In this context the different theological theories on “Church” do not need to be cited, but it will be helpful to refer briefly to the Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

This document is called a dogmatic constitution because the fathers of the Council have thus sought to express a particular meaning and the

¹⁰ See: German Bishops Conference, *Katholische Kirche in Deutschland: Statistische Daten 2018* (Bonn: Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, 2019).

¹¹ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse,” *Corriere della Sera*, April 11, 2019 (trans. Anian Christoph Wimmer for Catholic New Agency).

value of this text. The first paragraph reads: “The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”¹² This quotation makes it clear that the Church is not of itself, nor does it stand within itself; nor does it reflect its own light or the desires and ideas of people, but the Church is the Church from God. The Church has a sacramental dimension,¹³ because she has her origin and her roots in God and receives herself from him. Should this connection be damaged or should it lose its significance, then the Church would be transformed into a non-profit organization or political party; she would ultimately become a plaything of arbitrariness.¹⁴

But this is exactly what has happened due to the anthropocentric turn—the overemphasis on the horizontal dimension. A process has begun which, in extreme cases, leads or has led to an “emancipation” from the revealed truth, which is Jesus Christ himself. Put simply, the gaze has been so strongly focused on man that the gaze on the mystery of God has been blocked. If the Revelation of God no longer specifies the way, if Christ is no longer recognized as the way and the truth (cf. John 14:6), and if the Church does not indicate the way that leads to God, then man—more precisely some people, those who set the tone—will invent new ways, which of course do not correspond to what God had revealed. In these cases, the projection theory of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach proves to be true, according to which the knowledge of God is the self-knowledge of man. In his polemical thesis he assumed that man projected his own ideas onto God, who consequently did not really exist. This thesis, which was strongly challenged at Feuerbach’s time, has become widely accepted. Today, quite a few believers live and act in exactly the way that this thesis postulates. Many who call themselves “believers” no longer seem to notice that in reality they follow their own projections and create a church and a faith according to their own standards. Such tendencies can be seen above all in theology, especially since, as the Pope Emeritus explained in September 2019, the “word God in theology seems to be ever often on the margins.”¹⁵ When the point of reference is lost, there will be no absolute moral law or norm.

¹² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, §1.

¹³ See the work of the German theologian Karl-Heinz Menke, *Sakramentalität: Wesen und Wunde des Katholizismus*, 3rd ed. (Regensburg: Pustet, 2018).

¹⁴ In his first homily, Pope Francis warned against these tendencies. Cf. Francis, “Missa Pro Ecclesia,” Sistine Chapel, March 14, 2013.

¹⁵ See Benedict XVI, “1968 und der Missbrauch: Antwort auf Birgit Aschmann,” *Herder-Korrespondenz* 73, no. 9 (2019): 51.

This process has been evolving for decades. In the Church one has become accustomed to look almost exclusively at man and quite subtly the gaze has turned away from God. This is particularly evident in the celebration of the Eucharist *versus populum*, which turned the priest toward the people and caused them to be looking at each other. This practice contradicts the tradition of the Church in West and East and cannot itself invoke the Second Vatican Council.¹⁶

The celebration *versus populum* has become the most visible sign of the anthropocentric turn. This has far-reaching consequences, especially since the Church lives from the Eucharist, as Pope John Paul II has stated in accordance with the Tradition.¹⁷ A great change has been made in this most central of all religious practices, and it has had a great impact on the life of the Church. If the *lex orandi* (the way of prayer) changes, then also the *lex credendi* (faith).¹⁸ What has happened in the field of the liturgy has had an impact on all levels of ecclesial life and is also related to the ongoing crisis of morals. Not infrequently the turning to man has made him become the yardstick for faith. It is no longer a question—as the Gospel unambiguously puts it—of making disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded (see Matt 28,19f), but of asking what people think, what they want to believe. But in this manner, the Church would have lost her *raison d'être*, because she no longer follows the mission of Jesus Christ or teaches the revealed message of salvation, but “following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths” (2 Tim 4:3–4). The drama to which this process leads becomes particularly clear in the most central event of faith: the redemption granted by God alone. Through anthropocentrism it would be degraded to a man-made

¹⁶ See Joseph Ratzinger, “The Spirit of the Liturgy,” in *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, ed. John Saward, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 44–51. In the new preface to his work, Benedict has emphasized this aspect even more clearly and also listed more recent literature on this subject. He concludes: “The notion that priest and people should look at each other while praying appeared only in the modern era and was completely foreign to ancient Christendom. After all, priest and people pray, not to each other, but to the one Lord” (“On the Inaugural Volume of My Collected Works,” in *Theology of the Liturgy*, xv–xviii, here xvii). See also the comments by Kurt Koch, “*Summorum Pontificum* als Weg innerkatholischer Verständigung und als ökumenische Brücke,” in *Zehn Jahre Summorum Pontificum: Versöhnung mit der Vergangenheit—Weg in die Zukunft*, ed. M. Graulich (Regensburg: Pustet, 2017), 55–85, esp. 70–73.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), esp. §§5, 6, 12, and 34.

¹⁸ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1124.

self-redemption or “self-acceptation.” As a consequence, theology would, step by step, disappear in the conflict of differing opinions and views and finally dissolve itself, because it would only be about human wisdom and opinions. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God” (1 Cor 3:19).

Therefore, it is necessary to return to that objective standard, which is not made up by men or based on changing opinions, but revealed by Christ through the apostles. This brings us to the core of the problem.

Objectivity of the Church's Annunciation

The anthropocentric turn was sometimes inspired by good intentions, as dialogue with the people and with the world can be important to win people for God. However, with regard to faith, which is always the faith of the Church, this approach has often proved destructive and has led to alienation. According to the Tradition of the Church, two constitutive elements are necessary for faith: faith consists, on the one hand, of an individual-subjective dimension (*fides qua*), since faith in Jesus Christ includes a personal choice. On the other hand, faith includes an ecclesiastical-objective dimension (*fides quae*); it guarantees that faith corresponds to revelation as it took place in Jesus Christ. *Only* a healthy balance between these two dimensions can guarantee the truth of faith. Pope Francis's encyclical *Lumen Fidei* explains this:

It is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the believer's heart, nor a completely private relationship between the “I” of the believer and the divine “Thou,” between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the “We” of the Church; it always takes place within her communion.¹⁹

Through the anthropocentric turn—the radical turn toward man—the subjective-individual dimension was given more and more weight, while the ecclesiastical-objective faith norm of revelation withdrew and lost its normative importance. This led to an alienation from the Church, to which is entrusted the task of passing on the truth of faith which she herself has received (see 1 Cor 11:23). If in the Church everything was focused on man, then she could not pass on what she herself has received, but would be led by what people want to believe. This shows how far the Protestant axiom of an *autopistia* of faith, a knowledge based on one's own

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (2013), §39.

ideas, has found its way into Catholic theology.

This process was already present in the 1970s and was expressed in a concise way in the formula: “Jesus yes—Church no.” Many felt “mature” enough to be “Christians” without or against the Church. Thus, the erroneous opinion could arise that there is a faith detached from the Church or the ecclesiastical norm. With it a process of dissolution began, because if one’s “I” becomes the criterion of faith, then the Church and the Church’s faith become superfluous. Just as the constant drop hollows out the stone, so gradually the supernatural sense of faith has been softened or even dissolved.²⁰ This process of decay can currently be clearly seen, especially when someone dares to call to mind any ecclesiastical-objective norms regarding faith and morals.

In summary, it must be reaffirmed that ecclesiastical teaching contains an objective norm based on Scripture and Tradition. It prevents Christians from slipping into error and guarantees the way of salvation. It is the task of every Christian to accept the ecclesial-objective norm and to put it into practice.

Deficits in Receiving the Church’s Announcement

An honest analysis must include pointing out a failure of Church teaching. Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, in particular, have repeatedly underlined the importance of the objective ecclesial dimension of faith through important doctrinal writings, in order to avoid a drifting apart between the Church’s teaching and a self-referential faith, which would lead into Gnostic self-knowledge.²¹ But these efforts were often not (sufficiently) supported by the local churches. In this context, Paul VI’s 1968 *Humanae Vitae* (*On the Regulation of Birth*) needs to be mentioned, which was rejected, combated, and ridiculed especially by the clergy.²²

²⁰ See Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, §12. Already in the 1980s Ratzinger noticed a dissolution of this *sensus fidei*; see “Zur Lage des Glaubens,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13/1 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2016), 88.

²¹ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith warned of these tendencies in its letter *Placuit Deo*, February 16, 2018.

²² Ralph McInerny has shown that the violent protests against *Humanae Vitae* originated above all from the clergy (*What Went Wrong with Vatican II?* [Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute, 1998], 42–48). This is all the more surprising since the clergy is not affected by the use of artificial contraception. On this topic, see also: Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Die Enzyklika Humanae Vitae: ein Zeichen des Widerspruchs* (Regensburg: Habel, 1968); Konrad Hilpert and Sigrid Müller, eds., *Humanae vitae – die anstößige Enzyklika: Eine kritische Würdigung* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018); Martin M. Lintner, *Von Humanae vitae bis Amoris laetitia: Die Geschichte einer umstrittenen Lehre* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2018); Helmut Prader,

Pope John Paul II experienced a similar situation when he published the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (*On Some Fundamental Questions of Ecclesiastical Morality*).²³ These fundamental doctrinal writings—to name only two—have not only been ignored, but have also experienced violent opposition. It was John Paul II who drew attention to the core of the same problem with regard to ecclesiastical moral doctrine by clearly rejecting an autonomous morality.

To put it simply, the so-called “autonomous morality” is an expression of the anthropocentric turn, which grants the individual a moral autonomy according to which everyone can determine for himself what is good and evil. When everything is equally valid, everything becomes indifferent. As a result, the objective ecclesial norms lost their importance, which led to the dissolution of the faith—on the one hand because the norms are no longer known, and on the other hand because they were relativized. This has led to the collapse of morality and the refusal of any objective moral norm. The rejection of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as an expression of that objective ecclesial norm of faith is a further indication of how far this process has progressed.²⁴

At this point, the reasons why “believers” claim their rights and are vehemently opposed to objective doctrinal norms become clear. It should be noted that those who demand tolerance most strongly for themselves and their positions usually do not tolerate the least contradiction. The moral doctrine of the Church, unknown to most Catholics for years and decades, is suddenly declared “outdated.” Anyone who dares to speak of

ed., *50 Jahre Humanae vitae* (Kisslegg: Christiana-Verlag, 2019).

²³ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993); see the criticism of the encyclical in Dietmar Mieth, ed., *Moraltheologie im Abseits? Antwort auf die Enzyklika Veritatis splendor*, *Quaestiones Disputate* 153 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

²⁴ Only two works need to be mentioned in this context, which reflect a far-reaching rejection of the Catechism at the theological faculties. See Ulrich Ruh, *Der Weltkatechismus: Anspruch und Grenzen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993). See also the book of the “Ratzinger-Schüler”: Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Der Weltkatechismus: Therapie und Symptom einer kranken Kirche?* (Düsseldorf: Palmos, 1993). Karl Rahner’s opposition to publish a Catechism valid for the whole world must not be underestimated, especially since his theological principles have become the norm for most theological faculties. In his probably best-known work, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, he argues that attempts to introduce a universal world catechism have failed, are met with unanimous resistance by preachers and theoretical catechists, and will never prevail (Karl Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* [Freiburg: Herder, 2005], 432). Such statements underline that Rahner must be correctly described as the creator of an “anthropocentric theology.”

objective norms gets to feel this immediately, often through crude defamations. Not only the moral doctrine of the Church, but also many other important topics such as “sin,” “judgment,” “hell,” “purgatory,” “devil,” “angel,” and “divine justice” are declared taboo. The more this happens, the more the nature of the Church, and thus the Church itself, becomes incomprehensible.

Also, the teaching of the Church is under the influence of the anthropocentric turn. Clear contents, based on Scripture and Tradition, are increasingly rejected and replaced by often meaningless statements. Individual case solutions are suggested, while non-negotiable values are dispensed. To renew the moral life, it is urgent to accept and preach the objective principles once again which can well be justified by Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium of the Church. They have to be the starting point of the Church’s proclamation, so that the Church can carry out her very own task.

The Question of Hermeneutics (Interpretation)

In his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI placed particular emphasis on a correct interpretation of the faith, as expressed, for example, in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. This became clear already in his first Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2005.²⁵ Ratzinger/Benedict was very familiar with this problem. Shaped by his time as archbishop of Munich-Freising, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and finally as pope, he saw it as a priority to guarantee a truthful interpretation based on the normative ecclesial dimension of faith. In this important project the question of “how” arises; a key to interpretation is needed. Basically, there are two approaches: (1) starting from man, his life realities and ideas, what would correspond to the anthropocentric turn; (2) starting from—to put it simply—a theocentric interpretation, which opens the way starting from divine revelation.

Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, has given directions in this respect. It says that God in his goodness has decided to reveal himself “through Christ, the Word made flesh, [that] man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature.”²⁶ The principle of Incarnation determines the way, for the Word precedes human thought. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The

²⁵ See also Ralph Weimann, *Dogma und Fortschritt bei Joseph Ratzinger: Prinzipien der Kontinuität* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012).

²⁶ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, §2.

primacy of the divine Word reflects the basic structure of the Christian faith, and any non-observance would mean to turn away from the Incarnation.

An anthropocentric interpretation of faith entails the danger of depriving theology of that which is God. Such tendencies can be clearly discerned in the context of the complex phenomenon that went down in the history of theology under the term “modernism.”²⁷ The anthropocentric turn had a similar effect—time-delayed. The turn to the subject, following modern philosophy, reverses the principle of the Incarnation. The revealed truth is no longer accepted as normative, as something according to which the Christian has to direct himself, but vice versa: “In the beginning is the man,” his ideas and preferences. Already the Letter to the Romans warns against such an interpretation: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Rom 1:25). Whenever this very structure of Christian faith is rejected, man himself becomes the new *locus theologicus*; his own desires and subjective impressions become the new dogma, while every objective ecclesial norm is understood as a limitation of one’s own autonomy and freedom, which is to be stripped off and fought against. The dominant individualism and relativism in society additionally promotes these tendencies, whereby the philosophical axiom of René Descartes comes to the forefront: *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”). Thinking and theological reflection are centered on the subject, or more precisely on those “subjects” who now determine the new path.

The bond between faith, truth, and life is thereby broken, which often leads to a life praxis in contradiction to the faith. Here now a vicious circle develops, because no one lives well in a contradiction, and therefore efforts are made to adapt the faith to one’s own life circumstances in order to dissolve the contradiction. Faith adapts to changing fashions, while the biblical call to conversion (see Mark 1:15) becomes obsolete. The anthropocentrically oriented person seeks self-affirmation, not conversion, which must always imply a return to God.

In contrast, Pope Benedict XVI’s concern was to build bridges between the gaping distance of doctrine and practice by insisting on the unconditional recognition of the principle of the Incarnation. Therefore, he clearly rejected a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture, which “has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of

²⁷ See also Pius X, *Pascendi Domini Gregis* (1907), where the Pope describes the danger of a theological immanence (§§19–20).

modern theology.”²⁸ This refers to all those currents which construct something “new” in contradiction to Tradition, especially when the subject becomes the yardstick for faith. “On the other [hand], there is the ‘hermeneutic of reform,’ of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us.”²⁹ True and lasting renewal will be possible only if the Church remains reconciled with her own Tradition;³⁰ it will undoubtedly involve the subject and his circumstances, but the measure is and remains the Incarnate Word of God.

Conclusion and Solutions

The gap between the doctrine of the Church and society has widened. The balancing act that seemed possible until now cannot be carried on in the future anymore. In principle, two opposed possibilities remain.

One is the continuation of the anthropocentric turn in ever more radical forms, which will inevitably lead to an alienation from the revealed Truth and of the Church. Schisms, relativizations, and dissolution tendencies will then increase. The proposal of an “inclusivism” not often made in this context, according to which other religions are also valid ways to salvation, since one can be a Christian anonymously, so to speak, is no more than the theoretical possibility of the impossible. Already Hans Urs von Balthasar observed in the epilogue to his work that the Christian with this naïve conception of “apologetics” encounters an insurmountable gap. “With this summing and integrating method he indeed reaches a certain height, but suddenly he sees that, following this path (if it were feasible), he would not reach Christ but Hegel, namely to the ‘absolute knowledge’ that absorbs the Christian faith (perhaps *optima fide*) into itself.”³¹ That this does not work in practice is already visible in the daily life of most Christians.

The other possibility is a course correction by again accepting the measure of God, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and through the Church. This way corresponds to the logic of the narrow gate and the constricted road “that leads to life. And those who find it are few” (Matt 7:14). To this end, there must be the necessary readiness to look together

²⁸ Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2005 (see the Vatican website).

²⁹ Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2005.

³⁰ Del Valle has pointed out the difficulties involved, particularly with regard to the history of Europe and the associated “guilt complex.” He states that real renewal will be possible only if this is overcome (Alexandre del Valle, *Il complesso occidentale: Piccolo Trattato di de colpevolizzazione* [Isola del Liri: Paesi, 2019]). See also Weimann, *Dogma und Fortschritt*, 193–227.

³¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilog* (Einsiedeln-Trier: Johannes, 1987), 11–12.

to the Lord and to recognize without reservation Jesus Christ, who “by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”³²

The Apostle’s admonition has lost none of its significance in this day and age, as he wrote in his Letter to the Colossians. “See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power” (Col 2:8).

This will only succeed if faith finds a new balance between the subjective-individual dimension of faith (*fides qua*) and the objective-ecclesiastical dimension (*fides quae*). Faith is not merely subjective, but it is also not merely objective, which is clearly shown by the central mystery of faith: salvation. Although it is achieved objectively through Jesus Christ, it will only bear fruit if it is accepted subjectively in the life of the individual. This symbiosis makes faith become performative, “which shapes our life in a new way.”³³

In the search for a new balance, it has to be pointed out that the “objective ecclesial dimension” of faith is not an abstract doctrinal building, but is primarily about the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the gift of salvation. Modern man (and theologians) has difficulty with this assumption. But the greater the distance becomes between the objective and the subjective dimension, the greater the centrifugal forces in the Church will be. Pope Benedict XVI, with his rich theological heritage, has shown a way out of the impasse. It consists in recognizing the primacy of God and in seeking renewal in continuity with the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. Only in this way will it be possible to remain faithful to the admonition of the Apostle Paul: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:1–3). For this not to happen, it is necessary to be transformed by Christ. N&V

³² Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §22.

³³ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (2007), §10.

Rewriting Souls: *Lectio* and *Imitatio* in Dante's *Purgatorio*

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Lire c'est mediter et c'est prier.
—Jean Leclercq

For J. B.

Introduction

MUCH RECENT DANTE SCHOLARSHIP has focused on the need for enriched contextualization of the *Commedia* against the background of the cultural complexity of the Middle Ages. In contrast to many older readings of Dante in relation to a single thinker (e.g., Aquinas) or system of thought (e.g., Aristotelianism), contemporary scholarship has explored Dante's poem as an extraordinary synthesis of multiple philosophical, poetic, and theological traditions, thus bringing to light the full implications of Gianfranco Contini's *polisemia dantesca*, which "unfolds entirely on the literal level, by means of a multiplicity of internal echoes and cultural allusions."¹

¹ Gianfranco Contini, "Filologia e esegesi dantesca," in *Un'idea di Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), 113–42, at 119. Similarly, Zygmunt G. Barański, who sees much of his work as building on this insight of Contini, comments on how Dante "ably weaves together diverse elements—formal, narrative, cultural, symbolic, and intellectual—[into] a discourse created with extraordinary care and rigor, even if it remains the reader/exegete's responsibility to disentangle the various threads" ("Guido Cavalcanti tra le cruces di Inferno ix–xi, ovvero dante e la storia della ragione," in *Versi Controversi: Letture dantesche*, ed. Domenico Cofano and Sebastiano Valerio [Foggia: Edizioni del Rosone, 2008], 39–112, at 57; unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own). For more on *polisemia dantesca*, see: Barański, "Dante poeta e lector: poesia e riflessione tecnica (con divagazioni sulla *Vita nova*)," in "Dante Oggi" 1/3, special issue, *Critica del testo* 14 (2011): 81–110; Simon Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," in *Reviewing Dante's Theology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 65–110; Jason Baxter, "Through the Eyes of Landino: Dante, *Natura*,

That Scholastic moral philosophy did much to shape the architecture of Dante's Mount Purgatory is well known; that in *Purgatorio* Dante rewrites classical *auctores* and contemporary vernacular poets is also well known.² But until recently, scholarship has paid little attention to another strand that makes up the complicated textual fabric of the canticle: monastic theology.³ This paper contributes to our appreciation of the *polisemia* of *Purgatorio*, by focusing particularly on the role played by monastic affective reading (*lectio*) in effecting deep spiritual cleansing (*purgatio*).

At the same time, though, this strand of monastic *lectio* is interwoven with yet another medieval textual practice: Dante willingly conflates monastic reading (which Hugh of St. Victor and other writers associated with *imitatio*, as seen below) with that rhetorical *imitatio* taught and practiced in medieval schools.⁴ In the Middle Ages, such rhetorical *imitatio* was the writing process by which an aspiring *auctor* imitated an authoritative classic: that is, the compositional method by which an original authorita-

and the Poetics of *Varietas*," *L'Alighieri* 43 (2014): 65–89.

- ² For *Purgatorio*'s debt to Scholastic moral philosophy, see Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). For the rewriting of classical and vernacular *auctores*, see: Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Michelangelo Picone, "Purgatorio XXVII: passaggio rituale e translatio poetica," *Medioevo romanzo* 12 (1987): 389–420.
- ³ See, for instance, Andrea Robiglio's panoramic discussion of theological and philosophical trends "beyond scholasticism" in the age of Dante in "Philosophy and Theology," in *Dante in Context*, ed. Zygmunt Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 137–58. See also: Mira Mocan, *L'Arca Della Mente: Riccardo Di San Vittore Nella "Commedia" Di Dante* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2012); Erminia Ardissino, *Tempo liturgico e tempo storico nella "Commedia" di Dante* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009). For Dante and the liturgy, see: Matthew Treherne, "La *Commedia* di Dante e l'immaginario liturgico," in *Pregghiera e Liturgia in Dante*, ed. Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Longo, 2013), 11–30; Ronald Martinez, "Dante and the Poem of the Liturgy," in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne, Leeds Studies on Dante (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 89–156. For Dante and the "spirituality" of monophony, see Francesco Ciabattini, *Dante's Journey to Polyphony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).
- ⁴ I am not the first to point out this conflation of the two types of *imitatio*, even if my research focuses on different aspects. Dina de Rentiis has commented on how the pilgrim follows Virgil both as his moral and literary guide in *Die Zeit der Nachfolge: Zur Interpendenz vom imitatio Christi und imitatio auctorum im 12.–16. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1996), 75–93; see also de Rentiis, "Sequere me: *Imitatio* dans la *Divine Comedie* et dans le livre du *Chemin de long estude*," in *The City of Scholars: New Approaches to Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margarete Zimmermann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 31–42.

tive text was internalized and then transformed in a new textual composition. In this article, I will focus on how Dante combined these two distinct medieval textual practices in his *Purgatorio*, thereby creating an image of souls who are “rewritten” by God (the results of a rhetorical *imitatio*) by means of their meditative “reading” (that is, through the practice of moral *imitatio*).⁵

***Fervor Caritatis* and *Purgatio*:
Affective *Lectio* in the Late Middle Ages**

From ancient through medieval Christianity there was a broad consensus that good yet impure souls (*boni* but *imperfecti*) would have to spend time in the afterlife undergoing purgation—suffering in *ignis quidam purgatorius*, although explanations varied as to what exactly the end of such purgation was.⁶ Scholastic theologians thought of purgatory as the place where souls paid off the *debitum iustitiae*, that is, the “the payment ‘to the uttermost farthing’ of the *temporal* penalty incurred to the Justice of God by sin, the *eternal* penalty having been already remitted by the Mercy of God.”⁷ The monastic tradition, on the other hand, emphasized not the legal element, but focused on purgatory as a place of purity, where the final deficiencies of love were burned away in an excruciatingly painful *ignis purgatorius*. It was the aim of medieval spiritual masters (such as Guigo II, Peter of Celle, John of Fecampe, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and Bernard of Clairvaux) to avoid the need for the cleansing fires of the afterlife by cultivating a love (*fervor caritatis*) in this life strong enough to burn away moral flaws: “This I assert without hesitation, that if the fire that the Lord Jesus has sent down to earth burns in us with the ardor envisioned by him who sent it, the purgatorial fire . . . will find in us neither wood, nor hay, nor straw to consume.”⁸ Thus, the souls within Dante’s *Purgatorio*, who were spiritually lax in life, must now submit themselves to that *disciplina*

⁵ For Italian quotations, I have used *Commedia*, ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1995-1997). For English translations of Dante, I have almost always used that of Robert and Jean Hollande: *Purgatorio* (New York: Anchor, 2004).

⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁷ Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante: Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*, vol. 2 (Oxford University Press, 1899), 43–44.

⁸ These words come from the Cistercian Guerric of Igny, as cited in Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 139. For the connection between *fervor caritatis* and *ardor* with *purgatio*, see Le Goff, “The Fire of Purgatory: The Early Twelfth Century,” in *Birth of Purgatory*, 133–53.

that was the hallmark of monastic spiritual experience. Even if now they have rationally renounced their choice of earthly goods (cf. *Purg.* 6.25–27), their *affectus* has not been warmed enough by the fire of love (*foco d'amor* [*Purg.* 6.38]) to burn away their habitual inclination toward creatures. And yet, although they still have their characteristic earthly dispositions (*lo modo usato* [*Inferno* 4.126]), they are now in a state of transition in which those “with keen fervor make amends, / perhaps for . . . past negligence and sloth” (“fervore aguto adesso / ricompie forse negligenza e indugio” [*Purg.* 18.106–7]). Dante’s purgatory is a school of desire, where souls grow in *ardore* and *fervore* to prepare for “that cloister” (*quel chiostro*) where “when more souls speak of *ours*, / . . . the more of love is burning in that cloister” (“per quanti si dice più li ‘nostro’. . . / più di caritate arde”; *Purg.* 15.55, 57). As we shall see, closing the gap between head-knowledge (*ratio*) and heart-knowledge (*affectus* or *cogitatio cordis*) is the central task of the souls in *Purgatorio*, that is, moving from merely assenting to truth, to loving it, desiring it, responding with *affectus*. In Carlo Delcorno’s words: “In this intermediary place the souls are exhorted and goaded no longer with arguments, given that their *metanoia* has already taken place, but with examples which sometimes comfort, sometimes terrify, but all of which act directly and efficaciously on their character.”⁹

Although monastic masters drew on a whole range of spiritual exercises to shape their *disciplina claustralis*,¹⁰ there was one *exercitium* that served as the supporting pillar for all the others: *lectio*, a fluid “movement of reading into prayer.”¹¹ For centuries, reading and commenting on Scripture had been an essential practice in Christian devotion,¹² but during the great age of renewed “interest in the *inner landscape of the human being*” (Caroline Bynum), the traditional practice of *lectio* was drawn into the

⁹ Carlo Delcorno, “Dante e l’*exemplum* medievale,” *Lettere Italiane* 35, no. 1 (1983): 3–28, at 7.

¹⁰ See Peter of Celle, *De disciplina claustrali*: “The true religious voluntarily and freely desires regular discipline in order to be tied back from the appetites of the flesh as if by bands. The bonds of religion are the regular statutes: for example, silence, fasting, and seclusion of the cloister, ways of acting which do not attract attention, compassion and fraternal love, paternal reverence, reading and persistent prayer (*lectio et oratio assidua*), recollection of past evils (*recordatio praeteritorum malorum*), fear of death, the fire of purgatory, eternal fire (*Patrologia Latina* [PL] 202; English trans. in “The School of the Cloister,” in *Selected Works*, trans. Hugh Feiss [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987], 63–130, at 73).

¹¹ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio divina: the Medieval Experience of Reading* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2011), 134.

¹² Jacques Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

new emotional climate of affective spirituality, a Europe-wide phenomenon that constituted a major revolution in the history of emotions.¹³ A network of related twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin texts—Cistercian, Carthusian, Victorine, and Franciscan—led to a lasting reformulation of medieval piety, including the vernacular piety of late-medieval Europe. In what follows, I will illustrate this affective *lectio* by referencing three texts: Guigo II's *Scala claustralium* (*Ladder of Monks*), the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, and Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe*. Against this background we can appreciate the role of *lectio* in Dante's *Purgatorio*.

Cogitatio cordis mei: Lectio and Imitatio before Dante

The brevity and systematic nature of Guigo II's *Scala claustralium* was one of the most important factors that led to its extraordinarily widespread influence on European piety.¹⁴ The ninth abbot of the Grande Chartreuse succinctly explains (nine pages in a modern edition) how *lectio* finds its consummation in the *experientia* of God. Like any number of his contemporaries, Guigo describes *experientia Dei* in exuberantly sensual terms: to experience God is to have desire inflamed, to be enveloped in the sweet dew of heaven, to be anointed with oil, to have hunger sated, to be made to forget earthly things, to be enlivened, and to be made drunk while still

¹³ Caroline Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31, no. 1 (1980): 1–17, repr. in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), 82–105, at 87. For overviews of broad social changes, see: R. W. Southern, "From Epic to Romance," in *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 219–57; Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Dennis Martin, "Introduction," in *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 1–66; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Thoms Bestul, "Meditatio/Meditation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 157–66; Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Age: Une histoire des émotions dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2015).

¹⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 357–63. For more on reception of the *Scala*, see below.

remaining sober.¹⁵ In fact, *experientia* is the distinguishing characteristic between *philosophi gentium* and the Christian. Both the secular philosopher and Christian are able to use intellectual powers (*cogitatio* and *meditatio*), but secular philosophers lack the *spiritus sapientiae* which would lead them to smell, taste, feel, and be warmed by the *experientia* of God. For this reason, Guigo outlines a four-step reading process (a ladder with four rungs) that leads from the mere *littera* (literal meaning) to *experientia*.

The first rung is *lectio*, an attentive reading of Scripture with an alert expectation that the words under consideration are “sweet and crammed full of meanings.” *Meditatio*, the second rung, seeks out fuller explanation, allowing the mind to play freely over the face of Scripture. Guigo illustrates *meditatio* with reference to the verse “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The mind first considers the words, one at a time, locating each one in a network of related terms. The mind recalls, for instance, how Psalm 23 says only the innocent “in hands and of clean heart” will ascend to God; or how the Psalmist prayed, “cor mundum crea in me” (“create a clean heart in me”); or how Job “made a pact with his eyes” (Job 31:1). The mind then considers the final part of the verse, asking in what way *visio Dei* will satisfy all desires. Guigo continues, though, by saying this meditation on the greatness of the promise of a vision of God leads to a confrontation with the weakness of the soul, and faced with the disheartening contrast (between the greatness of the vision and the soul’s weakness), the mind is ushered into an impassioned state of panting, thirsting, and longing for heavenly things. In this third stage, known as *oratio*, the soul begins to long to know God no longer in the surface way of the letter, but in the sense of experience (“non jam in cortice litterae, sed in sensu experientiae”). In this state of prayer “increased desire” comes (*desiderium amplius*) and “fire is ignited” (*in mea meditatione mea exarsit ignis*). In short, the process of meditating on words has a state of longing where speech ends, but it is within this *oratio* that “desire is inflamed” (*inflammat desiderium*) and “the soul’s *affectus* is stretched out broad” (*sic ostendit suum affectum*). *Oratio*, then, finds its affective consummation in the fourth and final stage of *contemplatio*, and Guigo says that tears are the certain sign that such an affective experience will soon be had, for they effect the inner washing, the inner *purgatio*: “O blessed tears, through which interior blemishes are purged” (“O felices lacrymae, per quas maculae interiores purgantur”).

¹⁵ Guigo the Carthusian, *Scala claustralium* (PL 184; in English as *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations: A Letter on the Contemplative Life*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh [London: Mowbray, 1978; repr. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981]).

A few decades earlier, the Victorine, Hugh of St Victor, wrote an elaborate biblical meditation on how to know God interiorly, *De arca Noe*.¹⁶ Hugh borrowed the image of Noah's ark, expecting his readers to build an image of the ark in their minds as he describes its shape and design: "This your eye shall see outwardly, so that your soul may be fashioned to its likeness inwardly" (1.7). Once the picture is built within the imagination, though, Hugh can explore the meaning of the image from within, that is, imaginatively dwell within the image: "If, then, we want to be saved, it behooves us to enter this ark. And, as I said before, we must build it within ourselves, so that we can live in it within ourselves. For it is not enough for us to be in it externally, if we have not also learnt how we should live in it within ourselves" (1.11). In the second book, Hugh explains the allegorical meaning of the interior chambers of the ark. The first room represents meditating on a text (*cogitatio recta*), which must be followed by a second, more active phase of performing good works, a stage in which one imitates (*imitatio*) what one has read, allowing one's reading to go beyond the mere communication of information (2.5). If one fails to draw some *exemplum* for good living from his reading and puts off incorporating what he has read into his moral life ("si bonum . . . imitari differo et detracto . . . si illud ad exemplum vivendi non traho"), then his *cogitatio* might be called *recta* but *inutilis* (2.5). Reading must culminate in *exercitatio mentis* or *exercitium disciplinae* (2.6). Through *imitatio* or *cogitatio cordis* (reasoning of the heart), the soul comes to "own" those "virtues which it has already learned to admire and love in others ("virtutes, quas in aliis jam amare, et admirari didici"). Thus, we have in Hugh's *De arca Noe* a description of a progressively interior reading, with an analogous emphasis on knowing God *in sensu experientiae*. And like Guigo's *oratio*, Hugh's reading program also entails the growth of interior desire. Hugh uses the biblical symbol of the olive branch brought back to the ark by the dove to symbolize this growth in affective interiority: "The olive branch in leaf denotes the good *affectus* of the mind [*bonum mentis affectum*]. For it often happens that the more holy men gaze upon divine works, the more do they burn within with love for the creator [*intus in amore conditoris inardescunt*]" (2.4)."

¹⁶ Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe*, ed. P. Sicard, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* [CCCM] 176. For the Victorine reading practice more generally, consult Franklin Harkins, *Reading and the Work of Restoration: History and Scripture in the Theology of Hugh of St. Victor* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2009). For Dante's relationship to Victorine spirituality, see: Mocan, *L'arca della mente*; Valentine Atturo, "Contemplating Wonder: Ad-miratio in Richard of St. Victor and Dante," *Dante Studies* 129 (2011): 99–124.

In the next century, the Franciscan spiritual treatise *Meditationes vitae Christi* combined the moral *imitatio* of Hugh and the scriptural *meditatio* of Guigo in a treatise that combed through the details of the life of Christ from the Gospels and presented them in a vivid narration (the first of the *Imitatio Christi* genre).¹⁷ This imaginative rumination on Scripture departs from Guigo's *lectio* by focusing on making the life of Christ vividly and psychologically present before the eye of the mind of the reader, more of a rhetorical exercise directed to arousing pity and compassion than a sophisticated hermeneutic activity. And yet, as we read in the *prologus*, the one who does this will have an affective encounter with Christ: "So whoever follows him cannot go astray and cannot be deceived, for following him and acquiring his virtues in the summit of perfection. And by doing this one can enter into a state in which the heart is enflamed by the fervor of love and enlightened by divine virtue, so much so that one becomes clothed in virtue."¹⁸ Unlike Guigo, who gives instruction on how the mind should create within an elaborate network of related passages, or Hugh, who attempts to peel back the allegorical layers of Scripture, the *Meditationes* dwell on the physical experience described in the *lictera*, but the intended result is the same: the affective *imitatio* helps the readers live *interiorly* the suffering Jesus and Mary experienced in their bodies, thus uniting them through contemplation to Christ and Mary.

All three of these texts exerted extraordinary influence on late-medieval

¹⁷ See Giles Constable, "The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ," in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 143–248.

¹⁸ *Meditationes vitae Christi*: "Adonque chi lui [that is, Christ] seguita non puote errare e non puote essere inganato, la cui vertude seguitare e acquistare è summa perfectione. Unde perviene l'huomo in tanto ch'eli accende el cuore per fervore de caritade" (*Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, trans. Sarah McNamer [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018], 4–6). A vernacular manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale [still unedited], adds this reference to Francis: "The heart that wishes to follow and win Him must take fire and become animated by frequent contemplation. . . . Do you believe that the Blessed Francis would have attained such abundance of virtue and such illuminated knowledge of the Scriptures . . . if not by the familiar conversation with and contemplation of his Lord Jesus? With such ardor did he change himself that he had become almost one with Him, and tried to follow Him as completely as possible in all virtues, and when he was finally complete and perfect in Jesus, by the impression of the sacred stigmata he was transformed into Him" (*Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961], 3). The author encourages the reader to take Mary, Francis, Clare, and Bernard of Clairvaux as guides for how to respond fully to the life of Christ. Their imitation can be imitated.

spirituality, and late-medieval Italy in particular. The short monastic letter *Scala claustralium* not only survives in over one hundred manuscripts, but had direct impact on vernacular piety in Italy, as well as the rest of Europe.¹⁹ Bono Giamboni, also responsible for *volgarizzamenti* (vernacularization) of Innocent III's *De miseria* and Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*, seems to have been responsible for an Italian epitome of Guigo's *Scala*.²⁰ Similarly, the Franciscan *Meditationes vitae Christi*, perhaps dating from the early 1300s, "was the single most influential devotional text written in the later Middle Ages."²¹ And although scholarship is still unsettled on whether the *Meditationes* was first written in Latin or Italian, or whether it was written by John de Caulibus or a spiritual Franciscan by the name of Iacobus de Santo Geminiano, it seems now that Italian versions of the *Meditationes* were circulating within the life of Dante.²² Thus, the treatise was an important bridge between the monastic *studia* and vernacular piety, as well as an important vehicle to disseminate twelfth-century practices of affective reading throughout Franciscan and lay communities.²³ And finally, Hugh

¹⁹ Giles Constable, "The Popularity of Twelfth-Century Spiritual Writers in the Late Middle Ages," *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John Tedeschi (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1970), 3–28. For the role of Carthusians in creating a Europe-wide distribution of Latin texts into the various vernaculars, see: Michael Sargent, "The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976): 225–40; Marleen Cré, *Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

²⁰ Simona Foà, "Giamboni, Bono," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 54 (2000).

²¹ Sarah McNamer, "The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," *Speculum* 84 (2009): 905–55, at 905.

²² See Peter Tóth and David Falvay, "New Light on the Date and Authorship of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*," in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe*, ed. Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 17–105, and McNamer's commentary in her translation of *Meditations*.

²³ In particular, Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis are portrayed as exemplary guides for reading Scripture affectively, depictions which might have directly influenced Dante: see Steven Botterill, "The Image of St Bernard in Medieval Culture," in *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13–63. For Dante and Franciscan spirituality, see: Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. Santa Casciani (Leiden: Brill, 2006); George Holmes, "Dante and the Franciscans," in *Dante and the Church: Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Paolo Acquaviva and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), 25–38; Anna Pegoretti, "Immaginare la veste di un angelo: il caso di Purg. IX, 115–16," *L'Alighieri* 27 (2006): 141–50; Nicolò Maldina, "'L'oratio super pater noster' di Dante: Tra esegesi e vocazione liturgica. Per *Purgatorio* XI, 1–24,"

of St. Victor, whose works were read throughout Europe (surviving in over twenty-five hundred manuscripts), was also being copied in Italy in the age of Dante.²⁴ His *De arca Noe* is included in dozens of surviving Italian manuscripts, including one particularly fascinating manuscript—given Dante’s known connections to Franciscan spirituality—that indicates Hugh’s *De arca Noe* was being read in Franciscan circles alongside Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae* and Pietro Olivi’s *Principium super Matheum*, both of which modeled a reading that promoted *affectualis experienci[a]* (see the prologue to Olivi’s *Principium*) and address the *affectus* (see the preface to Bonaventure’s *Lignum*: “ut . . . attendatur affectus”).²⁵

In sum, for Franciscans, Victorines, Carthusians, and Benedictines, the ancient practice of scriptural meditation was affectively inflected in the late-medieval period, which gave rise to a process of reading that begins with an attentive, imaginative focus on the words, moves to a middle stage in which those truths are made more interior (*meditatio*, *imitatio*, and *cogitatio cordis*), and arrives at a final stage which erupts in *oratio* and *contemplatio* and is marked by the “fire” of *affectus* (or the *fervore di caritade*) that leads to interior *purgatio*. Even in the unlikely situation that Dante knew none of these widespread texts, my argument that such affective *lectio* plays a major role in *Purgatorio* is not substantially affected, for what we find in *Purgatorio* are simple echoes of what could be found in the prologues and prefaces of the most successful treatises of the day.

Secondo l’affezion: The Practice of Lectio in Purgatorio

Although Dante’s purgatorial souls on every terrace are engaged in some kind of affective *lectio*, they do not meditate on “texts” as conceived in the modern period. Medieval textuality was more fluid and demanded more from the senses and the imagination than the reading of the post-Enlightenment period. In particular, in the late-medieval period, the boundary between visual meditation and affective reading was porous, as Jeffrey Hamburger has written: “For Bernard [of Clairvaux], as for his contem-

L’Alighieri 40 (2012): 89–108. The research being conducted by the “Dante and Late Medieval Florence” program at the University of Leeds and Warwick will significantly alter our perception of Dante’s relationship to the mendicant orders and vernacular theology.

²⁴ This includes one from the library of the Dominicans of San Marco in Florence (*Iste liber est Conventus Sancti Marci de Florentia ordinis Predicatorum*). See Sicard, “Inventaire et description des témoins du texte [*De arca Noe*],” in *CCM*, 176:27–74.

²⁵ Biblioteca Comunale di Assisi, Fondo Antico, Ms. Assisi Com.586 (consulted through Manus Online).

poraries, vision was closely linked to the process of reading, in particular, reading understood as meditation on the Bible. This is because by ‘vision’ was meant primarily intellectual or spiritual vision and by ‘reading,’ an understanding that probed beyond the literal sense of the text. . . . To read literally or not to see beyond the mere shell of surface appearance was the equivalent of blindness.”²⁶ Souls in *Purgatorio* “read” *exempla* (both sacred and secular),²⁷ whether they are chanted, carved into the path, reverberate as voices through the air, or are dreamed. The most clear example of such *lectio* is found in canto 20.²⁸ At the beginning of the canto, the pilgrim is

²⁶ Jeffrey Hamburger, “The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotion,” in *The Visual and the Visionary* (New York: Zone, 1998), 111–48, at 147.

²⁷ Dante’s souls meditate on the *fabulae* of antiquity, in addition to biblical *exempla*, and with the same results! This reflects yet another strand of medieval culture, that of the “medieval renaissance” of classical literature in the schools. All of the major classical authors were recipients of extensive systems of glosses. See at least P. von Moos, “The Use of Exempla in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury,” in *Entre histoire et littérature: Communication et culture au Moyen Age* (Florence: SISMEL, 2005), 205–90, and Munk Olsen’s brilliantly useful introduction to his extensive research in *I classici nel canone scolastico altomedievale* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1991). For further bibliography, see: Rita Copeland, “Gloss and Commentary,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, ed. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 171–91; Frank T. Coulson, “Ovid’s Transformation in Medieval France,” in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen James Rupp (Toronto: CRRS, 2007), 33–60; Birger Munk Olsen, “Accessus to Classical Poets in the Twelfth Century,” in *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom: The Role of Ancient Texts in the Arts Curriculum as Revealed by Surviving Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys, John O. Ward, and Melanie Heyworth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 131–44.

²⁸ Scholarship on *Purgatorio* 20 has traditionally focused on *avaritia*, Hugh’s political prophesy, and Dante’s rhetorical invective: R. Scrivano, “L’orazione politica di Ugo Capeto: morale, politica e retorica di Dante,” *L’Alighieri* 12 (1971): 13–34; A. Stäuble, “Canto XX,” in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Purgatorio*, ed. G. Güntert and M. Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), 307–14; Vicent Moleta, “Canto XX: Hugh Capet and the Avarice of Kings,” in *Lectura Dantis: Purgatorio*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 210–21; Marco Grimaldi, “Politica e storia nel canto XX del *Purgatorio*,” in *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 15 (2012): 9–25; Enrico Fenzi, “Tra religione e politica: Dante, il mal di Francia e le ‘sacrate ossa’ dell’eseacrato san Luigi,” *Studi Danteschi* 69 (2004): 23–117. But see now: Ciro Perna, “‘Dilci, che ‘l sai: di che sapore è l’oro?’: Il canto XX del *Purgatorio*,” *Rivista di Studi Danteschi* 12 (2012): 34–62; Valerio Marucci, “‘Secondo l’affezion ch’ad ir ci sprona’: Lettura del canto XX del *Purgatorio*,” in *Per me, Dante: Incontri e riflessioni con alcuni canti*

struck by the *pietosamente piangere* that he hears. As he will later discover, Hugh Capet is conducting a tearful meditation on Mary's impoverished condition in the inn. His meditation is so vividly affecting that he is led to shout aloud: "By chance I heard on up ahead call out / 'Sweet Mary!' through his tears, even as a woman does in labor / ("Dolce Maria!' / dinanzi a noi chiamar così pianto / come fa donna che in parturir sia" (20.19–21). In this way, Hugh's meditation conforms to the practice enjoined on the devout reader of the *Meditationes*. In chapter 4 of the vernacular *Meditazioni*, the author, reflecting on the Nativity of Christ, also apostrophizes the Virgin: "See [*vedi*] also such great humility: the Queen of Heaven and Earth rides a donkey. O most holy poverty! And Joseph walks along leading the ox. O human pride, what might you say to excuse yourself? . . . O human soul, consider here the poverty and need of the Queen of Heaven!"²⁹ In strikingly similar terms, Dante's Hugh apostrophizes the Virgin, addressing her as if she were present: "How poor you were" (20.22: "Povera fosti tanto"). In his affective meditation, then, he shows that *compassione* the author of the *Meditationes* calls for, and by doing so is being conformed affectively through *imitatio Mariae*. As he compassionately meditates on Mary's poverty in her hour of parturition, he cries out like a woman giving birth.

Hugh also turns to classical *exempla* of poverty, apostrophizing Fabricius (20.25–27: "O buon Fabrizio"), before continuing on to consider the generosity of Nicholas (20.31–33). At night, Hugh tells the pilgrim, the souls respond antiphonally with negative *exempla* (20.101–2), which are also uttered with strong affective responses. They do not just go over the *exempla* again and again (20.103: "Noi repetiam"), but "celebrate" (20.113: "lodiamo") the destruction of Heliodorus, "accuse" Sapphira (20.112: "we accuse Sapphira, with her husband [accusiam col marito Saffira]"), and "cry out" the *exemplum* of Crassus ("ci si grida"), disdainfully addressing him (20.116–17: "Crassus, since you know, what is the taste of gold? [Crasso, dilci, che'l sai: di che sapore è l'oro?]"). Tellingly, as the penitent souls envision the scene of Achan and Joshua, it becomes so vivid in their imaginations that it seems to play out before their eyes ("20.109–11: "Each then remembers, . . . so that the wrath of Joshua seems to strike again [Si

della "Commedia" (Ravenna: Longo, 2014), 81–97.

²⁹ *Meditationes*, ch. 4: "Vedi etiandio grande humilitade, che la Regina del cielo et della terra cavalcha sopra uno asenelo. O povertade sanctissima! . . . O superbia humana, che dirai per tua scusa! . . . O huomo, pensa qui la povertade et la necessitade della Regina del cielo, et siando lei Madre de Dio non trovoe albergo: hàbili adonque compassione!" (trans. McNamer in *Meditations*, 23).

ricorda . . . sì che l'ira / di Iosüè qui par ch'ancor . . . morda"). They experience an overflow of *affectus*, spontaneously calling out and addressing their "readings" as if they were living before them, in proportion to the "affezione" they have:

"Sometimes one speaks loud, another low,
according to the zeal that spurs our speech,
at times with greater, at times with less force
[Talor parla l'uno alto e l'altro basso,
Secondo l'affezion ch'ad ir ci sprona
Ora a maggiore e ora minor passo] (20.118–20).

Hugh's whole mode of thought, though, is beginning to be molded by such responses of *affezione*, not just his biblical and classical *lectio*. After he briefly narrates his rapid ascent from being the son of a butcher to the ancestor of a dynasty (*Purg.* 20.49–60), he delivers a passionate jeremiad against his heir's insatiable hunger for conquest, likening Charles de Valois to Judas and Philip IV to Pilate. In other words, we find in Hugh a quality so admirable for Dante: the righteous conviction of the prophet (speaking in the same passionate tone found in Dante's political letters), reading contemporary political events in light of biblical paradigms.³⁰ As Hugh imagines the abuse of his dynasty, his *ira* boils over, and he calls out to God in words molded by passages of biblical longing ("O my Lord, when shall I be gladdened / at the sight of vengeance that, as yet concealed, / hidden in your mind, makes sweet your wrath? [O Segnor mio, quando sarò io lieto / a veder la vendetta che, nascosa, fa colse l'ira tua nel tuo secreto?]" (20.94–96; cf. Ps 13 and Rev 6:10). What is more, when Hugh apostrophizes avarice (20.82: "O avarice, what greater harm can you do? [O avarizia, che puoi tu più farne?]"), he uses words that echo Virgil's own condemnation of avarice, which, we are told two canti later, were responsible for the initial conversion of Statius (22.38–41: "As if enraged at human nature, you cried out:/ 'To what end, O cursèd hunger for gold, / do you not govern the appetite of mortals?' [Tu chiamo, / crucciato quasi a l'umana natura: 'Per che non reggi tu, o sacra fame / de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?'"). Hugh Capet then has begun to rejoice with alacrity upon hearing the actions of the good and to respond with *ira* upon hearing the

³⁰ Ronald Martinez, "Dante's Jeremiads: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Burden of the New Pharisees, the Capetians, and Florence," in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 301–20.

actions of the evil. Indeed, Hugh is now beginning to call out *nel pianto* (20.20), in a manner which recalls those “blessed tears” Guigo says are the sign of inner *purgatio* in his *Scala claustralium*. The sin to which he was once prone—the avaricious acquisition of land—has now become repulsive to him on a visceral level. His *affectus* has been enkindled.

We find another example of such affective *lectio* on the terrace of the prideful.³¹ Just as the meditations of the avaricious are so vivid that the events contemplated seem to take place sensibly before them (20.109–11: “Each then remembers . . . / so that the wrath / of Joshua seems here to strike again” [“si ricorda . . . sì che l’ira / di Iosüè qui par ch’ancor lo morda”]), so too do the carvings cast a kind of spell over the pilgrim as he “reads” them: “The angel . . . / appeared before us so vividly engraved / . . . it did not seem an image, carved and silent [L’angel . . . / dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace . . . / che non sembiava imagine che tace]” (10.34, 37, 39). In canto 12 of *Purgatorio*, the images are so vividly alive or dramatically dead (“morti li morti e i vivi parean vivi”) that Dante’s perception of the representations was “better” than those who witnessed them as historical events (12.67–68: “non vide mei di me chi vide il vero”), and as the context makes clear, the pilgrim’s viewing of the images is “better” because he views them “affectively.” The pilgrim’s reading experience is shockingly intense: he “hears” the angel’s “Ave” (10.40), the Virgin’s “Ecce ancilla Dëi” (10.43–44), and singing (10.58–60); and he seems to smell incense (10.61–63). The stories are carved so that the viewer cannot be unmoved. Perhaps most interesting for our purposes is that images produce textual meditations in the mind. In the story of Trajan and the widow, the *miserella* “one could almost hear the plea / . . . ‘M Lord, avenge [pareva dir: ‘Segnor, fammi vendetta]’” (10.82–83). Over the next three *terzine* Dante records the imagined dialogue between them that arose in his mind: these images are *visibile parlare* because they inspire an affective meditation (10.95).³²

³¹ On the art of the terrace of the prideful, see: Teodolinda Barolini, “Re-Presenting What God Presented: The Arachnean Art of Dante’s Terrace of Pride,” *Dante Studies* 105 (1987): 43–62; Georges Güntert, “Canto X,” in Güntert and Picone, *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Purgatorio*, 139–55; Michelangelo Picone, “Dante nel girone dei superbi (Purg. X–XII),” in *Studi danteschi*, ed. Antonio Lanza (Ravenna: Longo, 2017), 515–527; but especially Matthew Treherne, “Ekphrasis and Eucharist: The Poetics of Seeing God’s Art in Purgatorio X,” *The Italianist* 26, no. 1 (2006): 177–96.

³² For more on medieval images that generate verbal reflection, as well as texts that invite affective imagination, see: Jeffrey Hamburger, “Visible Speech: Imagining Scripture in the Prayer Book of Ursula Begerin and the Medieval Tradition of Word Illustration,” in *Schreiben und Lesen in der Stadt: Literaturbetrieb im spät-*

On the terrace of the prideful we also find *lectio* of negative *exempla*. In canto 12, the images do not just narrate, but render the scenes movingly and affectively. Dante is careful to relate not only the stories, but the affective responses of the figures within the narration: Thymbraeus, Pallas, and Mars seem like they are still armed (*armati ancora*) and “wonder” (12.32–33); Nimrod is “as though bewildered” (12.35: *quasi smarrito*); Niobe has “eyes welling up with grief” (12.37: *occhi dolenti*). In fact, the figures are so powerful that the poet is moved to apostrophize the figures he sees in his memory, in yet another instance of affective overflow: “Ah, Niobe . . . / Ah, Saul . . . ; Ah, Rehoboam . . . ; My eyes beheld Troy in ashes and in ruins. / Ah, Ilion, how reduced and shameful you were / now was shown within the carving [Vedeva Troia in cenere e in caverne; o Ilión, come te basso e vile / mostrava il segno che lì si discerne!]” (12.37, 40, 46, 61–63). In short, for Dante-poet and Dante-pilgrim, just as for Hugh Capet, the “texts” of *Purgatorio* are masterfully “written” so that they cannot be read on the mere level of the *lictera*; they leap off the page, so to speak—inspire *affectus*, *cogitatio cordis*, *imitatio*. Appropriately, these texts have been written for those who had in life been untouched by the well-known stories (none of the *exempla*, as Delcorno has shown, are learned allusions³³). As the simile at the beginning of canto 12 suggests (12.16–22), these images are “more true in their resemblance [di miglior sembianza],” not because they are more naturalistic and mimetically accurate, but because they cause that prick of recollection (“la puntura de la rimembranza”) that gives rise to tears (“molte volte si ripiagne”). Here the penitent cannot encounter them without *affectus*.³⁴

From this perspective, the penitential exercises in *Purgatorio* can be understood as setting the context for affective reading. When we first meet the avaricious, we find them weeping, “lying face down on the ground and weeping” (19.72: “giacendo a terra tutta volta in giuso”). While they lie

mittelalterlichen Straßburg, ed. Stephen Mossman and Nigel F. Palmer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 117–54; Mary Carruthers, “Moving Images in the Mind’s Eye,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 287–306.

³³ Delcorno, “Dante e l’*exemplum* medievale.”

³⁴ Aesthetically, then, Dante’s “art” is closer to the late-medieval affective spirituality of Giotto and Simone Martini than to the Renaissance naturalism of Quattrocento. For Dante, art, and his reception by artists; see Simon Gilson, “Divine and Natural Artistry in the *Commedia*,” in *Art and Nature in Dante: Literary and Theological Essays*, ed. Daragh O’Connell and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013), 153–86.

bolted to the ground, they recite the words of the Psalm: “My soul cleaveth unto the dust [Adhaesit pavimento anima mea]” (19.73). In this way, their *exercitium* puts them in a physical position in which the words of Scripture have affective power. Similarly, as the prideful move slowly around the terrace with heads suspended inches above the carvings in the ground, they have ample opportunity to meditate on the *exempla* of pride carved into their path (cf. 11.130-39). They go over these moral *exempla* again and again, conducting, each time they circle around, a visual meditation as they struggle to find strength to bear their loads. *Purgatorio* is a place constructed to teach sinners how to read, how to read to the point that their internal *foco d’amore* purges their inner affections.

**“Brought together into a Harmonious Whole”:
The Rhetorical *Imitatio* of *Auctores***

As we have seen, Dante crafted his purgatory as the consummate place of transformative reading; paradoxically, he also represents purgatory as the ultimate place to study the art of writing. Throughout *Purgatorio*, there are as many instances in which the pilgrim pays attention to the active production of *poesis* as there are examples of reading (moral *imitatio*). Purgatory is where Dante contemplates God’s own writing (cantos 10 and 12), where the pilgrim listens in on the conversations of ancient poets (22.127–29), and the place where he explains the secret of his success to near contemporaries (cantos 24 and 26).³⁵ For this reason, as Teodolinda Barolini has pointed out, it is within this canticle, more than in the other two, that Dante works out his self-understanding of his poetic vocation.³⁶ In other words, in addition to being a place where moral *imitatio* is practiced, purgatory is also a place of rhetorical *imitatio*.

Douglas Kelly has characterized such rhetorical *imitatio* as the “medieval apprenticeship tradition,” whereby a *modernus* wrote a text within the authoritative framework provided by a model author. The preface to Macrobius’s *Saturnalia*, in particular, was an invaluable text for medieval literary theorists and practitioners, those writing in Latin and the vernac-

³⁵ For a short but powerful introduction to Dante’s relationship to his near contemporaries, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Dante’s Lyric Past,” in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14–33. See also: Manuele Gragnolati, “Authorship and Performance in Dante’s *Vita Nuova*,” in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, ed. Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 125–41; Tristan Kay, *Dante’s Lyric Redemption: Eros, Salvation, Vernacular Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁶ Barolini, *Dante’s Poets*, 13.

ular alike.³⁷ In that influential passage, Macrobius described how he had compiled for his son a compendium of Latin and Greek classics he had read over a lifetime (preface, 1–2).³⁸ Macrobius insists, nevertheless, that the passages he has recorded in his *Saturnalia*—often word for word copies—make up a unified body, not just a pile of ill-digested bits (preface, 3). Besides digestion, Macrobius uses three other metaphors to describe how he formed these variegated texts into a unified whole: the author is like a bee, who gathers sweet nectar from a variety of places (preface, 5), like a perfume maker, and like a chorus whose many voices blend to become one (preface, 8). Macrobius then concludes:

We should draw upon all our sources with the aim to of making a unity [*unde unum fiat*], . . . Let this be the mind's goal: to conceal its sources of support and to display only what it has made of them, just as those who make perfumes take particular care that the specific odor of any ingredient not be perceptible, since they aim to blend all the aromatic essences into a single fragrant exhalation. You know how a chorus consists of many people's voices, and yet they all produce a single sound. . . . That is my goal for the present work: it comprises many different disciplines, many lessons, examples drawn from many periods [*exempla*], but brought together into a harmonious whole [*sed in unum conspirata*]. (preface, 8–10)

In this passage, Macrobius spelled out for generations of medieval writers how to achieve originality through “conspiracy,” that is, through the blending together of those diverse “odors” into “one flavor/fragrance.” John of Salisbury’s description of the pedagogy of Bernard of Chartres

³⁷ Douglas Kelly, *The Conspiracy of Allusion: Description, Rewriting, and Authorship from Macrobius to Medieval Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). See also, *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition*, ed. D. Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996); Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991); P. Godman, “*Opus consummatum, omnium artium. . . imago*: From Bernard of Chartres to John of Hauvilla,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 124 (1995): 26–71; Jean-Yves Tilliette, *Des mots à la parole: une lecture de la Poetria nova de Geoffroy de Vinsauf* (Geneva: Droz, 2000); Jan Ziolkowski, “The Highest Form of Compliment: Imitatio in Medieval Latin Culture,” in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 293–307; Ziolkowski, “Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009): 421–48.

³⁸ For edition and translation, see *Saturnalia*, ed. and trans. Robert A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

has preserved an anecdote of the practice of this *imitatio* in the medieval classroom. Mark Kauntze explains:

According to John, Bernard of Chartres' Latin instruction rested on three main activities: the careful grammatical and rhetorical exposition of the *auctores*, the memorisation and recitation of passages from the day's reading, and "introductory exercises" (*praeexercitamina*) in which his pupils would compose poetry and prose in imitation of the authors they had been studying. . . .

The imitation of ancient authors was an important exercise in the classroom of Bernard of Chartres. But, according to John of Salisbury's account, Bernard enforced a strict distinction between genuine imitation and mere plagiarism, or, in Horace's phrase, the sewing on of a patch of cloth filched from an external source. If Bernard detected such literary theft, he would reprimand the student in question. Then: "After he had reproved the student, if an unsuitable theme had invited this, he would, with modest indulgence, bid the boy to rise to real imitation of the authors, and would bring about that he who had imitated would come to be deserving of imitation by his successors (*fieret posteris imitandus*)."³⁹

Reworking antiquity, then, was not only a path to *auctoritas*, but brought with it its own aesthetic pleasure. Medieval authors delighted in detecting the past built into the present, of finding the work of a *modernus* studied with remains from the past, literary *spolia*, analogous to the ancient columns woven into the architectural fabric of medieval basilicas.⁴⁰ In the verse prologue to *Anticlaudianus*, Alan of Lille refers to the *novitas* that will delight his readers. They will find the poetry of antiquity rewritten: the "ancient parchment" rejoices in being renewed (a palimpsest in the making?: "scribendi novitate vetus iuvenescere carta / Gaudet").⁴¹

In Dante, too, we find that medieval "aesthetic" of *imitatio*, the flash of joy that accompanies the spark of recognition of the old in the new. Just a few canti before Dante's elaborate description of the relief carvings on the terrace of the proud, Sordello had directed Virgil and Dante to the Valley

³⁹ Mark Kauntze, *Authority and Imitation: A Study of the Cosmographia of Bernard Silvestris* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 132.

⁴⁰ For the medieval pleasure of finding the past renewed in the physical arts, see: Beat Brenk, "Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics versus Ideology," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 103–109; Paul Binski, *Gothic Wonder* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Alan of Lille, *Literary Works*, ed. and trans. Winthrop Wetherbee, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4–5.

of the Princes, which is the subject of the following celebrated *descriptio*:

Gold and fine silver, carmine and leaded white
 Indigo, lignite bright and clear,
 An emerald after it has just been split,
 Placed in that dell would see their brightness fade
 Against the colors of the grass and flowers,
 As less is overcome by more.
 Nature had not only painted there in all her hues
 But there the sweetness of a thousand scents
 Was blended in one fragrance strange and new.
 [Oro e argento fine, cocco e biacca,
 indaco, legno lucido e sereno,
 fresco smeraldo in l'ora che si fiacca,
 de l'erba e da li fior, dentr'a quel seno
 posti, ciascun saria di color vinto,
 come dal suo maggiore è il meno.
 Non avea pur natura ivi dipinto,
 ma di soavità di mille odori
 vi faceva uno incognito e indistinto] (*Purg.* 7.73–81)

On the most literal level, Dante describes the valley as a painted masterpiece of *Natura* (7.79: “ivi dipinto”), with flowers and grass that outshine the most lustrous earthly substances. *Natura*, then, has “rewritten” an earlier text, now giving the brilliant *colores* of earthly gems to purgatorial flowers. And yet, there is an even greater feat: *Natura* has brought together what was a variegated and scattered host on earth into an aesthetic unity, in which each flower contributes to the single unified fragrance of the whole (7.81: “vi faceva uno e indistinto”). *Natura* has, then, brought together a number of *loci* on earth, in order to create a single, surpassingly beautiful valley. *Natura* has rewritten the texts she herself had drafted on earth: we could say that *Natura* practiced *imitatio* to create a work of originality.

But in order to construct this description of *Natura's* work of *imitatio*, the poet himself cobbled together variegated bits of texts. In his brilliant *lectura* of *Purgatorio* 7 (“All’ombra di Sordello”), Michelangelo Picone identifies Dante and Virgil’s encounter with Sordello as the poem’s “first systematic reflection on poetry, taking into account its cultural, genealogical context (from the classical to the medieval, Christian world.”⁴²

⁴² Michelangelo Picone, “All’ombra di Sordello: una lettura di *Purgatorio* VII,” *Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana* 12 (1998): 61–77, at 62.

Although Dante in every canto has something to say about his art, Picone notes an “extraordinary eclipse of Dante-character” as compensated for by the special presence of the voice of the author, in whose words we recognize “a neat web of textual allusions.”⁴³ As is well known, Dante carefully modeled Sordello on Musaeus, who leads Aeneas and the Sybil to Anchises in *Aeneid* 6.⁴⁴ For his *descriptio* of the valley, Dante “systematically rewrote” Cavalcanti’s *plazer* “Biltà di donna.” At the same time, Dante included *spolia* from the *Salve Regina*, before concluding by taking as a model the “Planher vuelh en Blacatz” of Sordello himself.⁴⁵ In sum, Dante-poet blends together a number of *auctores* in the very passage given to describing the *imitatio* that Nature practiced. Tellingly, we also hear echoes of *Saturnalia* within *Purgatio* 7. Dante’s *Natura* “blended in one fragrance strange and new” (7.81: “di soavità di mille odori / vi facea uno incognito e indistinto”), analogously to how Macrobius’s perfume makers aim to have no one ingredient perceptible “since they aim to blend all the aromatic essences into a single fragrant exhalation” (preface, 8: “confusuri videlicet omnium sucos in spiramentum unum”). Whether Dante knew the *Saturnalia* directly or indirectly, he seizes the occasion to rewrite his friend and rival, Cavalcanti, correcting him with allusions to Virgil and sacred texts, at the very moment he describes *Natura*’s practice of *imitatio*.

We have seen, then, how throughout purgatory the souls accomplish their cleansing through the moral *imitatio* of *exempla* from Scripture, history, and classical literature. At the same time, the poet practices and reflects upon a second kind of medieval *imitatio* (rhetorical). In the following section, I want to focus on how Dante conflates these two forms of *imitatio*.

Si quis vero hec omnia studeat imitari:

Imitating God’s Miraculous Art

In the medieval mind, the boundary between these two textual processes—rhetorical *imitatio* and *lectio*/moral *imitatio*—was porous. That delight that comes from reading is intimately related to moral *imitatio*. Here, for example, is how the author of an important commentary on the *Aeneid* links them:

The *Aeneid* gives pleasure (quedam delectatio) because of verbal ornament, the figures of speech, and the diverse adventures and

⁴³ Picone, “All’ombra,” 63.

⁴⁴ Picone, “All’ombra,” 67.

⁴⁵ Picone, “All’ombra,” 71–77.

works of men which it describes. Indeed, anyone who *imitates* all of these things diligently (*hec omnia studeat imitari*) will attain the greatest skill in the art of writing, and he will also find in the narrative the greatest *exempla*, as well as expositions on pursuing the wholesome and fleeing the vicious. Thus, there is a double usefulness for the reader: the first is skill in composition which comes from *imitatio*, and the second is the prudence of acting rightly, and this comes from the exhortation of *exempla*. For instance, we have an *exemplum* of patient suffering in the labors of Aeneas; in his *affectus* for Anchises and Ascanius we have an *exemplum* of piety.⁴⁶

For Bernard Silvestris, buried underneath the events of the plot (*narratio*) is a deep understanding (*intellectum . . . veritatis*), but it is “wrapped up” (*involucrum*) or “covered” (*integumentum*) by a “narrated fable” (*sub fabulosa narratione*). At this deeper philosophical level, Virgil provides a series of moral lessons, *maxima exempla* of things *honesta* and *illicita*. For Bernard the serious business of pursuing the wholesome (*aggreudiendi honesta*) or shunning the base (*fugiendi illicita*) comes only after developing skill in writing (*peritia*) through imitation (*hec omnia studeat imitari*), after experiencing *quedam delectatio* of the text. There is an inextricable relationship between these two forms of *imitatio*: the “poetic wrapping” (*ficmentum poeticum*) and the “deep, philosophical truths” (*veritas philosophie*) are the “twin doctrines” (*gemin[a] doctrin[a]*) of the *Aeneid*. Virgil is *et poeta et philosophus*. The reader must imitate Aeneas, while as a writer, he imitates Virgil.

One of the greatest passages of *Purgatorio* embodies this *gemina doctrina*: the prideful souls’ “recitation” of the *Padre Nostro* (*Purg.* 11.1–24). From this vantage, the vernacularization of the biblical prayer is a prime example of literary *imitatio*, a spontaneous rewriting of the old prayer *cum* new special glosses added for the benefit of prideful souls, but now both gloss and translation have been reincorporated into the text itself.⁴⁷ Forty-nine words of Latin become the Italian prayer of more than

⁴⁶ *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. Julian Jones and Elizabeth Jones (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 2–3. The English translation comes from *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil’s Aeneid*, trans. Earl Schreiber and Thomas Maresca (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 4, which I follow with some modifications.

⁴⁷ See now Maldina’s remarkable “‘L’oratio super pater noster’ di Dante.” Maldina comments how Dante has “the desire not only to comment on the Gospel text, but also to construct on its basis a new prayer” (100). And for a more general

160, as if the Latin prayer releases its potential energy when it uncoils in the vernacular. The “qui es in cielis” becomes three whole verses (11.1–3), emphasizing God’s transcendence; the “sanctificetur nomen tuum” is amplified into “Our Father, who are in Heaven, / circumscribed only by the greater love / you have for your first works on high” (11.4–6: “laudato sia ’l tuo nome e ’l tuo valore / da ogne creatura, com’ è degno / di render grazie al tuo dolce vapore”), lines replete with echoes of Francis’s hymn of creation. “Veniat regnum tuum” becomes “May the peace of your kingdom come to us, / for we cannot attain it of ourselves / if it comes not, for all our striving” (11.7–9: “Vegna ver’ noi la pace del tuo regno, / ché noi ad essa non potem da noi, / s’ella non vien, con tutto nostro ingegno”), lines that emphasize especially the complete impotence of the prideful to get to the kingdom on their own. And finally, the phrase, “libera nos a malo,” for the prideful, who spent too much time on earth using first person pronouns (see 17.116–17), must now pray, “not for ourselves” but “for the ones whom we have left behind” (11.23–24: “non . . . per noi”; “per color che dietro a noi restaro”). But this spectacular rhetorical *imitatio* seemingly can occur only because of their practice of affective *lectio* (the moral *imitatio*) of the *exempla* of the prideful. With faces inches above the text, they study the miraculous *ombre e’ tratti* described in canto 12, what Bernard Silvestris had called “maxima . . . exempla et excogitationes . . . fugiendi illicita.” Here God’s own successfully rewritten text, which outdoes nature (cf. *Purg.* 12.64–69), provides an opportunity for deep reading, and then this deep reading flows forth as a fresh composition, an *imitatio* of the all-too-common “Our Father.”

Throughout *Purgatorio* Dante intentionally allows his vocabulary for the “reading” souls and the art of the Divine Writer to overlap. For instance, the word *ombra*, most often used to indicate the airy bodies of the souls in hell and purgatory (e.g., *Inferno* 6.34, 101), is used in a particularly dense cluster (seven times) in cantos 11–12 of *Purgatorio*. The *Padre Nostro* concludes by referring to the prideful as “those shades trudged

discussion of the “unstable frontier” between original text and later accretions, see Christopher Baswell, who observes a “tendency among medieval translators to include not only the ‘primary’ text, but also parts of its surrounding commentaries,” as in Chaucer’s *Boece*, which “unites Latin text and gloss, as well as French. This absorption of framing materials into the translation—the insistent centripetal movement of the margin toward the center—suggests the extent to which textuality in the Middle Ages has vague and fluid limits, only beginning with the *auctor*’s words,” (*Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 5–6).

on beneath their burden” (11.26: “quell’ombre orando, andavan sotto ’l pondo”), but in the very next canto Dante praises the divine artist for his skillful carving of *ombre* into the ground (12.65: “l’ombre e’ tratti ch’ivi”), making a connection between the designs in the stone and the souls who are reformed through their purgatorial penances. Similarly, just after Virgil tells the pilgrim to observe all the carvings (10.46: “non tener pur ad un loco la mente”), he orders Dante to stare fixedly at the prideful and try to distinguish the souls from the stone (10.118–19: “Ma guarda fiso là”), as if they were another passage in the same text. At the beginning of canto 13, the pilgrim notices that, in contrast to the richly decorated first terrace, “there are no shades nor any carvings” (13.7: “ombra non li è né segno che si paia”). And yet, toward the middle of this canto, Dante-pilgrim will have to look closely in order to pick out the souls from the rock, because the souls blend into it on account of their being draped in cloaks “the color of stone” (13.48: “al color de la pietra”). On this terrace, the extraordinary art to be marveled at is found in the souls being remade, not in carvings. In fact, Sapia’s exclamation confirms this: “Oh . . . how wonderful it is to hear / of this great [sign] of God’s love for you” (13.145–46: “Oh, questa è a udir sì cosa nuova, / . . . che gran segno è che Dio t’ami”). The miraculous appearance of a body in *Purgatorio* is *cosa nuova*, just as the miraculous art of the terrace of the prideful is *novello* on account of it not being found on earth (10.94, 96). Here, the pilgrim is a *segno*, to be paralleled with the *segn[i]* he had studied below (14.7). The poet is insistent that we think about these things together: the miraculous skill which rewrites and outdoes nature and the souls who are being re-formed. The same divine *fabbro* who carved the miraculous *imagin[i]* (10.39) into the marble, who outdid his terrestrial composition, also remakes the souls of purgatory: “All these people . . . / here are remade holy, through thirst and hunger” (23.64, 66: “Tutta esta gente . . . / in fame e’n sete qui si rifà santa” [translation adapted]).

All these themes are woven together in the canti dedicated to the terrace of gluttony (*Purg.* 23–24), where the souls also meditate on *exempla*: they sing “Labia mea, Domine” (23.11); a voice from a tree recalls Mary’s generosity at the wedding banquet, the temperance of the ancient Roman matrons, Daniel’s preference for wisdom over the Babylonian king’s polluted meats, the Golden Age diet of acorns and water, and the honey and locust of John the Baptist (22.142–54); a second tree provides negative *exempla*, including the spawning of the centaurs and the Hebrews Gideon did not enlist (24.121–26). Thus, the terrace has been structured to guide the souls on this terrace in practicing *meditatio*, a free play that ranges across the whole of Scripture and classical literature, the very

method Guigo had recommended for meditating on a beatitude. At the end of canto 24, we hear an angel practice rhetorical *imitatio*, rewriting the beatitude as he vernacularizes it: “Blessed are they / whom grace so much enlightens that appetite / fills not their breasts with gross desires, / but leaves them hungering for what is just” (24.151–54: “Beati cui alluma / tanto di grazia, che l’amor del gusto / nel petto lor troppo disir non fuma, / esuriendo sempre quanto è guisto”; cf. Matt 5:6: “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they will be satisfied [beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam quoniam ipsi saturabuntur]”). The new formulation, which emphasizes the right kind of hunger, makes sure the beatitude is heard as if for the first time.

Among those practicing *lectio* on this terrace, we find Forese Donati. He tells the pilgrim that the same “voglia” which caused Christ to shout “Eli” aloud in an act of voluntary, joyful suffering, pulses through the souls of this terrace and inspires them to go and listen to the *exempla* of the tree whose fruit they voluntarily forgo (23.72–75). In this way, we find Forese consciously practicing an *imitatio Christi*, reliving Christ’s life in his own. But what is most interesting is that Dante describes Forese’s *imitatio* as occurring simultaneously with his rewriting. The very soul who is *singing* “Labia mea, Domine” is at first unrecognizable because of “his changed features” (23.47: “la cangiata labbia”): his face, like a text, is being rewritten. Indeed, the faces of the gluttonous are texts where one may “read” their restored, rewritten humanity: the pilgrim observes the word *omo* etched in the visages of the penitential gluttonous (23.31–33), in contrast to the indistinguishably fleshy visage of Ciaccio and the gluttons of hell. The faces, then, of those who are imitating moral *exempla* are being rewritten as texts which more clearly signify their humanity (rhetorical *imitatio*). And indeed, the pilgrim experiences an intense moment of delight when he recognizes in the transformed face of Forese the visage of an old friend: “I never would have known him by his features, / but the sound of his voice made plain to me / what from his looks had been erased. // That spark relit the memory / of his changed features / and I knew Forese’s face” (23.43–48: “Mai non l’avrei riconosciuto al viso; / ma ne la voce sua mi fu palese / ciò che l’aspetto in sé avea conquiso. // Questa favilla tutta mi raccese / mia conoscenza a la cangiata labbia, / e ravvisai la faccia di Forese”) The pilgrim is so overcome by wonder (“mentr’io mi maraviglio”) that he can do nothing but follow up on his curiosity (23. 59). The pilgrim experiences what Alan of Lille described, when the *carta vetus* grows “younger” and surprises through its *novitas*.

The full implications of Dante’s choice to marry these two forms of *imitatio* cannot be explored here, for it would force us to consider passages

in *Paradiso* which take us beyond the scope of this paper. And yet, I would like to conclude with one final set of observations to hint, at least, at what a rich and central theme this conflation of the two forms of *imitatio* is for the *Commedia*.

Conclusion

At the end of canto 30 in *Paradiso* and then again at the beginning of 31, the poet uses a series of images to try to capture the extraordinary splendor of the heavenly community of saints. He describes them at first as a collection of flowers in a meadow, then as a single rose, then as a city, before returning again to likening the saints to so many petals on a white rose. As the ineffable reality to which Dante gestures eludes words, the shifting, kaleidoscopic imagery is appropriate. More importantly for our purposes, Dante-poet revisits and rewrites two passages of his own: cantos 7 and 10 in *Purgatorio*, two passages which had also described feats of “rewriting.”

Dante describes this vision of the Empyrean as *novella vista* (*Paradiso* 30.58), and the sparks which emerge from the river and land on the adjoining banks are “painted with the wondrous colors of spring” (*Par.* 30.63: “dipinte di mirabil primavera”). The sparks fall on flowers (*Par.* 30.65), which are likened to “rubies inscribed in gold” (*Par.* 30.66: “quasi rubin che oro circunscrive”). Beatrice continues the metaphor, referring to the sparks as *li topazi* (*Par.* 30.76) and saying that the “grassy places” are smiling (*Par.* 30.77). Dante later likens this whole vision to a hill which is reflected in a body of water at its base, as if it were studying itself in a mirror, “as if it saw itself adorned / when it is lush with grass and flowers” (*Par.* 30.110–11: “quasi per vedersi addorno, / quando è nel verde e ne’ fioretti opimo”). Dante, as mentioned, shifts his image of the heavenly community from a collection of flowers to a single “candida rosa” (*Par.* 31.1), “adorned with many petals” (*Par.* 31.10–11: “che s’addorna / di tante foglie”), into which angels dive, with faces of “living flame,” “wings of gold,” and “all the rest so white, / that no snow ever arrives at that limit” (*Par.* 31.13–15: “Le facce tutte avean di fiamma viva / e l’ali d’oro, e l’altro tanto bianco, / che nulla neve a quel termine arriva”).

To create this extraordinary passage, to be sure, Dante has woven in bits and pieces of numerous other passages throughout the entirety of the *Commedia*, but especially, the passages I have commented upon above, that is, those passages in which Dante reflects upon the art of God (*Purg.* 10) and the *imitatio* of Nature (*Purg.* 7). The vision he is given (*Par.* 30.58: “novella vista”), like the miraculous art of God in *Purgatorio* 10 (10.96: which is “novello a noi”), is of a rose which is *candida* (*Par.* 31.1) like the

“white, adorned marble” (“marmo candido e addorno”) of *Purgatorio* 10.31. *Candido* is used only three times in the whole of the *Commedia*. Furthermore, the brilliant *fioretti* of *Paradiso* are said to be *addorno*, the term used for the *segni* and *imagini* of *Purgatorio* 10 and for the *fiori* in the Valley of the Kings (retrospectively recalled at *Purg.* 9.54). In *Paradiso* 30, Dante, too, uses an extraordinary set of synesthetic metaphors. Beatrice, for example, tells him to drink in the vision of the river (*Par.* 30.73–75), which recalls the synesthetic “speech made visible” (*Purg.* 10.95: “visibile parlare”) and medium-transgressing art of the terrace of the prideful. Indeed, all the souls in heaven are said to combine their beauties to the end of making one tremendous show (*Par.* 31.27: “tutto ad un segno”). The idea of joining various properties into a unity, of course, invokes many passages from the *Commedia* (not the least of which is the Eagle of Justice), but, within the context of the rich botanical imagery, it is especially redolent of the *mille odori* which *Natura* made into *uno incognito e indistinto* (7.80–81). The brilliance of the flowers and the angels’ wings, described as gold, the likening of the flowers to rubies and topazes, the description of the place as a meadow, the intoxicating fragrance released from the flowers, all echo the great passage in *Purgatorio* 7, not to mention that both are described as “painted” (“avea . . . ivi dipinto,” [*Purg.* 7.79]; “due rive / dipinte” [*Par.* 30.62–63]).

Dante has then rewritten *Purgatorio* 7 and 10 in *Paradiso* 30–31; rather, he has transformed his own work, or practiced *imitatio* on his own text. The brilliance of the vision in paradise is blinding, and in its variety of colors, bewildering. The peaceful meadow of purgatory has become a blazing, fulsome, searing river of light (*Par.* 30.61–62: “And I saw light that flowed as flows a river / pouring its golden splendor between two banks” [“e vidi lume in forma di rivera / fulvido di fulgore”]). We note how appropriate this is: the souls in the heavenly community are those whom God radically rewrote in life. The tranquil flowers of *Purgatorio* 7 are now the burning, blinding saints and angels of the mystical rose. What we have is, again, a rich interplay of the various ideas of *imitatio*, and the various kinds of “transformations” possible. As a writer, Dante has *imitated* his own passage, and transformed it; but he models his own auto-imitation on the divine Author who rewrote Nature herself in purgatory, and who translated his rough drafts into their superior forms found in the heavenly community. NEV

From the Action of Creatures to the Existence of God: The First Way, Science, and the Philosophy of Nature

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Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? The usual approach of science of constructing a mathematical model cannot answer the questions of why there should be a universe for the model to describe. Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing? Is the unified theory so compelling that it brings about its own existence? Or does it need a creator, and if so, does he have any other effect on the universe? And who created him?

—Stephen Hawking¹

STEPHEN HAWKING poses quite a few questions in this brief paragraph. The last one may seem rather flippant, but the second could be helpful: “Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?” We might take it a bit further: “Once things exist, why do they go to all the bother of acting?” “Why do things act or move at all?”

In the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes, things would not bother to move unless they were pushed, and God becomes something like the Great Pusher.² In the hylomorphic philosophy of Aristotle and Aquinas, motion is

¹ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 174.

² The interpretation of the philosophy of causation espoused by René Descartes is notoriously controversial. Tad Schmaltz notes that “a central question, given the scholastic rejection of occasionalism, is whether Descartes allows for any causes other than God.” He acknowledges Descartes’s statement that God is “the universal

not a bother, but a spontaneous activity, and things act, not because they are forced or pushed, but simply because of the kinds of things they are—and each is what it is in virtue of its substantial form. Still, their actions are not self-explanatory, but provoke a question as to their ultimate origin. That question is the foundation of Aquinas's First Way of showing the existence of God.

Although Aquinas calls this his “most evident” argument, I think it has become less evident to us for two reasons, both associated with the advent of modern science. First, the argument requires a robust notion of causality as it traces a causal chain from the evident motion of creatures to its First Cause, who is God. The idea of causality, however, has lost a lot of its “oomph” in the wake of modern science. Secondly, the argument requires a philosophy whose concepts are pliable enough to pierce the limits of this world and point to a transcendent First Cause. With modern science, however, a mechanistic philosophy was adopted that reduced causality to the univocal notion of the force that moves the atoms.

In what follows, I will first show how the notion of causality was diminished with the advent of modern science and then consider how, with the more robust understanding of causality suggested by contemporary science, the First Way can still lead us from the action of creatures to the existence of God.

Causality in Aristotle and Aquinas

Aristotle proposes four types of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. He also finds a place for the quasi causality of chance. For Aquinas and Aristotle, the hallmark of causality is ontological dependence: “Those things upon which others depend for their being or becoming are called causes.”³ Since this dependence takes various forms, causality is an analo-

and total cause,” but defends “a reading on which such a claim endorses not the occasionalist conclusion that God is the only cause of natural effects, but rather the more modest conclusion that all other causes of natural effects are subordinated to God's universal causality.” I would point out, however, that the mode of this subordination should not be confused with Aquinas's account of secondary causality where the entire effect is attributed wholly to both the primary and the secondary cause. For Descartes, as Schmaltz explains, God “is not a cause of change. Rather he is the cause of a constant quantity of motive force in the world.” There is therefore “a sort of causal division of labor” in the interaction of God and secondary causes, where God “produces an effect that is constant and thus distinct from the changes that are attributable only to secondary causes” (Tad M. Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 76, 90, 104, 218).

³ Thomas Aquinas, *In I phys.*, lec. 1, no. 5, in *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, trans. R. Blackwell et al. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963).

gous notion that has various senses. All four types of causes involve dependence, but in different ways.⁴

Matter and form are intrinsic ontological causes of things on two levels, accidental and substantial. On the accidental level, a statue may be made of marble (the material cause) and have the shape of Zeus (the accidental form). On the substantial level, a dog is a substance composed of matter and form. Here, however, the matter is not a particular type of thing (such as marble), but the sheer possibility of being a thing. This possibility of being is actualized not by an accidental form, such as a certain shape or structure, but by a substantial form, the principle by which a substance is a particular kind of substance.⁵ It is the principle by which a dog is a dog, and therefore exhibits the structure and activities of a dog. So the dog barks and wags its tail in virtue of its substantial form.

Matter and form are also intrinsic causes of change, again on accidental and substantial levels. Any change involves some subject that endures through the change and initially lacks some actuality that it then acquires.⁶ On the accidental level, a slab of copper may be reshaped into a statue. The new shape is the formal cause, the accidental form. The copper is the material cause, the substrate that endures through the change. In this case the material cause is itself a substance (copper) that has the potency to be reshaped and so acquire a new accidental form. On the substantial level, a substance may cease to be what it is altogether and become something else. When a dog dies, for instance, it ceases to be a dog (one organically unified substance) and becomes a carcass (which is really a collection of substances gradually decaying into still more basic substances). While copper remains copper when it is reshaped, the dog does not remain a dog when it becomes a carcass. The substance cannot be the principle that endures through the change when the substance itself is changing. It is not the substance that endures, but the mere potentiality of being a substance, a potentiality actualized first by one substantial form and then by another. This potentiality is not itself a *thing*, but the mere possibility of being a thing. Aristotle calls it “primary matter” (*prōtē hylē*).⁷ Together, substantial form and primary matter

⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 5. a. 1, corp., in *On the Power of God*, trans. the English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952).

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 110, a. 2, corp., trans. the English Dominican Fathers (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1946).

⁶ Aristotle, *Physics* 1.7.191a 3–5, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

⁷ Aristotle, *Physics* 2.1.193a 29; 1.7.191a 7–12. Cf.: Aquinas, *In I phys.*, lec. 13, no. 118.

comprise the “nature” of a material substance, the spontaneous source of its proper activities.⁸

While Aquinas accepted Aristotle’s notion of form as an intrinsic principle, he tweaked it somewhat to allow for something like the exemplar causes of Plato. Aristotle himself had no use for Plato’s Forms, as he makes clear in his *Metaphysics*:

Above all one might discuss the question what on earth the Forms contribute to sensible things, either to those that are eternal or to those that come into being and cease to be. For they cause neither movement nor any change in them. But again they help in no wise either towards the knowledge of other things (for they are not even the substance of these, else they would have been in them), or towards their being, if they are not *in* the particulars which share in them. . . . And to say that they are patterns and the other things share in them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors.⁹

Aquinas found a place for the Forms, not as the existing entities that Plato envisioned, but as ideas in the mind of God. Formal causality includes not only intrinsic formal principles or substantial forms by which each substance is the kind of thing that it is (as in Aristotle), but also extrinsic formal principles or exemplar causes (as in Plato). As Aquinas says: “In the divine wisdom are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas—i.e., exemplar forms existing in the divine mind.”¹⁰

Change requires not only matter and form but also efficient and final causes. The efficient cause is the agent, and the final cause is the end or purpose in virtue of which the agent acts. The efficient cause is what we tend to think of first when we talk about causes. It is the agent that makes something happen. Such agency, however, is taken in a very broad sense. The art student who shapes the marble is the efficient cause of the

⁸ See Aristotle, *Physics* 2.1.192b 21–23: “Nature is the principle of motion and rest in those things to which it belongs properly (*per se*) and not as a concomitant attribute (*per accidens*).” See also James A. Weisheipl, O.P., “The Concept of Nature,” in *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages*, ed. William E. Carroll (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 1–23.

⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.9.991a8–22), in McKeon, *Basic Works*.

¹⁰ *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3, corp. See also: Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, corp., in *Truth*, trans. R. Mulligan et al., 3 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952–1954). On the divine ideas in Aquinas, see Vivian Boland, O.P., *Ideas in God according to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

statue, but so is the teacher who directs her.¹¹

Final causality is also needed, since an agent acts only in view of some end or purpose. The final cause, as a good to be attained, moves the agent to act. Aquinas explains: “If an agent did not incline toward some definite effect, all results would be a matter of indifference for him. . . . So, it would be impossible for him to act. Therefore, every agent tends toward some determinate effect, and this is called his end.”¹² Aquinas and Aristotle see final causality as a universal feature of nature, operative not only in intelligent beings, but also in things that lack intelligence— even inanimate things.¹³ As the principle that moves the agent to act, the final cause is the foundation of all causality, “the cause of the causality of all the causes.”¹⁴

The notion of dependency characterizes all four types of causes, but in different ways. Each thing depends on its material and formal causes for its being, since these are intrinsic to its nature. If they were removed, it would cease to exist. Each instance of change depends upon material and formal causes as well as efficient and final causes.¹⁵

The notion of “action” is ascribed not only to the efficient cause, but also to the formal and final causes: “A thing is said to act [agere] in a threefold sense. In one way formally, as when we say that whiteness makes white. . . . In another sense a thing is said to act effectively, as when a painter makes a wall white. Thirdly, it is said in the sense of the final cause, as the end is said to effect by moving the efficient cause.”¹⁶ For Aquinas, to act means “to make something to be in act.”¹⁷ This can happen in various ways. If an artist (efficient cause) shapes a lump of clay into a ball, she makes it actually round. But the accidental form of “roundness” (formal cause) also makes the clay round. For all her pushings and pullings, the artist’s clay will not be round until it attains that particular shape. The end or purpose (final

¹¹ One of Aristotle’s examples of efficient causality is “the man who gave advice” (*Physics* 2.3194b 30).

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG], II, ch. 2, no. 8 (*On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, 4 vols., trans. Anton C. Pegis et al. [Garden City, NY: Image, 1955–57]).

¹³ See Aristotle, *Physics* 2.8.199b16–18. Final causality is the basis of Aquinas’s Fifth Way of showing the existence of God (*ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, corp.). On the compatibility of universal final causality and modern empirical science, see Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., “Research into the Intrinsic Final Causes of Physical Things,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 26 (1952): 185–94.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De principiis naturae*, ch. 4, no. 24, in *Selected Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Robert P. Goodwin (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

¹⁵ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, corp.

¹⁶ *ST I*, q. 48, a. 1, ad 4. Cf.: *ST I*, q. 82, a. 4, corp; q. 105, a. 5, corp.

¹⁷ *ST I*, q. 115, a. 1, corp.

cause) also “acts” on the agent or “moves” the agent to act. The beauty of the perfectly rounded clay (as a good to be attained) also induces her to act. Efficient, formal, and final causes all “act” in the process of change, but each acts in a distinctive way.

Causality is not always quantifiable. The action of the efficient cause may sometimes be quantified (represented, for instance, in terms of measurable force), but not always. Although the activity of the art student, for example, may be described in terms of how much pressure (pounds per square inch) she applies to the clay, the action of her adviser (itself a mode of efficient causality) cannot be represented quantitatively.

Formal and final causality can never be described as quantitative force. While the formal cause does act on the clay to make it round, it exerts no force. Rather, it acts according to the mode of formal causality by making something (in this case the roundness of the clay sphere) to be actual. Its action is quite different from that of efficient causality, especially the efficient causality of “force.” The final cause also acts on the agent to influence or induce it to act, but again this implies no quantitative force. Rather, it acts according to the mode of final causality, as an end or good that induces the efficient cause to act. Final causality cannot be reduced to efficient causality, much less to that mode of efficient causality that might be called “force.”

Causality in Modern and Contemporary Science

The classical understanding of causality was abandoned with the coming of modern science, since science had no place for causes that could not be quantified.¹⁸ Formal and final causes were ignored, and the material cause was no longer understood as pure potentiality, but as the fundamental, measurable “stuff” of the universe (the atoms). As Mario Bunge explains: “The Aristotelian teaching of causes lasted in the official Western culture until the Renaissance. When modern science was born, formal and final causes were left aside as standing beyond the reach of experiment; and material causes were taken for granted in connection with all natural happenings. . . . Hence, of the four Aristotelian causes only the efficient cause was regarded as worthy of scientific research.”¹⁹

Efficient causality itself was reduced to the force or energy that moves

¹⁸ For a more complete account of the fortunes of causality and the discussion of divine action in relation to modern and contemporary science, see Michael J. Dodds, O.P., *Unlocking Divine Action: Contemporary Science and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Mario Bunge, *Causality and Modern Science* (New York: Dover, 1979), 32.

the atoms.²⁰ Even this narrow idea of efficient causality was questioned by David Hume, who argued that causation was merely a habit of our thinking as we become accustomed seeing one thing constantly conjoined to another.²¹ Causality became a property of thought rather than things. The hallmark of causality shifted from the ontological category of *dependence* to the epistemological category of *predictability*. The world was viewed as a deterministic realm, governed by inexorable laws that provided no room for outside causes. It was best studied by a reductionistic method that explained all phenomena in terms of their most fundamental components.

With the discoveries of contemporary science, new ways of understanding causality have arisen. We can see this in the theories of quantum mechanics, emergence, and contemporary biology. Quantum mechanics (at least in the Copenhagen interpretation) affirms a world of spontaneity with a fundamental indeterminism at its foundation.²² Such indeterminacy brings to mind Aristotle's material cause—not the actual, measurable “stuff” of Newtonian science, but a principle of sheer possibility.²³ Werner Heisenberg himself was aware of this association.²⁴

The theory of emergence claims that, at various levels in the natural world, new features arise that cannot be explained simply by reference to their parts.²⁵ The study of them must begin with the whole (from the top

²⁰ Edwin A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), 30, 98–99, 208–9.

²¹ See David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 75–77.

²² See John Polkinghorne, “Space, Time, and Causality,” *Zygon* 41 (2006): 975–84, at 979: “Those of a realist cast of mind will tend to correlate epistemology closely with ontology, believing that what we know, or what we cannot know, is a reliable guide to what is the case. If this metascientific strategy is followed, unpredictability will be seen as the sign of a degree of causal openness in physical process. In the case of quantum theory, this is indeed the line that has been followed by the majority of physicists, who join with Bohr in interpreting Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as an ontological principle of indeterminism and not merely an epistemological principle of ignorance in the way that Bohm suggests.”

²³ On the compatibility of these two understandings of matter, see Norbert A. Luyten, O.P., “Matter as Potency,” in *The Concept of Matter*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 122–33.

²⁴ See Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 160.

²⁵ See: Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence: from Quantum to Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66–69; Mariusz Tabaczek, “The Metaphysics of Downward Causation: Rediscovering the Formal Cause,” *Zygon* 48 (2013): 380–404.

down) rather than the part (from the bottom up). There are, for instance, “several features of the present-day theory of elementary particles” which suggest that “at certain levels of complexity, matter exhibits ‘emergent properties’ and ‘emergent laws’ which can neither be defined nor explained in terms of the properties and laws at a lower level of complexity.”²⁶ As John Polkinghorne points out: “Subatomic particles are not only not ‘more real’ than a bacterial cell; they also have no greater privileged share in determining the nature of reality.”²⁷ The “bottom-up” method of reductionism no longer seems adequate for the study of such phenomena. The move away from reductionism to the “top down” causality of the whole invites a reconsideration of Aristotle’s notion of substantial form as an intrinsic principle that makes the whole substance to be what it is.

Contemporary biology has embraced the notion of purpose or final causality. As Francisco Ayala explains: “Biologists need to account for the functional features of organisms, their ‘design,’ in terms of the goals or purposes they serve, which they do by teleological hypotheses or teleological explanations.”²⁸ Ayala concludes that “teleological explanations in biology are not only acceptable but indeed indispensable.”²⁹

Potentiality, form, and finality are all modes of causality that are not measurable, and so cannot come directly under the scientific microscope. What is studied in science, however, now seems to invite (or possibly require) their consideration as categories of explanation.³⁰

The Notion of Causality and the Discussion of Divine Action

To argue from creatures to the existence of God, the First Way requires a notion of causality that allows the action of creatures to manifest the influence of the Divine Cause. This, however, is precisely what disappeared with the advent of modern science and the mechanistic philosophy that accompanied it.

²⁶ Jonathan Powers, *Philosophy and the New Physics* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 155.

²⁷ John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 39.

²⁸ Francisco J. Ayala, “Reduction, Emergence, Naturalism, Dualism, Teleology: A Précis,” in *Back to Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution*, ed. John B. Cobb (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 84.

²⁹ Francisco Ayala, “Teleological Explanations in Evolutionary Biology,” in *Nature’s Purposes: Analyses of Function and Design in Biology*, ed. Colin Allen et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 44.

³⁰ See William A. Wallace, *The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

As the notion of causality was restricted, so was our ability to speak of God's action.³¹ As Keith Ward explains: "The scientific world-view seems to leave no room for God to act, since everything that happens is determined by scientific laws."³² Langdon Gilkey is more explicit: "Contemporary theology does not expect, nor does it speak of, wondrous divine events on the surface of natural and historical life. The causal nexus in space and time which Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind . . . is also assumed by modern theologians and scholars."³³

If physical force is the only kind of causality, then divine causality must be understood in those terms. But when God's action is conceived as one physical force among others in the world, it inevitably appears to interfere with the others and with the determined laws of science that describe them. Gordon Kaufman accordingly asks how God can act in the world without "violently ripping into the fabric of history or arbitrarily upsetting the momentum of its powers."³⁴

If there is only one univocal kind of causality, God must also exercise it, and so become just one more univocal cause³⁵ alongside of creatures. When two univocal causes are involved in the same action, however, the causality of one inevitably interferes with that of the other. If two people are carrying a table, for instance, each one lifts only part of the total weight. The more one hefts, the less there is for the other. If one hoists the whole load, the other is left with nothing to do. Similarly, if we think of God as a cause like any other in the world, God's causality must interfere with that creatures. An omnipotent God would then necessarily rob all creatures of their proper causality. Accepting such premises, many theologians concluded

³¹ As Philip Clayton says: "The present-day crisis in the notion of divine action has resulted as much as anything from a shift in the notion of causation" (*God and Contemporary Science* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997], 189).

³² Keith Ward, *Divine Action* (London: Collins, 1990), 1.

³³ Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology and the Travail of Biblical Language," in *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem*, ed. Owen C. Thomas (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 31.

³⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 147.

³⁵ It should be noted that the term "univocal cause" will be used in two distinct senses in this article. In the first sense, a univocal cause is an efficient cause that acts with another efficient cause of the same order to produce some effect (as when two people carry a table). In the second sense (that will appear in the discussion of the "chain of causes" in Aquinas's First Way), a univocal cause is one that belongs to the same species as its effect, such as a parent and its offspring in biological reproduction (a dog that generates a dog).

that God's power must be limited if creatures are to retain any causality of their own.

The deists, for instance, limit God's action to the moment of creation. Some liberal theologians allow that God continues to act in the world, but deny that God can act outside the limits of the laws of nature. Friedrich Schleiermacher argues that, "as regards the miraculous, the general interests of science, more particularly of natural science, and the interests of religion seem to meet at the same point, i.e., that we should abandon the idea of the absolutely supernatural."³⁶ Rudolf Bultmann considers it inappropriate to view divine action as a cause "which intervenes between the natural, or historical, or psychological course of events." Events in nature are "so linked by cause and effect" as to leave "no room for God's working."³⁷ To avoid divine interference, some theologians maintain that God's knowledge and power must be limited. Arthur Peacocke argues that "God's omniscience and omnipotence must be regarded, in some respects, as 'self-limited.'"³⁸ Polkinghorne thinks that the presence of chance in the world requires a limitation of divine power: "God chose a world in which chance has a role to play, thereby . . . accepting limitation of his power to control."³⁹

We must limit God's action if we believe that it would otherwise disturb or interfere with the causality of creatures and the nexus of scientific laws. And we will think that God's action must involve such a disturbance so long as we understand God as a univocal cause. We will have no other way to understand God's causality, however, if we reduce causality itself to a univocal notion. This apparent impasse has been happily overcome by the discoveries of contemporary science which suggest a much broader notion of causality, and so open wider avenues for speaking of divine action.

Today's science provides two fundamentally new options for speaking about God's action. One is to import the new discoveries of science directly into theology and use them to speak of divine action. The other is to employ not so much the discoveries themselves as the expanded notion of causality that they imply. The second invites a retrieval of certain classical notions of causality. We will look briefly at both options.

³⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. and trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 183.

³⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Meaning of God as Acting," in Thomas, *God's Activity in the World*, 61, 64.

³⁸ Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming— Natural, Divine and Human* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 155.

³⁹ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 63.

Some theologians choose the first option and employ the discoveries of science themselves in their discussion of divine action. Robert Russell, for instance, uses the indeterminism of quantum mechanics to show how God might act in the world, yet not interfere with natural causes. He argues that: “We can view God as acting in particular quantum events to produce, indirectly, a specific event at the macroscopic level, one which we call an event of special providence. . . . Quantum mechanics allows us to think of special divine action without God overriding or intervening in the structures of nature.”⁴⁰ Using another development in science, John Polkinghorne suggests that the openness of chaos theory may be understood in a way that leaves “room for divine maneuver.”⁴¹

Such discussions, however, still tend to be hampered by a narrowly conceived notion of causality. The very effort to locate divine action within pockets of scientific indeterminacy suggests a univocal understanding of causality in which God’s action is liable to interfere with the causality of creatures.

We must turn instead to the second option and employ the expanded notion of causality that the discoveries of science imply, a notion reminiscent of the classical account of material, formal, efficient, and final causes.

The Nature of Divine Action

God’s action, like any other attribute we predicate of God, must be one with God’s being. As Aquinas says, “whatever exists in God is God.”⁴² Accordingly, Aquinas teaches: “God’s action is his being [suum agere est suum esse].”⁴³ This teaching means, minimally, that God’s action must be wholly unlike that of creatures, whose actions are always distinct from their being. Creaturely action is still in some way like God’s, however, since God is the ultimate cause of the being and action of creatures, and every effect is in some way like its cause. This accords with Aquinas’s fundamental teaching that, “although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must nowise be admitted that God is like creatures.”⁴⁴ This teaching invites us to speak of divine action analogously, as we speak of other divine

⁴⁰ Robert John Russell, “Does the ‘God Who Acts’ Really Act in Nature?,” in *Science and Theology: The New Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 89, 94.

⁴¹ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God’s Interaction with the World* (Boston: New Science Library, 1989), 31.

⁴² *ST I*, q. 27, a. 3, ad 2. Cf.: *ST I*, q. 28, a. 2, corp.; q. 40, a. 1, ad 1.

⁴³ *SCG II*, ch. 9, nos. 4–5.

⁴⁴ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 4.

attributes, using words that are normally applied to creatures.⁴⁵ A rich vocabulary and conceptual framework for such speech is available in the classical notions of formal, efficient, and final causality. We have already seen how developments in contemporary science point to these kinds of causes. We can now use them to discuss God's action.

God is the final cause of each creature. Since every action of the creature is for the sake of some real or apparent good, and each thing is good only insofar as it participates in a likeness to the Supreme Good, who is God, "it follows that God himself is the cause of every operation as its end."⁴⁶ As final cause, God is intimately involved in all creaturely action. Far from interfering with such action, God is rather its source.

God is also the exemplar formal cause of all things. As the idea or exemplar in the mind of an artist is the source of her artwork, so God, "the first exemplar cause of all things,"⁴⁷ is the cause of all creatures. As the creative idea of the artist does not interfere with her work, but is rather its source, so God, as the exemplar cause, does not interfere with the world of creatures, but is its origin.

God is the first efficient cause of all things. We must not understand this causality in the narrow sense of Newtonian physics. God's action is not a mathematically describable force that moves the atoms. It is rather the transcendent cause of the being of all things.⁴⁸ And since being is the innermost actuality of each thing, God is most intimately present to each creature. As Aquinas says: "Being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent. . . . Hence, it must be that God is in all things and innermost."⁴⁹

God's efficient causality is also manifest in the actions of creatures. Insofar as the effects of those actions entail being and perfection, they are wholly from God and wholly from creatures. As Aquinas says: "It is apparent that the same effect is not attributed to a natural cause and to divine power in such a way that it is partly done by God and partly by the natural agent; rather, it is wholly done by both, but in different ways."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See: *ST I*, q. 12, a. 12; *I*, q. 13, a. 5.

⁴⁶ *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, corp. Cf.: *ST I*, q. 44, a. 4, ad 3; q. 103, a. 2, corp.

⁴⁷ *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3, corp.

⁴⁸ *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, corp.; q. 44, a. 1, corp.; q. 104, a. 1, corp.; *SCG III*, ch. 65, nos. 5 and 7.

⁴⁹ *ST I*, q. 8, a. 1, corp. Cf. *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, corp.

⁵⁰ *SCG III*, ch. 70, no. 8. Cf.: *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 7, corp.; *SCG III*, ch. 67, no. 1. It is important to note here that evil as such is precisely *not* being, but rather a lack of being. The fact that God is the source of all being in no way implies that God is the source or cause of sin (see *ST I*, q. 19, a. 9).

God is the ultimate transcendent cause, whose action does not diminish the contingency or freedom of the creature, but is rather its source.⁵¹ As Aquinas says: “God not only gives things their form, but he also preserves them in existence, and applies them to act, and is moreover the end of every action.”⁵² No action of God in nature or in any creature can be characterized as meddling or interfering. Even when God acts miraculously, causing events in the world that are beyond the causality of creatures, his action cannot be said to disturb the worldly order, since the most profound order of the world is its ordering toward God.⁵³

Divine Causality and the First Way

Against the background of this restored vision of God’s causality and action, we can now consider Aquinas’s First Way.⁵⁴ Since this argument is about motion and movers, we might be tempted, given the influence of the mechanistic philosophy of modern science, to picture it mechanically. A mechanistic philosophy, however, can only yield a series of causes that are

⁵¹ Aquinas, *In I de interpretatione*, lec. 14, no. 22: “The divine will must be understood as existing outside of the order of beings, as a cause producing the whole of being and all its differences. Now the possible and the necessary are differences of being, and therefore necessity and contingency in things and the distinction of each according to the nature of their proximate causes originate from the divine will itself, for He disposes necessary causes for the effect that He wills to be necessary, and He ordains causes acting contingently (i.e., able to fail) for the effects that He wills to be contingent. And according to the condition of these causes, effects are called either necessary or contingent, although all depend on the divine will as on a first cause, which transcends the order of necessity and contingency” (*Aristotle: On Interpretation Commentary by St. Thomas and Cajetan*, ed. Jean T. Oesterle [Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962]).

⁵² *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, ad 3.

⁵³ See *ST I*, q. 105, a. 6, corp.: “If therefore we consider the order of things depending on the first cause, God cannot do anything against this order; for if he did so, he would act against his foreknowledge, or his will or his goodness. But if we consider the order of things depending on any secondary cause, thus God can do something outside such order; for he is not subject to the order of secondary causes, but on the contrary this order is subject to him as proceeding from him not by a natural necessity, but by the choice of his own will; for he could have created another order of things. Wherefore God can do something outside this order when he chooses, for instance by producing the effects of secondary causes without them or by producing certain effects to which secondary causes do not extend.”

⁵⁴ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, corp. For a more extensive introductory account of Aquinas’s doctrine of God and creation, see Michael J. Dodds, O.P., *The One Creator God in Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020).

always of the same type—like cogs in a machine.⁵⁵ To get to God, we must find a cause that utterly transcends all others.⁵⁶

We will have more success in understanding the argument if we begin not with wheels and levers, but with potency and act, as the argument itself suggests: “Whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.”⁵⁷

To adopt the language of potency and act, we must move beyond empirical science to the philosophy of nature.⁵⁸ We need not transplant the

⁵⁵ See Eric A. Reitan, O.P., “Aquinas and Weisheipl: Aristotle’s *Physics* and the Existence of God,” in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, O.P.*, ed. R. James Long (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1991), 186: “For Aristotle and St. Thomas, ‘to move’ or to cause motion, is not primarily a mechanical function, such that the First Mover, as it were, pushes the material universe around in a circle. Rather, the immaterial mover is the source of material ‘nature,’ the cause of the mobile object’s own principles of motion—matter and form. The Aristotelian-Thomistic world of nature is not a static universe of material bodies pushed here and there by immaterial souls or intelligences—it is a dynamic universe, filled with natural, physical beings that spontaneously and regularly exhibit specific, characteristic behavior. This spontaneous and characteristic activity springs from ‘nature,’ from matter and form, that is, from the constituents of natural, physical substances—mobile beings.”

⁵⁶ See Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 107: “Aquinas does not have in mind a first mover who acts only to set off a kind of ‘domino effect.’ He is seeking to describe a cosmology in which any motion at any time is unintelligible without a fully actual first mover who is the source of motion for all things in the present.” (See also William A. Wallace, O.P., “Aquinas and Newton on the Causality of Nature and of God: The Medieval and Modern Problematic,” in Long, *Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, 275: “If the *per se* subordinated series of movers and moveds is likened to the fall of dominoes, the fall of the first domino could be temporally quite distant from that of the last. Applying this to the *prima via*, one could interpret this to hold that the argument does not prove that God exists here and now, but only that he existed some time ago—perhaps a very long time ago, say, at the ‘Big Bang’ fifteen billion years into the distant past. Clearly this is not what St. Thomas had in mind.”

⁵⁷ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, corp.

⁵⁸ The philosophy of nature, as exemplified by Aristotle’s *Physics*, broadly studies change in material things and its ultimate causes. It is distinct from, but complementary to, the investigations of empirical science: “When one uses the terminology of modern science one invariably interprets this causal agency through the concepts of force, mass, energy, and the like. . . . But when one absorbs motor causality totally into these terms, and regards them as logical constructs that have no reference to the real world apart from some theoretical system of which they form a part, the proof quickly loses its persuasive power. In effect, one suppresses any intimations

argument, however, from a physical to a metaphysical context.⁵⁹ We start, as Aquinas says, with the fact that “in the world some things are moving.” This is “certain and evident to our senses.”⁶⁰ But while the reality of motion is evident, its nature is not.⁶¹ Aquinas provides a compact definition: “Motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.”⁶² Motion is not fundamentally about pushers and pullers, but about potency and act. The First Cause that we are looking for is not a mechanical agent giving a first or sustaining “push” to the natural world, as in the philosophy of Descartes, but the ultimate source of actuality.

The thing that is moving or changing must be in potency to some new

of transcendence that are to be found in the movement of material objects. That is why, for many of our contemporaries, physical arguments for the existence of God are terminated before they start, or at least become so insulated from philosophical inquiry as to nullify their value as valid starting points” (Wallace, “Aquinas and Newton,” 276–77). See also: Edward Feser, “Natural Theology Must Be Grounded in the Philosophy of Nature, Not in Natural Science,” in *Neo-Scholastic Essays* (South Bend, IN: Saint Augustine’s Press, 2015), 61–83.

⁵⁹ The First Way, in its argument for a First Mover, does not presuppose metaphysics, but rather provides the foundation for metaphysics: “Far from reserving to metaphysics the proof for a Prime Mover, the philosophy of St. Thomas requires such a proof as the necessary approach to metaphysics without which metaphysics, as a science, cannot come into existence. And should this verdict be accepted, then it is supremely necessary to rehabilitate the philosophy of nature not only to provide a porchlight for modern science but also to build the very portals of metaphysics itself” (Vincent E. Smith, “The Prime Mover: Physical and Metaphysical Considerations,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 28 [1954]: 79–80). As David Twetten notes: “The familiar proof of God’s existence through motion has frequently been represented in more metaphysical terms so as to address contemporary conceptions of motion and causality. The resulting arguments, however cogent, inevitably lose the original’s status as ‘the first and most manifest way’” (“Why Motion Requires a Cause: The Foundation for a Prime Mover in Aristotle and Aquinas,” in Long, *Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, 239).

⁶⁰ ST I, q. 2, a. 3, corp.

⁶¹ To understand the First Way, we need to understand the nature of motion: “This thorough investigation of ‘mobile being,’ the principles of ‘nature,’ and the reality of ‘motion’ is necessary for understanding the argument [for the unmoved mover] of books seven and eight [of Aristotle’s *Physics*]. Only by grasping these preliminary principles can we perceive the need for an immaterial, immobile, and indivisible First Mover who ‘moves’ the whole universe for all eternity. Only by understanding natural beings, precisely in terms of their own natural principles, can we then identify the reasons for positing a being that is neither physical nor subject to change—a being upon whom the physical world depends for its physical existence, considered precisely as physical, that is, as natural and changeable” (Reitan, “Aquinas and Weisheipl,” 184).

⁶² ST I, q. 2, a. 3, corp. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 3.1.201b 5–6.

actuality. In observing the change, we realize that some potency is presently being actualized (as potentially hot water may become actually hot). But potency (the mere possibility of being) cannot actualize itself. So the present influence of some being in act is required.⁶³ If that being accounts for its own actuality, we have arrived at the cause we are looking for. But if that being is itself dependent (right now) on something else for its own actuality (and so also for its capacity to move another), we must continue the search.

The next stage in the argument is to consider the series of dependent movers (or actualizers). This series is not “accidentally” ordered, but rather “essentially.” The difference between the two orderings is that, in an accidentally ordered series, one cause does not depend upon another for the exercise of its causality, while in an essentially ordered series, it does. We can find an example of an accidentally ordered series in Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*. In that story, a series of passengers, acting in succession, stab the malevolent Samuel Ratchett to death. In so doing, they comprise an accidentally ordered series of causes since one does not depend upon another in doing the dastardly deed. In an essentially ordered series of causes, however, each cause does depend upon the one before it for the very exercise of its causality. Aquinas illustrates this with the example of a hand that moves a stick that moves a stone. The motion of the stone depends on the present action of the stick, which in turn depends on the present action of the hand.⁶⁴

An essentially ordered series of causes cannot be infinite.⁶⁵ Aquinas defines infinity as “that beyond which there is always something.”⁶⁶ In his argument, what we need is a first mover, a first actualizer, that does not owe its actuality to another. But in an infinite series, we never get to the “first,”

⁶³ See Dennis Bonnette, *Aquinas’ Proofs for God’s Existence: St. Thomas Aquinas on “The Per Accidens Necessarily Implies the Per Se”* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 100: “The *process* of coming-to-be requires the continued and simultaneous causation of the agent—since . . . ‘removing a cause is to remove that of which it is a cause’ (SCG I, ch. 13).”

⁶⁴ See *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, corp.; q. 46, a. 3, ad 7.

⁶⁵ See *ST I*, q. 46, a. 3, ad 7: “In efficient causes it is impossible to proceed to infinity *per se*—thus, there cannot be an infinite number of causes that are *per se* required for a certain effect; for instance, that a stone be moved by a stick, the stick by the hand, and so on to infinity. But it is not impossible to proceed to infinity *accidentally* as regards efficient causes; for instance, if all the causes thus infinitely multiplied should have the order of only one cause, their multiplication being accidental, as an artificer acts by means of many hammers accidentally, because one after the other may be broken.”

⁶⁶ *In III phys.*, lec. 11, no. 383. Aquinas’s understanding of divine infinity is quite different from this account of material infinity. See *ST I*, q. 7, a. 1.

since there is always one more to be added. A mere series of actualizers in which each depends on the one before it does not get us to the needed first mover, even if we extend the series to infinity, since infinity itself means that there is no first.⁶⁷ Aquinas therefore argues that “it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other.”⁶⁸ He concludes that the first mover is what “everyone understands to be God.”⁶⁹

The Chain of Causes

So, we have reached the conclusion of the argument, but a niggling question still remains as to what sorts of causes are entailed in that long chain stretch-

⁶⁷ See Gaven Kerr, “The Relevance of Aquinas’ Uncaused Cause Argument,” in *Revisiting Aquinas’ Proofs for the Existence of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 80: “Taking the principle that if you remove the cause then you remove the effect, we can apply it to the essentially ordered series of causes and observe that if there were no primary cause in such a series, then the intermediate and the ultimate causes would be causally inefficacious with respect to the causal property of the series, since in an essentially ordered series of causes, the intermediate and ultimate causes depend on some primary cause not only for their existence but also for their causality. . . . But . . . then there could not be an infinite series of such causes, since an infinite series is infinite precisely insofar as it has no primary cause.”

⁶⁸ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3.

⁶⁹ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, corp. See Reitan, “Aquinas and Weisheipl,” 188–90: “The point to note here is that Aristotle and St. Thomas, thinking as natural philosophers, are concerned not only with isolating individual agents of physical change, but also with tracing universal lines of natural causality, which account for the activities and characteristics proper to entire species of natural substances. . . . This preserves the spontaneous dynamism of natural substances and avoids considering physical causality as merely some version of mechanical push or pull. . . . This immaterial being is not simply some created intelligence that pushes or pulls an independently existing material world; rather, this immaterial being is the active source and origin of the material world. It ‘moves’ that world by being the cause and foundation of all the material and formal principles of motion within that world. . . . An analysis of Aristotle’s fundamental principles of natural philosophy, including a notion of universal equivocal cause, as well as a dynamic understanding of nature and motion, leads the mind to God, that is, to the First Unmoved Mover, upon which the physical universe depends for its entire natural, physical, and material existence. Of course, this discovery leads to an expanded notion of ‘existence,’ which can no longer be restricted to the natural, physical, and material. This discovery leads to a new science, ‘metaphysics,’ which then leads us to a more profound understanding of God and his intimate relationship to the whole of material and immaterial creation. However, the roots of this more profound understanding lie in the philosophy of nature, in an understanding of the natural principles at work in the physical world, and in a recognition of the explanatory limits of those principles. It is in Aristotle’s ‘argument from motion,’ in St. Thomas’ *prima via*, that philosophy—‘natural philosophy’—first encounters (albeit in a limited and hidden way) the God of Abraham.”

ing from the water being heated, or the hand moving the stick, to the First Cause whom we call God. Are those causes hopelessly medieval?⁷⁰ In Aquinas's world, the chain would certainly include the concentric celestial spheres of ancient cosmology, centered on the earth and imparting motion one to the next, all derived from the motion of the outermost sphere, which is itself moved by its desire for the unmoved mover.⁷¹ Those crystalline spheres have long since vanished from our modern cosmology, and it might well seem the validity of the First Way went with them. Here we must remember that the argument is to be understood not in terms of mechanisms (whether medieval or modern), but in terms of potency and act. The potential cannot actualize itself: it depends on the actual. The series of actualizers need not be crystalline spheres, but the need for a first actualizer remains.

So, given our cosmology and science, together with the philosophy of nature, how do we get to that first actualizer? We can start with Aquinas's simple example: "the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand." The next question, of course, is what moves the hand? Here we might get into all the complexity of physiology and neuroscience and, if we choose a human example, the added complications of free will, and so on. To simplify things, let us consider a hungry ape who employs a stick to poke a plump termite out of a log. The stick is moved by the ape's hand, which is moved by its arm, which is moved by its nerves and brain, that somehow entail its desire for food, and so on. Ultimately, though, the ape exhibits all of this activity because it *is* an ape, and it *is* an ape in virtue of its substantial form, which, as its nature, is the spontaneous source of its characteristic activities. But the substantial form of the ape is not itself the First Cause for which we are searching, since it is also caused by something else. To get to the First Cause, then, we must find the cause of the substantial form of the ape (or of any other substance that exhibits spontaneous motion according to its nature).

The substantial form is the principle by which a thing is what it is. But

⁷⁰ See Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways: Saint Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 3: "The Five Ways fail, I shall argue, principally because it is much more difficult than at first appears to separate them from their background in medieval cosmology." For a critique of Kenny's arguments, see David S. Oderberg, "'Whatever is Changing is Being Changed by Something Else': A Reappraisal of Premise One of the First Way," in *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny*, ed. John Cottingham and Peter Hacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 140–64.

⁷¹ On the celestial spheres, see Michael J. Dodds, O.P., *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 19–25.

neither the ape nor any other substance can be the cause of its own substantial form, for then it would be the cause of itself. Could the ape's parents be the cause of its substantial form? Here Aquinas makes an important distinction. A univocal agent (one belonging to the same species as its effect) may be the cause of the "becoming" of the effect (the cause that disposes primary matter in such a way that a substantial form of the same species is educed from it), but it cannot be the cause of the "being" of the effect (the cause of the substantial form as such through which the effect has its being). If it were the cause of the substantial form as such, it would be the cause of itself, since it has its being through that form. As Aquinas explains:

We must observe that an agent may be the cause of the "becoming" of its effect, but not directly of its "being." . . . For if an agent is not the cause of a form as such [*causa formae inquantum huiusmodi*], neither will it be directly the cause of "being" which results from that form; but it will be the cause of the effect, in its "becoming" only. Now it is clear that of two things in the same species one cannot directly cause the other's form as such, since it would then be the cause of its own form, which is essentially the same as the form of the other; but it can be the cause of this form for as much as it is in matter—in other words, it may be the cause that "this matter" receives "this form." And this is to be the cause of "becoming," as when man begets man, and fire causes fire. Thus whenever a natural effect is such that it has an aptitude to receive from its active cause an impression specifically the same as in that active cause, then the "becoming" of the effect, but not its "being," depends on the agent. Sometimes, however, the effect has not this aptitude to receive the impression of its cause, in the same way as it exists in the agent: as may be seen clearly in all agents which do not produce an effect of the same species as themselves: thus the heavenly bodies cause the generation of inferior bodies which differ from them in species. Such an agent can be the cause of a form as such [*causa formae secundum rationem talis formae*], and not merely as existing in this matter, consequently it is not merely the cause of "becoming" but also the cause of "being" [*est causa non solum fiendi, sed essendi*].⁷²

⁷² ST I, q. 104, a. 1, corp. See Gregory T. Doolan, "The Causality of the Divine Ideas in Relation to Natural Agents in Thomas Aquinas," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 393–409, at 398–99: "Thomas explains that as regards two things in the same species, one cannot be a *per se* cause of form in the other, i.e., the cause of its form as such; if it were, it would be the cause of its own form since

Lawrence Dewan illustrates this with the example of dogs: “The doctrine of the nature of univocal causality (dogs producing dogs and cats cats) should be taken into consideration. A univocal cause presupposes the common nature which it communicates in causing individuals of that nature. The dogs which reproduce are not causes of doghood as doghood, but of doghood-in-this-or-that. To say that they cause doghood would be to make them causes of themselves, and thus prior to themselves, a contradiction in terms. The cause of doghood as doghood must have a nature nobler than doghood.”⁷³

The Cause of the Form as Such

To find the First Cause, we must find the cause of the substantial form as such. Aquinas identifies this cause as the heavenly bodies that “cause the generation of inferior bodies which differ from them in species. Such an agent can be the cause of a form as such [*causa formae secundum rationem talis formae*].”⁷⁴ We may rightly shy away from this suggestion as overly medieval. Still, we should remember that even medieval thinkers did not view the heavenly bodies as the First Cause of generation or the ultimate cause of the form as such.⁷⁵ In our search for that First Cause, therefore,

it shares the same nature as its effect. Thus, e.g., an individual man cannot be the cause of human nature absolutely, for he would then be the cause of himself. Rather, a univocal cause can only be the cause of the form of another individual in the same species inasmuch as that form exists in matter—i.e., only inasmuch as such an agent causes this matter to acquire this form. Thus, while one man cannot be the cause of human nature absolutely, he can be the cause of human nature inasmuch as it exists in this man. And it is this mode of causality that Thomas terms generation, according to which an agent’s action presupposes determinate matter. . . . Because the operations of natural agents proceed from a form that is determined by designated matter, such agents are only particular ones. It is for this reason that they cannot be the cause of a nature absolutely but, rather, only inasmuch as that nature exists in this individual. Consequently, Thomas concludes that although such agents are the cause of the coming-to-be (*causa fiendi*) of a thing, they are not the cause of its being (*causa essendi*).

⁷³ Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “St. Thomas’s Fourth Way and Creation,” *The Thomist* 59, no. 3 (1995): 371–78, at 376.

⁷⁴ *ST* I, q, 104, a. 1, corp.

⁷⁵ See Reitan, “Aquinas and Weisheipl,” 188–89: “Now, in the generation of all natural, physical substances, including heavy and light bodies, the natural philosopher must take into account, not only the particular univocal causes, such as this man or this fire, causes which bring about only individuals like to themselves; he must also consider the universal equivocal causes, such as the sun, causes whose power ranges over a wide variety of natural effects. . . . When Aristotle claims that the mover and the thing moved—the cause and its effect—must exist simultaneously,

we can omit the heavenly bodies and proceed directly to God. In this, however, we may still follow Aquinas, who begins by showing us what cannot be the cause of the form as such. It cannot be a creature that has the same form as the substance that it generates (such as the parents of our hungry ape). Nor can it be any material substance, except to the extent that such a substance acts as an instrument of an immaterial cause:

The being of a thing made depends on its efficient cause according as the form of the thing made depends on that cause. Now there can be an efficient cause on which the form of the thing made does not depend directly [*per se*] and considered as a form, but only indirectly [*per accidens*]: thus the form of a generated fire does not depend on the generating fire directly and by reason of its species, seeing that it occupies the same degree in the order of things, and the form of fire is in the same way in both the generated and in the generating fire, and is distinguished therefrom only by a material distinction, through being seated in another matter. Hence since the generated fire has its form from some cause, this same form must depend on some higher principle, that is the cause of that form directly and in

he is not speaking only about individual univocal causes and their effects, but also about universal equivocal causes and their effects. . . . The point to note here is that Aristotle and St. Thomas, thinking as natural philosophers, are concerned not only with isolating individual agents of physical change, but also with tracing universal lines of natural causality, which account for the activities and characteristics proper to entire species of natural substances. At least, this seems to be the only way to account for the fact that mover and moved must be simultaneous and in contact, that is, in some way naturally and physically connected by being parts of a single universe. Furthermore, this preserves the spontaneous dynamism of natural substances and avoids considering physical causality as merely some version of mechanical push or pull. These universal, celestial movers, however, are themselves 'moved movers,' for they are material and extended, they are moved in place, and they are directed towards some end or goal, that is, they have an intrinsic intentionality for a specific kind of physical existence. They are not, however, 'generated,' in the proper sense of the term, for they have always existed. Nevertheless, they do depend on another for their motion, for their intrinsic principles of natural change and existence, and for being the kind of reality that they are. That is to say, they are not self-made, or self-sufficient, for nothing can 'move' itself *primo* and *per se*—nothing can give to itself its own principles of change, its own principles of directedness, its own 'nature.' Of course, this continuous series of moved movers cannot go on to infinity, for then there would be no motion here and now. Hence, both Aristotle and St. Thomas conclude that there must be a First Unmoved Mover, entirely separate from matter, infinitely powerful, who 'moves' the entire universe for all eternity."

respect of its very species [causa ipsius formae per se et secundum propriam speciei rationem]. Now seeing that properly speaking the existence of a form in matter implies no movement or change except accidentally, and since no bodies act unless moved, as the Philosopher shows, it follows of necessity that the principle on which the form depends directly [principium ex quo per se dependet forma] must be something incorporeal, for the effect depends on its active cause through the action of a principle. And if a corporeal principle be in some way the cause of a form, this is due to its acting by virtue of an incorporeal principle and as its instrument [quasi eius instrumentum].⁷⁶

Although the material agent is not the cause of the form as such, it is still an essential cause of generation in disposing the matter to the particular form that will be educed from it:

In fact this [the action of the corporeal agent] is necessary in order that the form begin to exist, inasmuch as it does not begin to exist otherwise than in matter: because matter cannot be the subject of a form unless it have a particular disposition, since the proper act should be in its proper matter. When, therefore, matter is in a disposition unsuitable to a particular form, it cannot directly receive that form from an incorporeal principle on which the form directly depends, so that there is need for something to transmute the matter: and this will be a corporeal agent whose action consists in moving something. This corporeal agent acts by virtue of the incorporeal principle, and its action terminates in this or that form, inasmuch as this or that form is in the corporeal agent either actually (as in univocal agents [agentibus univocis]) or virtually (as in equivocal agents [agentibus aequivocis]). Accordingly these lower corporeal agents are not the cause of the forms in things made, except to the extent of their causality in transmuting matter, since they do not act except by transmuting, . . . and this is insofar as they dispose the

⁷⁶ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, corp. (translation corrected slightly). See also *SCG* II, ch. 2, no. 5: "Whatever is caused as regards some particular nature cannot be the first cause of that nature, but only a second and instrumental cause; for example, since the human nature of Socrates has a cause, he cannot be the first cause of human nature; if so, since his human nature is caused by someone, it would follow that he was the cause of himself, since he is what he is by virtue of human nature. Thus, a univocal generator must have the status of an instrumental agent in respect to that which is the primary cause of the whole species."

matter and educe the form from the potency of the matter. Hence the form of the thing generated depends naturally on the generator [the corporeal agent] insofar as it is educed from the potentiality of matter, but not as to its absolute existence. And, therefore, when the act of the generator ceases, the eduction of the form from potentiality into actual being, that is the becoming of the thing generated, ceases, whereas the form itself whereby the thing generated has its existence, does not cease.⁷⁷

This means that, when the corporeal generators (the parents of our hungry ape) cease to be, our ape does not die with them, since its form depends on them only for its coming to be (its eduction from the potency of matter), not for its being. The cause of the form as such must be immaterial, and the ultimate immaterial cause of the form is God:

Wherefore just as when the action of their efficient cause which acts by movement ceases, at that very instant the becoming of the thing generated ceases, even so when the action of an incorporeal agent ceases, the very existence of things created by it ceases. Now this incorporeal agent by whom all things, both corporeal and incorporeal are created, is God . . . from whom things derive not only their form but also their matter.⁷⁸

As cause of the form, God is the ultimate source of creaturely action. Since the substantial form, understood as “nature,” is the source of the characteristic action of a substance, the cause of the form is also the ultimate cause of that action: “The generating agent, because it gives the form, gives all the properties and resultant motions [generans enim, quod dat formam, dat omnes proprietates et motus consequentes].”⁷⁹ In this

⁷⁷ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, corp. (translation corrected slightly).

⁷⁸ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, corp. See also *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3, corp., and *SCG III*, ch. 65, no. 4: “Now this cause [of the human species itself or any other species of natural things] is God, either mediately or immediately. For we have shown that he is the first cause of all things. So he must stand in regard to the species of things as the individual generating agent in nature does to generation, of which he is the direct cause. But generation ceases as soon as the operation of the generative agent ceases. Therefore all the species of things would also cease as soon as the divine operation ceased. So he preserves things in being through his operation.”

⁷⁹ *SCG III*, ch. 99, no. 4. See also *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 7, corp.: “Accordingly this or that individual thing cannot by its action produce another individual of the same species except as the instrument of that cause which includes in its scope the whole

way, God is the ultimate cause of all creaturely action (including our free human acts), but without robbing any creature of its own proper causality: “Now not only is every motion from God as from the First Mover, but all formal perfection is from him as from the First Act. And thus the act of the intellect or of any created being whatsoever depends upon God in two ways: first, inasmuch as it is from him that it has the form whereby it acts; secondly, inasmuch as it is moved by him to act. Now every form bestowed on created things by God has power for a determined act, which it can bring about in proportion to its own proper endowment.”⁸⁰

Returning to the First Way, we can now see why the action of any creature (such as that of our hungry ape poking around for termites) is not explained simply by reference to the substantial form (or nature) of the creature, but only when that substantial form has been traced back to the ultimate cause of the substantial form as such, who is God.⁸¹ Here we have, of course, gone beyond the limits of empirical science, but we are still within the philosophy of nature. The First Way does not require a medieval cosmos or a metaphysical interpretation— only an account of motion in terms of potency and act, which is the business of the philosophy of nature.

The Cause of the Form in Aquinas and Avicenna

Aquinas’s account of God as the “cause of the form as such,” acting through secondary causes that dispose matter to the new form, is not to be confused with Avicenna’s “Giver of the Forms [Dator Formarum].”⁸² Avicenna seems

species and, besides, the whole being of the inferior creature. . . . Therefore God is the cause of every action, inasmuch as every agent is an instrument of the divine power operating.”

⁸⁰ *ST I–II*, q. 109, a. 1, corp. Were we to use a human example (instead of our hungry ape) and trace the motion of the stick to an act of human freedom, we would still need to name God as primary cause to account for the action of the will as secondary cause: “Besides, as natural inclination in an inanimate thing, which is also called natural appetite, is related to its proper end, so also is the will, which is also called intellectual appetite, in an intellectual substance. Now, to give natural inclinations is the sole prerogative of him who has established the nature. So also, to incline the will to anything is the sole prerogative of him who is the cause of the intellectual nature. Now, this is proper to God alone, as is evident from our earlier explanations. Therefore, he alone can incline our will to something” (*SCG III*, ch. 88, no. 4).

⁸¹ See *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 18: “Just as a form cannot be a principle of existence, unless we presuppose some previous principle, even so neither can it be a principle of operation since God works in everything.”

⁸² Aquinas uses the term *dator formarum* only once in all of his writings (if my

to introduce a kind of occasionalism that robs creatures of their own proper causality in the act of generation. Kara Richardson offers a helpful distinction between Avicenna's "Infusion Model" and Aquinas's "Education Model" of generation. In Avicenna's model, a new substantial form is created *ex nihilo* by an immaterial "Giver of the Forms" (identified as the Agent Intellect) when matter is properly disposed by natural causes. In Aquinas's model, a new substantial form is simply educed from the potency of matter when the matter is properly disposed by natural causes.⁸³ Aquinas himself explains the difference between the induction of a substantial form by an external agent (Avicenna) and the education of the form from primary matter (Aristotle). In the latter, the corporeal agent is truly the cause of the substantial form, but only in its *becoming* and not in its *being*:

The Platonists together with Avicenna through denying the education of forms from matter were obliged to hold that natural agents merely dispose matter, and that the form is induced by a principle that is separate from matter. On the other hand if with Aristotle we hold substantial forms to be educed from the potentiality of matter, natural agents will be causes not only of the disposition of matter but also of substantial forms, only, however, in regard to their education from the potentiality of matter into actual existence, . . . so that they will be principles of existence as considered in its inchoation but not as considered absolutely [sunt essendi principia quantum ad inchoationem ad esse, et non quantum ad ipsum esse absolute].⁸⁴

investigations in the *Index Thomisticus* are correct). In that one place, he seems to imply that the Giver of the Forms is God, even while allowing Avicenna's opinion that it is something other than God: "Even the giver of forms, if we suppose with Avicenna that it is something apart from God, must cease to exist if God who is its cause cease to act [ipse dator formarum si ponatur aliquid aliud praeter Deum, secundum sententiam Avicennae, oportet quod et ipsum deficeret cessante actione Dei, quae est sua causa]" (*De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9).

⁸³ Kara Richardson, "Avicenna and Aquinas on Form and Generation," in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, ed. D. Hasse and A. Bertolacci (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 251–74, at 251.

⁸⁴ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 5 (translation corrected slightly). In distinguishing Aquinas from Avicenna, James Weisheipl is correct in saying that, in Aquinas's view, fire generates fire without need of a "giver of the forms" to infuse a new substantial form from outside, but he seems to overlook the role that Aquinas does assign to the cause of the form as such: "Similarly, in the case of natural events, Thomas's view was that fire is sufficient in itself not only to dispose water to its boiling point, but even to the point of becoming another substance, namely, air. There was no need for him to invoke a *dator formarum*, since nature itself can be credited

Aquinas insists that effects such as offspring result from the causality of their parents in disposing matter in such a way that a form of a similar kind is educed from it. It is not that natural agents dispose the matter and then some “Giver of the Forms” creates a new form in that matter. Rather, the new form is educed from the potency of the matter precisely through the causality of the parents. Still, the parents cannot exercise this causality apart from the influence of the first exemplar cause, who is God: “Just as the divine power, the first agent to wit, does not exclude the action of the natural forces, so neither does the prototypal form which is God [prima exemplaris forma, quae est Deus] exclude the derivation of forms from other lower forms whose action terminates in like forms.”⁸⁵ As in all cases of instrumental causality, the effect is not divided between the principal and instrumental cause, but belongs wholly to both.⁸⁶ As the ultimate cause of the form as such, God’s action does not exclude the causality of more proximate causes, such as the parents in disposing matter to the new form: “Forms which are in matter derive from forms which are without matter not as from proximate causes but as from the prototypes [primis exemplaribus].”⁸⁷ In this way, Aquinas is able to affirm God’s causality as

with substantial changes—real efficient causality—in the world. The great irony of Avicenna’s view is that he conceives ‘nature’ as an efficient cause of the body’s own motion, and yet refuses to allow ‘nature’ to be an efficient cause of changing another body. Consequently the second point of difference between Avicenna and Aquinas is that Avicenna explains all substantial changes in terms of a *dator formarum*, a celestial force existing apart from nature, while Thomas explains them in terms of ‘nature’ as an active source of natural motion and an efficient cause of substantial changes. . . . Aquinas rejects outright the need for any *dator formarum*, and holds that natural bodies are capable of changing other bodies substantially” (“Aristotle’s Concept of Nature: Avicenna and Aquinas,” in *Approaches to Nature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lawrence D. Roberts [Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1982], 151, 154).

⁸⁵ *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 8, ad 17.

⁸⁶ See Doolan, “Causality,” 409: “Despite the fact that natural agents are the instruments of higher causes, however, they still possess their own proper actions that follow from their proper forms. Hence, while form as such is not a proper effect of their power, this form as it comes to be in this matter is. Thus the divine ideas do not through their causality exclude natural agency; rather, they facilitate it, for it is through the combined agencies of God and the natural agent that a natural effect is caused—not so that the same effect is attributed to a natural cause and to the divine power as though part is made by God and part by the natural agent,” Thomas explains, “but so that in a different way the whole effect is from each: just as the whole same effect is attributed to an instrument and also to the principal agent” (*SCG* III, 70).”

⁸⁷ *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 8, ad 18. See Richardson, “Avicenna and Aquinas,” 271–72:

the cause of the form as such while avoiding the possible occasionalism of Avicenna.⁸⁸

The Cause of the Form and the Law of Inertia

Newton's law of inertia is often invoked as an objection to the First Way.⁸⁹ Aquinas's argument is considered outmoded because it ignores Newton's law, which states: "Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it."⁹⁰ According to this law, it seems that a body does not require a cause for its state of motion, but only for a change in that state. Here, we should remember that, although the law describes the motion of a body mathematically, it provides no physical explanation for that motion. Like all laws of nature, it is descriptive but not prescriptive.⁹¹ The philo-

"Insofar as a corporeal agent is a cause of form it acts in the power of an incorporeal principle as if it were its instrument."

⁸⁸ Richardson questions whether Aquinas's interpretation of Avicenna is correct and finds common ground between them: "This account of form, matter and their relationship suggests that . . . he [Avicenna] shares with Aquinas the following view of the structure of substantial change: matter first has a form potentially and later, through the activity of some agent or agents, it has it actually. . . . I find questionable the application of the term 'occasionalist' to Avicenna. It seems to me that he has no occasionalist axe to grind. Even where he emphasizes the superiority of divine causality, he recognizes lesser agents as genuine causes. . . . While Aquinas' argument against the Infusion Model of generation in *De potentia* q. 3 a. 8 is persuasive, it is problematic insofar as it takes Avicenna as one of its targets. In my view, the attribution to Avicenna of the Infusion Model of generation is based on a coarse reading of Avicenna's discussions of the causal roles played by the Agent Intellect, which conflicts with his account of the unity of form/matter compounds" ("Avicenna and Aquinas," 257, 267–68).

⁸⁹ See, for example Kenny, *Five Ways*, 28–33.

⁹⁰ Sir Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, in *Sir Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and his System of the World*, trans. Andrew Motte and Florian Cajori (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1946), 13.

⁹¹ See William R. Stoeger, "Contemporary Physics and the Ontological Status of the Laws of Nature," in *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and C. J. Isham (Berkeley, CA.: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1993), 209–34, at 210: "Although the laws of nature do reveal and describe fundamental patterns of behavior and regularities in the real world, we cannot consider them the source of those regularities, much less attribute to them the physical necessity these regularities seem to manifest. Nor can we ascribe to them an existence independent of the reality whose behavior they describe. Instead I claim that they are imperfect abstract descriptions of physical phenomena, not prescriptions dictating

sophical explanation for why a body behaves in a certain way is “because it is a certain kind of body.” And it is a certain kind of body because of its substantial form. The substantial form explains not only why it is a certain kind of thing but also why it manifests a certain type of activity. To discover the ultimate cause of that activity, we must find the cause of the form as such, since the one who gives the form also “gives all the properties and resultant motions.”⁹² We have already seen that God is the ultimate cause of the form as such. This philosophical explanation complements, but does not contradict, the scientific account. As Dennis Bonnette explains: “Now we do not wish to challenge Newton’s law which simply describes the fact that a body in motion tends to remain in motion. Yet, we do demand an explanation as to why this fact is so. . . . It is our suggestion that, since the conventional physical agent as well as the ‘law of inertia’ have proven to be insufficient as a total explanation, it is possible that some transcendental cause beyond the range of natural science may be posited as the only adequate cause for the phenomena of inertia.”⁹³

Conclusion

We began with Hawking’s question: “Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?” To that, we added a second question: “Once things exist, why do they go to the bother of acting?” We then saw that Aquinas implicitly addresses this question in his First Way of showing that God exists.

To follow his arguments from the movement of creatures to the existence of God, however, it was first necessary to retrieve a robust notion of causality, largely lost with the advent of modern science but now implied in the considerations of contemporary science. Using that richer notion

or enforcing behavior.”

⁹² See *SCG* III, ch. 99, no. 4: “The generating agent, because it gives the form, gives all the properties and resultant motions [generans enim, quod dat formam, dat omnes proprietates et motus consequentes].”

⁹³ Bonnette, *Aquinas’ Proofs*, 100–102. See William Wallace, “Newtonian Antinomies against the Prima Via,” *The Thomist* 19, no. 2 (1956): 184: “Further, far from the principle of inertia disproving the existence of God, the more one tries to verify this principle, the more one is led to affirm the existence of an infinite Mover. If all the idealized concepts that have been discussed be granted, and the idealized case be considered as physically real, then not only is *some* extrinsic mover required, but also one of infinite power, and this can only be God.” See also: Antonio Moreno, O.P., “The Law of Inertia and the Principle ‘*Quidquid movetur ab alio movetur*,’” *The Thomist* 38, no. 2 (1974): 306–31; James A. Weisheipl, O.P., “The Principle ‘*Omne quod movetur ab alio movetur*’ in Medieval Physics,” in Carroll, *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages*, 75–97.

of causality, we then traced the chain of causes from creaturely motion to its Divine Cause without becoming trapped in either the celestial spheres of medieval cosmology or the mechanistic philosophy of modern science.

Each thing “bothers” to act because of the kind of thing it is; and it is what it is in virtue of its substantial form. But what is the source of its substantial form? We saw that an explanation through univocal causes (as fire produces fire) was inadequate. To find the ultimate cause of creaturely action, we had to discover the ultimate cause of the substantial form as such. We found that cause to be God, the author of nature, acting intimately in each thing as the ultimate exemplar, efficient, and final cause, who does not diminish but is rather the source of all secondary causes, each acting spontaneously according to its substantial form or nature. God as pure act is the ultimate cause of all of the actualizations (changes/motions) that we find in nature.

God explains not only the fact *that* creatures act, but also why they “bother” to act. Each thing, in acting according to its nature, is not behaving senselessly, but acting to achieve some good appropriate to it. But in seeking its own good, it is also implicitly seeking the goodness of God.⁹⁴ So its action should not be characterized as a “bother,” but as an endeavor, rich in meaning, reflecting the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Creator. As Timothy McDermott explains:

For him [Aquinas] “just being” or “just happening” is in the last analysis unintelligible. Nothing can enter into being simply as a phenomenon. To exist, as St. Thomas sees it, is to have significance, to have point, to play out a role. Such an idea of being is indeed the seminal idea of his philosophical view of the world: an idea of being, that is, not just as an arbitrary thereness of things for sense-experience, but as a logical and significant thereness in a community of the universe revealed to man by knowledge and love. The model or image that St. Thomas uses to express this idea of being is the model of an action: being is playing out a role, realizing a significant conception. . . . Since action is in turn conceived as the expression and execution of some agent’s desire (giving point to the action), the

⁹⁴ See *ST I*, q. 6, a. 1, corp.: “Now everything seeks after its own perfection; and the perfection and form of an effect consist in a certain likeness to the agent, since every agent makes its like; and hence the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to him.”

being of things is conceived as fulfilling a role desired by someone, as the expression of someone's love. So that this seminal idea of being leads almost immediately to the notion of a God whose intentions rule the world, the expression of whose intentions the world indeed is. Since St. Thomas's word for the community of the universe about which we have been talking is "nature," we may say that God enters into his philosophy as the one who conceives nature, as the "author" of nature.⁹⁵ N&V

⁹⁵ Timothy McDermott, O.P., "Introduction," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Timothy McDermott (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 2:xxiii–xxiv.

Nature as Analogous: A Response to the Doak-Strand/ Conedera Symposium on Benedict XVI and the Natural Law

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THREE TRENCHANT ARTICLES about the views of Benedict XVI on the natural law have appeared in the English edition of *Nova et Vetera* in recent years. The first, by Vincent Strand in 2017, argues that *Caritas in Veritate* [CV] displays a “nakedly thin account of nature *qua* nature.”¹ In response, Kevin Doak, in 2020, posits a robust defense of Benedict’s appeals to the natural law.² In the same 2020 issue and as a response to Doak, Strand is now joined by Sam Zeno Conedera and argues that Benedict places himself in an unresolved dilemma.³ The authors, in amplifying the claim of Benedict’s suspicions about the natural law, assert that, nonetheless, he has no recourse but to use it in order to buttress the liberal political institutions that he supports.⁴

I am grateful to the editors of the English edition of *Nova et Vetera* for allowing me to respond to these articles. I feel a certain responsibility to do so. On the one hand, I selected Strand’s first paper as part of the *Festschrift*

¹ Vincent L. Strand, S.J., “On Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” in “Symposium in Honor of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’s 90th Birthday,” ed. Stephen M. Fields, S.J, special issue, *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 3 (2017): 835–52, at 848.

² Kevin M. Doak, “Globalism in Natural Law Theory: Pope Benedict XVI and Paul Francis Kōtarō Tanaka,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 2 (2020): 653–68.

³ Vincent L. Strand, S.J., and Sam Zeno Conedera, S.J., “Ratzinger’s Republic: Pope Benedict XVI on Natural Law and Church and State,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 2 (2020): 669–94.

⁴ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 670.

that I guest-edited, which was presented to Benedict on his ninetieth birthday. On the other hand, I asked the editors if they might publish Doak's paper. I had requested it for a conference held at Georgetown University in September of 2018 as a follow-up to the *Festschrift*.⁵ Because Doak took explicit issue with Strand's first article, the editors invited Strand and Conedera to reply.

My response seeks to bridge divergences between Doak, on one side, and Strand and Conedera, on the other. It will be developed in three stages. First, it will review the three articles, focusing on key claims made about the natural law, human reason, and their place in the debate concerning the relation between nature and grace. Second, it will explain how Benedict develops the Council of Trent to conceive nature as theologically analogous. It will show that this concept can integrate claims made about him by both Doak and Strand and Conedera, even as it can resolve the dilemma that the last two find in him. Finally, it will offer its own interpretation of Benedict's understanding of the natural law's place in the theology of nature and grace.

Strand, 2017

Strand grounds his claim about Benedict's thin account of nature in *CV*'s emphasis on the logic of gift. Gift includes, but is not limited to, generosity, friendship, solidarity, and the redistribution of goods. These devolve not from the natural law as such, but from Christian revelation. Nonetheless, argues Strand, *CV* does not set these over against contractual obligations, which devolve from the natural law's notion of justice. The encyclical does, however, advocate that gift should be ingredient in economic liberalism, working in tandem with natural justice.⁶ Still, stresses Strand, *CV* does not account for the socio-economic dimension of human rationality principally "through an inductive observation of the person and his operations," as would the natural law, "but through a deductive consideration of the Trinitarian God." It follows, therefore, that *CV*'s anthropology is erected primarily on grace, "because no other ontological foundation remains."⁷

CV's thin account of nature, Strand contends, is consistent with Benedict's 2004 dialogue with Jürgen Habermas. Here Benedict asserts that the natural law, as grounded in reason, "has become blunt" when used

⁵ The conference was funded by the Thomistic Institute headquartered at the Dominican House of Studies, Washington, DC.

⁶ Strand, "Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," 844; quoting *CV*, §§36–37.

⁷ Strand, "Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," 848.

as a tool for dialogue with secular culture. The victory of scientific evolution suggests that “nature as such is not rational, even if there is rational behavior in nature.”⁸ Moreover, Benedict, when commenting in 1968 on the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, claims that “every human reason is conditioned by a historical standpoint so that reason pure and simple does not exist.”⁹ Strand interprets the meaning of these claims of Benedict through the lens of Alasdair MacIntyre, David Schindler, and Tracey Rowland.

MacIntyre, for instance, while not denying “the existence of universal, transcultural truth,” proposes nonetheless that “philosophical principles are conceived [as varying] according to the tradition in which we find ourselves.” As a result, it is not easy to transpose truths from one tradition to another.¹⁰ Similarly, Schindler argues that economics advances claims “about God, humanity and culture [which] can conflict with the logic of the Gospel,” at least implicitly.¹¹ Likewise, Rowland “understands the culture of modernity to be incompatible with Catholicism.”¹² Consistent with these thinkers, Benedict posits that “human reason” must obtain “*in* [the tradition and culture of] faith.”¹³ In support of this claim, Benedict frankly admits that the Christian effort to establish “with pure rational certainty” the evidences for faith (*preambula fidei*) in the natural order “has failed.”¹⁴

⁸ Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 849; quoting Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 69–70.

⁹ Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 850; quoting Joseph Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Lilit Adolphus et al., 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–69), 5:115–63, at 120.

¹⁰ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 326–48 (cited in Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 840).

¹¹ See David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1996), 119 (cited in Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 840).

¹² Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II*, Radical Orthodoxy (London: Routledge, 2005), 83 (cited in Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 840).

¹³ Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 850; quoting Ratzinger, “Dignity,” 120.

¹⁴ Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 849; quoting Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry

These quotations of Benedict, together with Strand's aligning them with MacIntyre, Schindler, and Rowland, raise the crucial question underlying the exchange among Doak, and Strand and Conedera. Are nature and grace equivocal, such that nature is so nakedly thin that its ability to make claims about the true and the good is enfeebled unless grace explicitly animates them? In other words, how robust is nature to supply an independent or quasi-independent substratum for grace to do its work? We might wonder whether our four thinkers are approaching the Reformed position put forth in recent times by Karl Barth that grace, as the "wholly other," breaks in upon nature as a tangent, "perpendicularly from above."¹⁵ His view posits nature as so corrupted by the Fall that it retains little, if any, integrity for grace to support and perfect.¹⁶ By contrast, we should recall Trent's "Decree on Justification" (1545–1547). It teaches that, however much grace is the guarantor of freedom, still nature is vital enough freely to "reject" grace as freely to assent to and cooperate with it.¹⁷ The Council thus weds nature and grace into a dynamic, albeit a paradoxical, synergy. Where between these two poles, we are led to ask, is Benedict to be located?

For his part, Strand sees Benedict following the "single-end" theory of the human person brought to the fore by Henri de Lubac's seminal *Surnaturel*.¹⁸ It argues that humanity cannot possess two ends, a theory that, according to de Lubac, originated in Cajetan's sixteenth-century misreading of Aquinas. The two-ends theory posits that a natural end is altered into a supernatural end when the infusion of sanctifying grace effects justification. Justification in turn makes the beatific vision existentially possible. But according to the French Jesuit, because a final end, goal, and purpose necessarily structures every aspect of a substance as a unity of form and matter, a substance's end cannot be altered without altering its entire species.

The two-ends theory has recently been defended by Steven Long, who agrees with de Lubac that the end of a substance determines its species.¹⁹

Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 136.

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas et al. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1960), 41.

¹⁶ Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 44.

¹⁷ Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, ch. 5, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 2:671–81, at 672.

¹⁸ Strand, "Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," 848; citing Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946).

¹⁹ Strand, "Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," 847.

In disagreeing, however, Long argues that, if a substance does not possess its proportionately natural end, the substance cannot be determined and would lack any basis for its unity. If, therefore, humanity's end is graced and not natural, nature becomes merely an empty vessel to be filled with grace.²⁰ Nature would thus lack immanent integrity and so, one might argue, devolve all too easily into the Reformed position. Is Benedict subject to Long's probing critique? Doak's argument leads us strongly to think not.

Doak, 2020

Referring to the work of Manfred Spieker and Martin Rhonheimer, Doak emphasizes that Benedict orders his use of the natural law to right reason, which necessarily embraces a social dimension. This ordering means that the *oughts* of the natural law devolve from their entailment within the end, goal, and purpose of the human person, which *is* reason's own immanent ordering to the true and the good. As so grounded, the natural law is immune to Hume's naturalistic fallacy, which claims that an ought cannot be evinced from an *is*.²¹ This ordering also means that, when the person establishes justice within himself through the virtuous guidance of right reason, justice also results in society.²² Doak thus emphasizes that, for Benedict, the origins of law reside squarely within society, not within the state, which is itself derived from society.²³ As evidence for this claim, Doak cites Benedict's reference in *CV* §6 to the classic maxim *ubi societas, ibi ius*.

Doak criticizes the erroneous English rendering of this maxim as "every society draws up its own system of justice" (see the translation of *CV* on Vatican website). It connotes a relativism inimical to the mind of Benedict, who has warned the world of its dictatorship. The correct translation is

²⁰ Strand, "Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," 847–48; citing Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 48–49. Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010), also supports the two ends theory.

²¹ Doak, "Globalism," 661.

²² Doak, "Globalism," 654, 657–58; citing Manfred Spieker, "The Quiet Prophet: Benedict XVI and Catholic Social Teaching," trans. David Lutz, *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* (2018): 64–82, and Martin Rhonheimer, "The Secular State, Democracy, and the Natural Law: Benedict XVI's Address to the Bundestag from the Perspective of Legal Ethics and Democracy Theory," in *Pope Benedict XVI's Legal Thought: A Dialogue on the Foundation of Law*, ed. Marta Cartabia and Andrea Simoncini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 79–92, at 88.

²³ Doak, "Globalism," 666.

“where society exists, there law exists.” For Doak, this meaning holds the key to Benedict’s understanding of the natural law. It is fitting that every society should have its own legal system, precisely because distinctive societies are the historical embodiment of humanity’s rational nature. Law therefore finds its warrant in the universal sense of justice that is part and parcel of rationality’s ordering to the true and the good.²⁴ For this reason, Benedict avers in *Truth and Tolerance* that, whereas the basis of law is society, the basis of society is “the whole of mankind,” both today’s and tomorrow’s.²⁵ Doak addresses Benedict’s criticisms of the natural law. Benedict’s 1964 remark in “The Natural Law, Gospel and Ideology in Catholic Social Teaching” is directed not at a proper understanding of the natural law, but at its “pseudonym.”²⁶ By this term, Doak sees Benedict meaning the tradition of Grotius and the Enlightenment that, unlike the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, is “non-responsive to social particularity and historical change.”²⁷ The pseudonym posits a deductive system leading to a form of rationalist positivism, which easily devolves into the relativism that Benedict deplors.²⁸ Consequently, Benedict rightly joins other natural jurists, like the Japanese Kōtarō Tanaka and the Georgetown University scholar Heinrich Rommen, in censuring them as “authoritarian, hyper-theorized, individualistic.”²⁹

In noting the reasons for Benedict’s opposition to the pseudonym, Doak may be suggesting an interpretation of what Benedict means when he says that “every human reason is conditioned by a historical standpoint.”³⁰ If this quotation is read in light of Benedict’s robust model of reason, so ordered to the true and the good that a universal sense of justice can ground every society’s distinctive legal system, then it means that no bar exists, *prima facie*, to reason’s integrating into that universality the historical contingencies of evolving human beings and societies. Although perfect justice is unattainable short of the eschaton, still, insofar as reason necessarily aims at it, reason, in coping with the history in which it is

²⁴ Doak, “Globalism,” 658–59.

²⁵ Doak, “Globalism,” 664; quoting Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 249–50.

²⁶ Doak, “Globalism,” 662; quoting Joseph Ratzinger, “Naturrecht, Evangelium und Ideologie in der katholischen Soziallehre: katholische Erwägungen zum Thema,” in *Christlicher Glaube und Ideologie*, ed. Klaus von Bismark and Walter Dirks (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1964), 29.

²⁷ Doak, “Globalism,” 661.

²⁸ Doak, “Globalism,” 662.

²⁹ Doak, “Globalism,” 663.

³⁰ See Strand, “Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*,” 849, quoting Ratzinger and Habermas, *Dialectics of Secularization*, 69–70.

immersed, can mediate justice to history. Reason's power to effect this mediation is what I believe Doak means when he affirms that Benedict's model of the natural law is founded on "the analogical autonomy of reason."³¹ In other words, history and universality, for Doak's Benedict, are not equivocal, but constitute a unity-in-difference guaranteed by the human person's immanent end. Doak's Benedict thus inclines toward Long's position, which requires a vitally stout (as opposed to a nakedly thin) concept of nature when positing its relation to grace.

Moreover, Doak presents further citations indicating that Benedict not only understands natural reason as analogous in itself, but also in its relation to grace. This second analogy suggests an interpretation of what Benedict could mean when claiming that "human reason" must obtain "*in* [the culture and tradition of] faith."³² On the one hand, like Strand, Doak looks at Benedict's dialogue with Habermas. Here Doak finds Benedict retrieving the contributions of Ulpian and Gratian for a proper notion of natural law. In so doing, Benedict avers that, although "the natural law is broader than the revealed truths of the Catholic Church, [it] is also inherent in Church doctrine."³³ On the other hand, eyeing Benedict's 2010 Westminster Hall speech, Doak cites scholars who underscore the boldness of Benedict's argument that the contribution of the Church to public debates does not rely, first and foremost, on the divine authority of its magisterium, "but on the authority of reason."³⁴ Accordingly, the true, the good, and the just of natural reason, derived from reason's end, stand equally valid outside of, and within, the order of grace. For its part, the content of faith given by grace seems, for Doak's Benedict, to embrace the content of natural reason, supplementing it, even while respecting and absorbing it.

Strand and Conedera, 2020

These authors, when considering reason's historical conditioning, qualify Strand's 2017 position. For their Benedict, although "metaphysical and moral reason comes into action" only in history, this does not mean

³¹ Doak, "Globalism," 668.

³² See Strand, "Method, Nature, and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," 840, quoting Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition*, 83.

³³ Doak, "Globalism," 665; quoting Joseph Ratzinger, "Reason and Faith for a Common Ethics: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas (January 19, 2004)," in *Faith and Politics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), 182–95, at 190, 191n3.

³⁴ Doak, "Globalism," 667; quoting Marta Cartabia and Andrea Simoncini, "A Journey with Benedict XVI through the Spirit of Constitutionalism," in Cartabia and Simoncini, *Benedict XVI's Legal Thought*, 1–30, at 4.

that reason is reducible to history.³⁵ The authors note that, for Benedict, the “natural law finds its ultimate metaphysical grounding in God, and, correlatively, the existence of natural law points back to its author.” Because Benedict locates “love at the heart of morality,” this metaphysical pointing back creates an opening in natural reason for faith in Christ.³⁶ Strand-Conedera thus conclude that “the realms of revelation and reason penetrate one another very closely.”³⁷ The point is that natural reason does indeed possess some independent integrity, both as metaphysics aiming at God and as the substratum that, without direct reference to grace, can be opened to faith. In short, even though operating “*in* [the historical context of] faith,” reason *qua* reason does seem to possess trans-historical significance to know the true, the good, and the just.

We are thus led to ask whether the Benedict of Strand and Conedera and Doak’s Benedict are in fact closer than they might initially appear. Indeed, Strand and Conedera frankly acknowledge that Benedict does accord nature “a certain autonomy” apart from grace, although they note his caution that too much autonomy could disadvantageously render grace “superfluous.”³⁸ At this point, we might be inclined to interpret the Benedict of Strand and Conedera as accepting de Lubac’s single-end theory of nature and grace’s relation, even while respecting Long’s caveat that nature must constitute more than a mere vessel to be filled with grace. And, as we recall, Long’s caveat implicitly undergirds Doak’s argument.

But the matter does indeed become further complicated when Strand and Conedera probe more deeply into their reading of Benedict’s suspicions about the natural law. Crucially, Benedict reminds us that this “law obtains not in a hypothetical order where human nature is untouched by sin and grace, but rather in the real order in which both are active.”³⁹ Any account of natural reason’s innate power to affirm universal judgments of the true, the good, and the just must include the recalcitrance of fallen nature that, as John Henry Cardinal Newman opines, “pursues its own

³⁵ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 675; quoting Joseph Ratzinger, “Truth, Values, Power: Touchstones of a Pluralist Society,” in *Faith and Politics*, 95–150, at 146.

³⁶ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 677; citing Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 43–44.

³⁷ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 677; quoting Ratzinger, *Turning Point for Europe*, 43.

³⁸ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 678; quoting Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Faith and Politics*, 17–18 (preface).

³⁹ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 677.

course, . . . now across [grace], now divergent, now counter, in proportion to its own imperfection.⁴⁰ Nature, as independent of grace, can ignore and deliberately corrode the true, the good, and the just. The “aboriginal calamity” of original sin and its perduring consequences can lead reason, as Newman also avers, into “suicidal excesses” of its own making.⁴¹

When accounting for this persistent corrosion in nature, Benedict’s dialectic between reason and faith manifests tension, Strand and Conedera indicate, even apparent contradiction. Conditioned by sin and its effects, how trustworthy is metaphysics *qua* metaphysics to guarantee access to the true, the good, and the just? “Nature,” avers the Strand-Conedera Benedict, “will function ‘naturally’ in the postlapsarian condition only when assisted by grace.”⁴² Accordingly, they see Benedict claiming in his doctoral thesis that “supernatural revelation is now morally necessary even for the mere grounding of” the natural law.⁴³ If this is the case, then how can the natural law possibly provide “the state with non-confessional moral resources that” the state cannot provide by its own legal positivism?⁴⁴ If the secular state cannot have direct recourse to grace, then is Benedict not really proposing a Christian morality under the veneer of universal values putatively accessible to natural reason alone?⁴⁵ Benedict himself says, for instance, that “the Church community is required in the historical condition for the activity of reason.”⁴⁶ He advises the state to “recognize that a fundamental system of values based on Christianity is the precondition for its existence.”⁴⁷ This advice corresponds with his claim that the natural

⁴⁰ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University*, discourse 8, no. 2 (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1960), 18.

⁴¹ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 320–21, 323.

⁴² Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 679.

⁴³ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 678; citing Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, in Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2011), 400–401.

⁴⁴ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 679.

⁴⁵ On this question, Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 686–89, cite Paolo Flores d’Arcais in his 2000 debate with Ratzinger. See also Gerald McKenny, “Moral Disagreements and the Limits of Reason: Reflections on MacIntyre and Ratzinger,” in *Intractable Disputes About the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 195–226.

⁴⁶ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 679; quoting Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 155.

⁴⁷ Strand and Conedera, “Ratzinger’s Republic,” 683; quoting Ratzinger, *Church*,

law is broader than the revealed truths of the Catholic Church, even as it inheres in the Church's doctrine.⁴⁸

Findings

Having completed our review of Strand's 2017 article, Doak's 2020 criticism, and Strand's 2020 response with Conedera, let us take stock of our findings. Both camps have Benedict according nature at least "a certain autonomy" apart from grace. Both admit a role for metaphysics, but they diverge on its potency in the historical order of humanity conditioned by sin. For his part, Doak's Benedict sees humanity's immanent ordering to the true, the good, and the just as robustly authoritative, and he underscores the ability of reason to mediate this authority to the particularity of history. He would surely not deny the bias of sin and the perfection of nature's integrity in grace. By contrast, the Benedict of Strand's solo article and later response with Conedera posits a notably more curtailed potency for nature *qua* nature. In light of sin's corrosion, what authority remains to reason without grace, if any, is not further specified, but Strand and Conedera do claim that these days "both the faithful and civil" leaders reject the natural law as "accessible to reason alone."⁴⁹ The "certain" independence that their Benedict ascribes to nature seems close to the "nakedly thin account" in Strand's original 2017 piece with which we introduced our review. In other words, their Benedict seems finally to incline toward nature's indeterminacy that Long avers follows from the single-end theory.

By now, we may be eager to exclaim with Bud Collyer, host of the famous television show *To Tell the Truth*: "Will the real Benedict XVI please stand up!" I will argue that, although tension exists in Benedict's thought on the natural law, reason, and the relation between nature and grace, this tension is not equivocal or contradictory. It finds a coherent ground in a view of nature as "analogously autonomous." This term came to our attention in Doak, who credits my work.⁵⁰ I will suggest that the

Ecumenism and Politics, 207.

⁴⁸ See Doak, "Globalism," 665; quoting Ratzinger, "Reason and Faith for a Common Ethics," 190, 191n3.

⁴⁹ Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 693–94.

⁵⁰ Doak, "Globalism," 668n44. See Stephen M. Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence: An Essay on Nature, Grace and Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 11–13, 127–34. The argument that follows is adapted from this source. A version also appeared in my "On Nature and Grace in *Deus Caritas Est*," in "Symposium in Honor of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's 90th Birthday," ed. Stephen M. Fields, S.J, special issue, *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no.

term finds a basis in Trent and that Benedict develops an expanded version of it by locating nature within the eschatology of John's Gospel. In short, the three articles highlight diverse aspects of Benedict's thought that can be brought into concord. As Samuel Johnson observes: "He who differs from us, does not always contradict us."⁵¹

Trent on Nature and Grace

We stated earlier that Trent weds nature and grace into a dynamic, albeit paradoxical, synthesis. It teaches that, in justification, God's freedom, as expressed in the merits of Christ's saving deeds, is the efficient cause. But justification obtains only through baptism, or the desire for it, which is justification's instrumental cause. Human beings are "awakened and assisted" by prevenient grace freely to assent to this grace and cooperate with it. They are "not inactive," therefore, since they can "reject" grace, or voluntarily receive it. Nonetheless, without grace, they cannot of their "own free will" turn toward righteousness.⁵²

Trent's assertion that baptism is justification's instrumental cause allows the Council to marry nature and grace into integrally free centers of action. According to Aquinas, an instrumental cause exercises two powers. On the one hand, the "power of the instrument" designates the innate activity that the cause effects in virtue of its defining form. On the other hand, the "instrumental power" designates the activity that the power of the instrument receives from a principal agent. The power of the instrument assumes instrumental power when the principal agent transfers to it a form that this agent possesses. When this transfer obtains, the instrumental power is incorporated into the finality of the activity intended by the agent.⁵³ Trent thus affirms that justification obtains by God, through Christ, as instrumentally mediated by the person's baptism.

We might offer the following interpretation of the Council's teaching. In baptism, the freedom of the human person constitutes the power of the instrument, because only through it can baptism's final cause be realized. Human freedom becomes an instrumental power when grace is joined to the person's voluntary acceptance of the justification effected by the

3 (2017): 817–33, at 826–31.

⁵¹ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942/1951), 4:381n1 (cited in Walter Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975], 532).

⁵² Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, chs. 4–6 (Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:672).

⁵³ James S. Albertson, "Instrumental Causality in St. Thomas," *New Scholasticism* 28 (1954): 409–35, at 412, 419, 424.

sacrament. As justification's principal agent, God confers on the person sanctifying grace, God's own life, which only he can give. Prior to the reception of the sacrament, prevenient grace and human cooperation meet in an unspecified union that preserves free will.

Initiating a person's life of grace, this sacramental scenario respects human and divine freedom even as it binds their synergy. As the power of the instrument, human freedom is not compromised when it becomes an instrumental power. Nor is the freedom of God, justification's principal agent, compromised when it effects the instrumental power. The reciprocity between human and divine freedom obtains by their common contribution to a single final cause, justification. Especially significant is Trent's incorporation of prevenient grace into the union of freedom effected by this final cause. Prevenient grace participates, however remotely, in baptism's sanctifying grace, precisely because it is oriented toward justification. As Trent says, a desire for baptism can sufficiently effect the sacrament. It is possible, then, without the water of baptism, for prevenient grace to become sanctifying grace; they can meet in the hidden continuum of human and divine freedom.

Thus, Trent's teaching on justification refuses to affirm a theory of a pure nature totally independent of grace. Whereas justification requires the cooperation of human nature, this is always grounded in grace, both prevenient and sanctifying. Nonetheless, Trent does not posit an indeterminate nature, but a nature that belongs to human persons innately endowed with their "own" freedom to cooperate with, assent to, and reject grace. Because the innate determinacy of free will, precisely as a power of the instrument, retains integrity when grace renders it an instrumental power, Trent posits nature as analogously autonomous. Nature subsists, in other words, as a unity-in-difference with grace. It abides substantially as itself, with its own determinate power to act for a good that is congenial with the good given by grace. Hence, nature exercises an autonomy. But this autonomy obtains as grace subsumes it into its own higher end. This higher end even empowers the autonomous assent. Hence, because nature's autonomy is enveloped in grace, it and grace are analogous.

Furthermore, Trent posits nature as autonomously analogous in another sense. Nature in itself—*qua* nature—subsists as a unity-in-difference. As we have seen, the selfsame nature can both assent to and cooperate with grace and reject it. Nature is able to expand into transcendence or stubbornly indulge its own suicidal excesses. The Council thus accords nature an integral plasticity constituted by two oppositely tending moments.

For his part, Doak implicitly suggests that Benedict's view is consistent

with Trent's. As we saw, for Doak's Benedict, the content of faith, given by grace, seems to embrace the content of natural reason, supplementing it, even while respecting and absorbing it. But Strand and Conedera also implicitly suggest that Benedict's view is consistent. As we saw, for their Benedict, sin riddles historically conditioned humanity, and so vitiates its ability to know and do the good. All three see Benedict as consistent with Trent, and in this the outline of an analogously autonomous view of nature in Benedict thus begins to emerge. Let us now explore how Benedict develops the Council in light of the eschatology of John's Gospel.

Benedict's Analogy of Nature

Benedict envisages *Deus Caritas Est* [DCE] as an extended reflection on its "starting point," the pierced side of Christ, the living font of wounded love (DCE, §12). It should not surprise us, then, that the eschatology grounded in this starting point should provide the document's implicit framework. The blood and water flowing from the crucified Jesus consummates "the hour [that] now is," which has been "coming" (John 4:23/5:25). This hour manifests the divine glory of the Christ, which has been foreshadowed in the miracles of the preceding Book of Signs. Moreover, the consummation of the hour underscores the nuanced tension between "realized" and "future" eschatology, which John articulates more clearly than any other New Testament writer. For the Master's disciples living in the post-resurrection Church, true worship is given to God in Jesus, because the hour of the Spirit's indwelling has been realized. Nonetheless, Jesus's messiahship is not yet perfected. Our worship in and of him, although authentic, still but anticipates our future worship in heaven, whose earthly sacrament our historical worship nonetheless is.⁵⁴

Accordingly, every Christian must own a dual vocation: to live for Christ *in* this age and *for* the age to come. A disciple cannot feed on the flesh of the Son of Man and become in anyway an autonomous prisoner of history.⁵⁵ To be sure, the mandate of Holy Thursday must be obeyed: feet must be washed here and now. But for John, the grafting of the disciples onto Christ as the living vine gives them a share in the Redeemer's ascent through an obedient death to the glory of the Father.⁵⁶ Both given and pledged, this glory inspires Christians dwelling in history "to make the world more human . . . by freely giving something to others" in love amidst

⁵⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 68.

⁵⁵ Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 69–70.

⁵⁶ Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 84.

perduring injustice (*DCE*, §§28, 31).

The Christian's dual eschatological vocation presupposes a nature both charged with grace and recalcitrant to it. Although nature realizes grace and, dilating in it, can anticipate its future perfection, still nature's finitude, contingency, and propensity for evil impose limits on grace's activity. The German theologian Karl Rahner observes, for instance, that even when grace seems to shine through nature, it seems unable "to achieve anything final in the world but seems subject to the world's stronger law."⁵⁷ Likewise, Benedict reminds us that nature's limits can be sensed most forcibly in its struggle with its innate imperfectability. This struggle lodges in the heart of every Christian's life of grace, as Benedict reminds us in *Spe Salvi* when quoting Theodor Adorno: progress means moving "from the sling to the atomic bomb" (§22).

Thus, we see that Benedict, by situating nature within the Johannine tension between realized and future eschatology, constructs an analogy that, like Trent's, accounts for nature's dynamic plasticity. We can discern three moments in this analogy; the first two are identical with the Council's, whereas the third is an elaboration of Trent's second moment. First, even in this world of realized eschatology, nature freely asserts its recalcitrant enmity to grace. Capable of spurning the divine gift outright, nature means that "the world [will] hate you [even as] it has hated me" (John 15:18). Second, nature can freely cooperate with grace to bring about a metanoia that purifies us of sin. Benedict stresses that, until the full fruition of the eschaton, history, both individual and corporate, will ever demand conversion. It is "the path that draws [humanity] together [into communion]."⁵⁸

Third, building on conversion, grace further purifies the practice of natural virtue. Even when acting in accord with ends deemed good by natural reason, the theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit must subsume those rational habits so ably defined, for instance, by Aristotle. Accordingly, Benedict avers that the justice grounding the social order must spring from love and lead to love (*DCE*, §§34, 36, 37). Corroborating Benedict, Aquinas notes that prudence, the natural regulator of the moral life, requires purifying by counsel. This gift of the Spirit inspires in us an intuitive sense of the good that transcends prudence's skilled

⁵⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Christian Commitment: Essays in Pastoral Theology*, trans. Cecily Hardings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 60.

⁵⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 51–52.

ability to assess options for action.⁵⁹ In short, Benedict shows us the error in Rahner's claim that nature is merely "guilt-laden, . . . closed, to its own undoing, against grace."⁶⁰ On the contrary, nature evinces an integral dynamism. While yearning in history for its future transcendence, it grows expansively, through the analogous moments that constitute it, even as, because of sin, it can always retreat solipsistically, through these same moments, into willful closure.

The important point is that all three analogous moments presuppose nature's innate power to act for a determined good that it knows. Nature could neither reject grace, nor accept and cooperate with it in the first and second moments, unless it knows grace as a good to which it inclines. Similarly, in the third moment, grace could not lead justice into love, or prudence into counsel, unless nature knows justice and prudence as goods to which it moves to acquire. When acquired outside of justification, of course, natural virtues are not meritorious of salvation. Nonetheless, because reason deems them valuable, Aquinas classifies them as "works leading to a good which is connatural" to fallen nature (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 109, aa. 2, 5).

It is precisely here, in this crucial presupposition of both Trent's and Benedict's analogy of nature, that the natural law finds its properly *theological* ground (as opposed to its philosophical ground, treated in the next section). If Benedict emphasizes the natural law as the foundation of the political order, it is not because he inconsistently underplays the bias of sin and the need for grace. It is because, consistent with nature's analogy, he staunchly asserts and defends the natural capacity of human reason and volition *as the very basis of grace* leading to salvation. Without humanity's natural ability to know the true, the good, and the just, and to act upon them, the Catholic doctrine of grace collapses into the Reformed position. Accordingly, metaphysics can ground a universal justice knowable without direct advertence to grace. Equally, metaphysics needs grace's purification. Nature's innate power to know and freely act, its innate power to undermine what it can know and do, and its innate power to be purified coexist. That they do coexist entails no equivocation, because, as analogous moments, they coexist as the unity-in-difference which defines "nature" as a theological concept.

Doak's Benedict and the Benedict of Strand and Conedera, then, are

⁵⁹ Anselm Stolz, *The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection*, trans. Aidan Williams (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 187, expounding Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 52, a. 2, and q. 68, a. 2.

⁶⁰ Rahner, *Christian Commitment*, 51.

not, at root, contradictory, although they do differ about whether nature's independence from grace is thin or robust. Nonetheless, that nature's independence, however thinly defined, must include its innately determined power, albeit limited, to know and to do the true, the good, and the just finds solid ground in Trent and Benedict. This being said, we still need to face the problem raised by Strand and Conedera that "something has gone badly amiss."⁶¹ Is the rejection by the faithful and civic leaders of what should be apparent to reason without grace due to sin? If so, then is grace indeed necessary for reason to see the validity of the natural law and so desire to fulfill it? And if grace is necessary, then how can the fundamental presupposition of Trent and Benedict's position be defended?

Nature, Grace, and the Natural Law

The inability of the natural law to command universal assent to its numerous claims is, in the first instance, not a matter of sin, but rooted in the very "nature" of reason as it emerges as good from its Creator. According to Aquinas, the precepts of the natural law stand to practical reason as first principles stand to speculative reason. The most important of these latter principles is non-contradiction, because it is "being" that first falls under reason's apprehension. It therefore follows that the same entity, precisely as it exists, cannot simultaneously be affirmed and denied. By contrast, the essential precept of practical reason is the good as directed to the ends of actions. Accordingly, just as non-contradiction grounds speculative intelligence, so the imperative "that good should be done and evil avoided" grounds practical intelligence. Thomas affirms that both the first principle and the imperative precept are self-evident. Non-contradiction is entailed in being, whereas doing good and avoiding evil is entailed in the ends of action (*ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2).

Furthermore, Thomas affirms that all other precepts of the natural law follow from practical reason's first precept. Accordingly, the next level of inference from the first precept encompasses those inclinations of human nature that tend toward ends. These—good simply because they are so entailed—include self-preservation, procreation, educating offspring, knowing truth and God, and the prospering of social cooperation (*ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2).

Crucially, the Angelic Doctor next considers the third level of inference. Whereas the natural law is the same in all because it embraces those things known by reason, nonetheless reason evinces what is proper or particular from what is common or general. Accordingly, practical

⁶¹ Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 694.

intelligence must apply the precepts of the first two levels to the manifold contingencies that constitute human affairs. As a result, “the more we descend towards the particular, the more frequently we encounter defects.” Hence, “practical reason is not [necessarily] the same for all as to what is particular,” and where it might or should be, it is not self-evident to all (*ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 4). That practical reason is not self-evident to all does not necessarily mean that some of its claims are not goods that should be done by all. A claim may properly be inferred from the first two levels of precepts but not be self-evident “in relation to us.” As Thomas says, citing Boethius: “Some propositions are self-evident only to the wise” (*ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2). By “wise,” Aquinas means those having prudence, the practical wisdom or *phronesis*, which, as we noted, serves, for him and Aristotle, as the regulating virtue of natural ethics.

In light of these considerations, it is evident that, because even the correct system of natural law (as opposed to the pseudonym) asserts numerous claims about complex contingencies in sexual, medical, and business ethics, and in social policies on economics, defense, war, and jurisprudence, the moral judgments of reasonably prudent persons will differ, not only about the nature of the rule to apply, but also about how to apply it to specific cases. That such differences do, and should, exist is part and parcel of the natural law; they are entailed in the nature of practical intelligence. Accordingly, when some faithful and civic leaders reject the natural law as unapparent to reason, it is unlikely that they are rejecting *tout court* the first two levels of precepts (that the good should be done consistent with the inclinations). It is more likely that they are submitting to reasonable scrutiny the third level of prudential inference. That they are is not necessarily a matter of sin, nor a sign that something has gone badly amiss; it may well be an exercise of virtue.

Still, a problem is raised when the Church, using its magisterium, makes a moral claim based on the natural law. In cases like abortion, artificial contraception, and sterilization, which are declared intrinsically evil, an eclipse seems to fall on the natural prudence of some, or even many, at the third level of inference. Even in such cases, however, we cannot conclude that the graced exercise of the ecclesial teaching office is inconsistent with natural reason. As Thomas says, some claims of the natural law are evident only to the wise. In other words, without direct advertence to grace, natural reason can perceive the goodness of controversially received teachings, but it should not surprise us, given the contingent reasoning required to assert them, that many persons, though not generally lacking in reasonableness, will not have the wisdom (skilled prudence) to see it.

As Newman reminds us, skilled wisdom confers on the mind *certitude*,

not *certainty*. Whereas certainty is a function of propositions reached by formal reasoning or syllogisms, certitude is a habit of mind, which proceeds according to a living discernment assessing concrete situations.⁶² This discernment enables a person to pass from conditional inference to unconditional assent on the basis of *implicit* proof. Such proof enables a wise person, by apt insight that often “cannot express itself in words, [to take] in the necessary conditions for an assent” in the midst of opposing arguments.⁶³ Even after the assent is made, *difficulties* may remain, says Newman, but these do not constitute a *doubt*. Difficulty and doubt, he avers, are incommensurate.⁶⁴

Newman’s elaboration of Aquinas’s use of “wise,” then, confirms Benedict’s claim that, although the natural law is broader than the revealed truth of the Church, it is also inherent in it. Prudential reason operates in both nature and grace. But in keeping with our analysis of nature in both Trent and Benedict, it should not surprise us that it operates analogously. The theological and philosophical grounds of the natural law overlap in Trent’s defense of nature’s power to act for a determined good that it knows. From the perspective of grace, *in* which, as Benedict says, “human reason” obtains, sin can always vitiate this power, requiring it to be purified so that its natural object can be focused. Nature can either cooperate with this purifying or reject it. Moreover, grace, subsuming natural prudence, can endow reason with the gift of counsel. It can give or strengthen the certitude of the truth, goodness, and justice of magisterial claims that, based on the natural law, seem less than persuasive to natural reason. Grace’s endowment, however, does not deny that a person of skilled prudence could nonetheless be persuaded, on their own merits, of the claims’ truth, goodness, and justice.

Modeling Nature and Grace

The evidence presented thus far, especially in the three previous sections, inclines us, on balance, to read Benedict’s position on nature and grace as mediating between de Lubac and Long. While subscribing to the single-end theory, in other words, it heeds the caveat that nature must be represented more robustly than as an undetermined receptacle for grace to fill. In light of it, we need now to interpret Benedict’s claim that, after the Fall,

⁶² John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. Ian T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 288 (this source will be cited according to the standard edition, whose pages are given in the margins of the Clarendon edition).

⁶³ Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 300–301.

⁶⁴ Newman, *Apologia*, 317.

grace is needed as the ground of the natural law.⁶⁵ If nature is capable of perceiving the natural law's claims, then in what sense does it require grace, not only for its purification and growth, but also for its foundation? To answer this question, I will now propose a model of nature and grace that develops Benedict's mediating position in more detail. It does not appeal to Benedict for direct authority, because the Pontiff only adumbrates his position. Nonetheless, my model does purport to resolve this searching question that he poses to us.

First, the Church has long held that grace animates nature from within and represents no external alien imposition. This claim is a corollary of the fundamental teaching of Chalcedon that the divine nature subsumes the human nature within one divine person, even as each nature retains its integrity. Hence, as the communication of idioms allows, it is true, however paradoxically, that "God dies." Even before Chalcedon, the second century Justin Martyr articulates the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos*: wherever reason is found in the created order, there Christ is perforce found, because Christ is divine reason incarnate (Logos).⁶⁶ Similarly, Irenaeus propounds the "recapitulation," according to which the Logos in Christ "sum[s] up in Himself all things" in heaven and earth, thereby reforming the essence of what he initially fashions as agent of creation (see John 1:3).⁶⁷ More recently, *Gaudium et Spes* stresses that grace renovates the symbols of human culture "from the inside" (§58).⁶⁸ Divine revelation takes "the spiritual endowments and talents of every person and age," and with its own abundance "strengthens, completes and restores [them] in Christ" (§5; citing Eph 1:10). Echoing Justin, it further adds that, wherever these symbols lead humanity more deeply into truth and goodness, reason is enlightened by "the wonderful wisdom which was with God at the beginning" (§57; citing Prov 8:30–31). We can conclude, therefore, that, when nature is infused by grace, its redemption will obtain analogously.

Second, let us return to Trent's doctrine of redemption. As we have

⁶⁵ See Strand and Conedera, "Ratzinger's Republic," 678; citing Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes*, 400–401.

⁶⁶ Justin, *Apology* 1, ed. and trans. Edward Rochie Hardy, in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 225–89, at 233.

⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 21.1, in vol. 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rimbaut (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 315–567, at 548.

⁶⁸ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, in Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:1069–1135, at 1109. The English in the following quotations of the pastoral constitution will be from Tanner.

seen, baptism effects justification by embracing the human person's free will into a theandric synthesis that respects its natural endowment. Sanctifying grace and nature are thus analogously joined into a unity-in-diversity. Furthermore, prevenient grace rouses and helps natural free will to make its assent to justification. Although prevenient grace does not justify, its purpose is directly oriented to justification, and indeed, even without the water of baptism, it can lead to baptism of desire.⁶⁹ We can conclude, therefore, that prevenient and sanctifying grace both obtain more as formal causality (from within) and less as efficient causality (from outside). We can also conclude that these two graces, although differing as divine activity acting in nature and divine life redeeming nature, are nonetheless analogous, given their common purpose. Aquinas himself avers, for instance, that "one and the same grace both calls [nature to faith] and justifies [nature in faith]" (*ST I-II*, q. 113, a. 8).

Third, let us more precisely define nature from the perspective of de Lubac's single-end theory. Challenging the premise that the supernatural order is evinced from the natural, the French Jesuit claims that "it is not . . . nature which requires grace; it is rather grace which . . . calls into being spiritual creatures to receive it."⁷⁰ This means, for him, and for Benedict if, as Strand and Conedera claim, the Pontiff follows him, that it is not possible to envisage "a concrete nature in existence prior to or without its supernatural finalization."⁷¹ If so, then nature's fundamental difference from grace rests in its radical otherness to God: in its finitude, contingency, dependence on time and space, and sinfulness. Yet this radical otherness is of course not so other that it cannot affirm the analogy of being and the natural law and cooperate with or reject grace (see Rom 1:18–19). In affirming these powers, Trent does not canonize a theory of pure nature, and so, in agreement with it and de Lubac, Benedict's German contemporaries Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar both affirm that "no slice of pure of 'pure nature' exists in this world."⁷²

⁶⁹ Trent, *Decree on Justification*, chs. 4 and 6 (Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:672).

⁷⁰ See Anton C. Pegis, "Nature and Spirit: Some Reflections on the Problem of the End of Man," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 23 (1949): 62–79, at 79 (cited in Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992], 70n9, as summarizing de Lubac).

⁷¹ Pegis, "Nature and Spirit," 79 (cited in Duffy, *Horizons*, 70n9).

⁷² Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1966), 165–88, at 183; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 288.

Fourth, if no such slice historically exists, then we need to inquire into the dynamics of grace's engagement with nature. It is clear that sanctifying grace obtains only with the sacrament of baptism, either by water or desire. In the case of adults, baptism requires the cooperation of the individual's free will. Sanctifying grace, therefore, is given in the order of history in appropriate interaction with discrete instances of human freedom. We might therefore argue that it is not sanctifying grace but prevenient grace that is given *tout court* with nature at creation. If so, we could claim that nature and prevenient grace subsist as an analogous unity-in-difference.

This analogy means, on the one hand, that nature provides the substratum for prevenient grace, even as prevenient grace subsumes nature into an implicitly Christian vocation, which is explicitly consummated by baptism. Although nature and prevenient grace emerge at creation as a unity, they differ as to their essence. Nature is radically other than grace and entitled, of itself, to no Christian vocation. The analogy means, on the other hand, that grace is the gift of God alone, who endows what is radically other than he with such an implicit vocation. The coexistence of prevenient grace with nature does not prejudice nature's freedom by vitiating its ability either to reject or cooperate with grace, either prevenient or sanctifying, to which prevenient grace is oriented. When nature cooperates with prevenient grace and assents to baptism, not only is prevenient grace perfected, but nature, which is joined to prevenient grace, now possesses the life of God that makes the beatific vision, its only final end, existentially possible. In short, as to their causality, we might posit that nature and prevenient grace are materially the same, but formally different, even as they share a common end, goal, and purpose.

In conclusion, Benedict's claim that grace is the foundation of the natural law can be interpreted as follows. Whereas this law coexists with prevenient grace, even as the law retains its patency to reason, the law nonetheless finds in sanctifying grace the purifying that brings its object into clear focus and that gives it the fullness of certitude of its truth, goodness, and justice. Prevenient grace, an endowment given to nature at creation, thus animates nature from within to move it to assent to sanctifying grace, which also elevates the person from within. Neither grace supplants nature's post-lapsarian potency, as we have defined it, to know the true and do the good. But acting analogously together, these graces lead nature, through its own analogous moments discussed earlier, into a divine synthesis that, healing and expanding nature, allows the natural law to be perceived in its full propriety as the law of *nature* that indeed it is. In sum, the single-end theory is not only compatible with but also

strengthened by a determined nature that accords with Trent, Scripture, the patristic tradition, the Common Doctor, and Vatican II.⁷³ N.V

⁷³ For a more detailed treatment of the model outlined here, see Fields, *Analogies of Transcendence*, ch. 4.

The Eucharist and the Life of Christ in the Preaching of John Chrysostom

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WHEN JEAN DANIELOU penned an article on the symbolism of baptismal rites in early Christianity in a rather obscure and short-lived French journal, he could not foresee how ubiquitously the opening sentence would be quoted. The content of this quotation, however, stands on its own merits as a succinct yet insightful unification of diverse aspects of the Christian faith:

The Christian faith has only one object, the mystery of Christ died and risen. But this unique mystery subsists under different modes. It is prefigured in the Old Testament; it is accomplished historically in the earthly life of Christ, it is contained in mystery in the sacraments, it is lived mystically in souls, it is accomplished socially in the Church, it is consummated eschatologically in the heavenly kingdom. Thus, the Christian has at his disposal several registers, a multi-dimensional symbolism, to express this unique reality. The whole of Christian culture consists in grasping the links that exist between Bible and liturgy, Gospel and eschatology, mysticism and liturgy. The application of this method to Scripture is called spiritual exegesis, applied to liturgy it is called mystagogy. This consists in reading in the rites the mystery of Christ, and in contemplating beneath the symbols the invisible reality.¹

¹ Jean Daniélou, “Le symbolisme des rites baptismaux,” *Dieu vivant* 1 (1945): 15–43, at 17. I have slightly modified the translation as found in quotations by others. All translations from ancient and modern languages are my own unless otherwise noted.

In speaking of a method, Daniélou brought to the fore an approach to the Church Fathers which sought to capture the diverse aspects of a given figure's theology by showing, such as how scriptural interpretation related to sacramental theology and liturgy. Daniélou himself was deeply immersed in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa and possessed a wide acquaintance with the Greek-speaking East.² Years later, Daniélou would again turn his attention to liturgical details in his introduction to John Chrysostom's homilies on the incomprehensibility of God, where he explicated Chrysostom's invocation of the liturgy to argue against the Anomeans.³ Both his programmatic and descriptive work suggests wide possibilities of demonstrating significant linkages between scriptural exegesis and sacramental theology.

Eastern authors, both ancient and modern, acknowledge the liturgy of the Church as the centerpiece of the Christian faith.⁴ The Eucharist naturally holds pride of place in that centerpiece because it establishes the existence of the Church. Without the Eucharist, the Church could not be what it is or is intended to be.⁵ Accordingly, one would expect numerous discussions of the Eucharistic mystery in the Greek Fathers, especially in the large corpora of figures like John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria.

² See, for instance, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, selections and introduction by Jean Daniélou, ed. Herbert Musurillo (New York: Charles Scribner, 1961).

³ Jean Daniélou, introduction to French translation of *On the Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature*, in vol. 28/2 of *Sources Chrétiennes [SC]* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 51–61.

⁴ For an Eastern perspective, see Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1973) 8 and 121, and Archmandrite Vasileios, *Hymn of Entry* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), esp. 11, 13, and 18. Among the voluminous work of Robert Taft, S.J., special insight on liturgy may be gleaned from "The Spirit of Eastern Christian Worship," in *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd enlarged revision (Rome: Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, 2001), 143–60.

⁵ Theologians, East and West, have emphasized this point, often independently of one another. John Zizioulas says, "the celebration of the Eucharist by the primitive Church was, above all, the gathering of the people of God ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, that is both the manifestation and the realization of the Church" and "the Eucharist constituted the Church's being" (*Being as Communion* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1985], 21). John Paul II, without any reference to Zizioulas, made this point in his *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), §1: "Ecclesia de Eucharistia vivit" and "in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity [sacra in Eucharistia propter panis vinique conversionem in Corpus ac Sanguinem Domini gaudet ipsa [ecclesia] singulari quadam vehementia de hac praesentia]."

And yet, as Jaroslav Pelikan pointed out, there was no treatise devoted to the Eucharist in the ancient Church in a manner similar to the various Trinitarian or baptismal treatises. The fact that the Eucharist was never controversial in the same way that the Trinity or the Incarnation was may account for this lacuna.⁶ It would be misguided, however, to conclude that the Greek Fathers did not have much to say about the Eucharist. John Chrysostom, for example, wrote more about the Eucharist than any other Eastern Father.⁷ While the Antiochean Father never devoted a treatise to the Eucharist as he did to the priesthood, his voluminous sermons are filled with discussions of the sacrament. He is rightly celebrated as one of the great three hierarchs in the Eastern churches, not the least because he never tired of placing the Eucharist front and center.

There has been scant Anglophone attention paid to the theology of the Eucharist in the writings of John Chrysostom over the last one hundred years.⁸ Although Chrysostom's Eucharistic doctrine has received some recent attention,⁹ many modern Western authors continue to focus on his rhetoric and biblical interpretations.¹⁰ A second possibility is the sheer

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan rightly points out that the doctrine of the Eucharist did not become a matter of controversy until the ninth century, which would explain the absence of any treatise devoted to it in earlier centuries (*The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1 [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971], 166–67). His comments apply to the West and the rise of the Berengar controversy; there seems to have been even less controversy in the medieval East.

⁷ To date there have been only two works which give the Eucharistic texts of the Fathers with facing-page translations. For Spanish, see Jesus Solano, *Textos Eucarísticos Primitivos: Edición Bilingüe de los contenidos en la Sagrada Escritura y los Santos Padres*, vol. 1, *Hasta Fines del Siglo IV* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1952), and vol. 2, *Hasta el Fin de la Epoca Patristica (s. VII–VIII)* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1954); citations of Solano are by paragraph rather than page. For Italian, see Gerardo di Nola, *Bibliotheca Patristica Eucharistica*, vol. 3, *La Dottrina Eucharistica de Giovanni Crisostomo* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997). There is no comparable work in English.

⁸ Wendy Mayer, Chrysostom's preeminent bibliographer, pointed out that the twentieth century did not serve John particularly well, but that the twenty-first has seen a veritable explosion of Chrysostom studies. See her monumental bibliography of Chrystomica at the website of the Centre for Early Christian Studies (www.cecs.acu.edu.au/chrysostombibliography.html#).

⁹ Two recent doctoral dissertations are of particular interest in regard to Chrysostom's Eucharistic teaching: Jacky Marsaux, "La Théologie de l'Eucharistie selon Jean Chrysostome: étude du schéma sacrificiel" (PhD diss., Paris-Sorbonne University, 2008), and Pierre Molinié, "Jean Chrysostome, exégète et pasteur: les homélies sur la Deuxième épître aux Corinthiens" (PhD diss., Paris-Sorbonne University, 2017).

¹⁰ See: Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom*, ed. Carol Harrison,

difficulty of accessing his ideas because his discussions of the Eucharist are scattered throughout a wide-ranging variety of his homilies.¹¹ A third factor is more telling. Most histories of Eucharistic doctrine, at least in the West, have focused largely on the problems of the Real Presence of Christ and the sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic liturgy.¹² John of Antioch, however, rarely addressed these two issues directly. Most of his references to Christ's presence and sacrifice are made in passing while he addresses other concerns. His references to the Eucharist are usually tied to moral concerns and to a wide variety of scriptural texts. In this paper, I will follow one stream of his biblical interpretation as I expound how he ties the events in the earthly life of Christ to the Eucharist. Although here I focus on texts and events in the Gospels, John invoked Eucharistic ideas and associations on a much wider scale.¹³ In the process we will observe his ingenuity in applying Gospel texts and events to his contemporary audience.

Condescension (συγκατάβασις) in John Chrysostom

To understand John Chrysostom's Eucharistic teachings it is first necessary to take notice of the overall context of his theology. Several authors point out how central the concept of condescension is in his thought, among them Bertrand de Margerie.¹⁴ For Chrysostom, the condescension of God

Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 2000); David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Bradley Nassif, *Theoria in St. John Chrysostom's Exegesis: A Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and the Spiritual Life* (PhD diss., Fordham University, 1991). The most comprehensive biography of Chrysostom in English to date is still J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Aseptic, Preacher, Bishop* (London: Duckworth, 1995). Considerable historical work was done by Allen and Mayer in the 1990s and early 2000s in an attempt to place John's homilies in their proper historical context; see Wendy Mayer, "The Biography of John Chrysostom and the Chronology of His Works" (academia.edu/6448810).

- ¹¹ This obstacle has been largely removed by the advent of electronic access to Chrysostom's corpus in the excellent *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/).
- ¹² Pierre Battifol, *L'Eucharistie: la presence réelle et la transubstantiation*, 5th ed. (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1913). For a slight departure from this pattern, see Johannes Betz, *Eucharistie in der Schrift und Patristik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979).
- ¹³ A striking example is introducing the Eucharist in his *Homilies on Ephesians*, no. 3, where he aligns the Eucharistic body with the ecclesial body in an exhortation to live out the life of Christ in daily life. I return to this locus at the end of the article.
- ¹⁴ Bertrand de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse les pères grecque et orientaux* (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1980), 1:214.

can be seen in the gradual revelation of his plan of salvation (οἰκονομία). This gradual unfolding of God's plan of salvation in the old covenant prepared the world for the ultimate manifestation of himself in Christ. This assumption makes sense of John's use of typology in his expositions of Scripture. As Bradley Nassif pointed out, John Chrysostom's method of contrasting the old and new is predicated on a prior continuity between the revelation to Israel and the culmination of that revelation in the Incarnation.¹⁵ De Margerie takes this arrangement a step further by connecting history, Scripture, and liturgy: "We will catch a glimpse that Scripture is for Chrysostom a prolonging of the Incarnation. Scripture paved the way for it and also manifests it in the liturgy which is the place of the divine Word being received and effective par excellence."¹⁶

The condescension of God presupposes the inability of creatures to comprehend the Creator. The infinite distance between God and humanity forms the necessary background for understanding the love which motivated the Incarnation and the necessary condescension entailed by it. John argued vigorously against the Anomeans who claimed that human beings could attain to a direct knowledge of God. In his lectures on the incomprehensibility of God John claimed, "it is for God to appear and show himself, not as he is in himself, but such as he can be seen by those who are capable of such a vision as he proportioned his presentation of himself to the weakness of those who look for him."¹⁷ However, God in his goodness has not remained aloof and so his condescension to humanity should evoke an appropriate response: "Let us glorify the God who was made flesh for such great condescension [τὸν σαρκωθέντα Θεὸν]. According to our ability, let us render him worthy honor and recompense. Now there can be no repayment to God from us other than the salvation of our souls and our care for [living a life of] virtue."¹⁸ Daniélou argued that, in

¹⁵ See Nassif, *Theoria*, 230–48, where Nassif explains typology and the unity of the Testaments. Of course, John is by no means unique in this regard. The extensive use of typology reaches back to second-century figures like Melito of Sardis in his Paschal homilies.

¹⁶ De Margerie, *Introduction*, 216.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature*, discourse 3 (as quoted in de Margerie, *Introduction*, 1:217).

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: καὶ τὸν σαρκωθέντα Θεὸν δοξάζωμεν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοσαύτης συγκαταβάσεως, καὶ κατὰ δύναμιν τὴν ἡμετέραν, ἀξίαν ἀποδώμεν αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν ἀμοιβήν. Θεῷ δὲ ἀμοιβὴ οὐδεμία παρ' ἡμῶν γένοιτ' ἂν, ἀλλ' ἢ μόνον ἡ σωτηρία ἡμῶν καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων ψυχῶν, καὶ ἡ περὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιμέλεια (*Patrologia Graeca* [PG], 49:360).

John's theology, this condescension was not limited to the Incarnation, but must also be seen in the liturgy of the Church as well.¹⁹

The condescension of Christ displays God's method in the plan of salvation or *οικονομία*. God was not only motivated to send his Son out of his love for humanity; he also structured that plan out of the same love. One of John's clearest statements occurs in his *Homilies on Colossians* where he explains the divine *οικονομία*: "God does not do everything all at the same time but has employed condescension because of his great love of humanity."²⁰ John borrows Paul's phrase about "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4) to explain why God waited until the right moment, the *καιρός*, to reveal the fullness of life in Christ. All this was part and parcel of his condescending love to prepare for the reception of his Son. Because love is not often recognized without proper preparation, God planned to reveal his love for humanity (*φιλανθρωπία*), only at the right moment, the right *καιρός* so that it could be understood and embraced.²¹

Chrysostom loved to use the prophet Jonah as an example of God's love for the nations. In Jonah 4:11 God asks Jonah why he should not have compassion on the Ninevites if Jonah had such great concern for the plant that had withered. John comments: "Defending himself to Jonah because of the plant [that withered], God says, 'You felt pity for the plant for which you did nothing; shall I not spare [them] for the sake of the great city of Nineveh in which live more than one hundred and twenty thousand people?' He mentioned the number for a reason, that you might learn that prayer with unanimity has great power."²² While Chrysostom is arguing for the superiority of corporate prayer (e.g., in liturgy), he notes the extent of God's love as seen in his concern for non-covenantal people. John expands on the incident of Jonah at the end of his life in his treatise

¹⁹ See Danielou, introduction to *On the Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature*, SC 28/2 :15–63.

²⁰ Homily 4, no. 2 : 'Ο γὰρ Θεὸς οὐκ ἀθρώως πάντα ποιεῖ, ἀλλὰ κέχρηται συγκαταβάσει διὰ τὴν πολλὴν αὐτοῦ φιλανθρωπίαν (PG 62:328). De Margerie quotes only the second half of this statement (after ἀλλὰ) but the temporal reference is crucial. He translates the second clause as: "Dieu use de condescendance en vertu de sa grande philanthropie."

²¹ Φιλανθρωπία occurs over seven hundred times in the Chrysostom corpus, hundreds of which are formulaic at the end of homilies, However, in other contexts the term carries a profound significance. Interestingly, the Greek fathers in general use *φιλανθρωπία* more than the favorite term of New Testament authors, *ἀγάπη*. It is worth further exploring whether they intend *φιλανθρωπία* as a means of explicating the meaning of *ἀγάπη*.

²² John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature*, homily 3 (SC 28/2:419–26).

On the Providence of God. In chapter 6, which treats the love of God, John again invokes Jonah. The story of Jonah tells of his complaint to God that he did not bring to pass the threat of destruction upon Nineveh which he had foretold. Jonah, however, had missed the divine intention; it was ultimately not to punish but to show mercy if Nineveh repented. So, in John's preaching God rebukes Jonah with the example of a gardener who loves his plant and adds, "he [God] wanted to show in this example his love for men in the form of a love charm?"²³ This divine love, Chrysostom says, is seen not only in God's provision, but also in the kind of love God has. "God loves [ἐρῶν] with an exceedingly irresistible love, love without human passions, a love that is very warm, very vigorous, very genuine, indestructible, and cannot be snubbed out."²⁴

Since the Incarnation with its condescension to the human race is so central to Chrysostom's preaching, his emphasis on the earthly life of Jesus as a source of inspiration and grace makes perfect sense. For John, the believer of his time is able to experience Jesus Christ in his humanity in the same way that Christ was present on earth. Responding to a desire deep within the hearts of his hearers, John assures them:

So many say, "I would like to see his form, his distinctive appearance, his clothes, his sandals." Look, you do see him, you touch him, you eat him. Yes, you desire to see his garments, but he gives you himself not only to be seen but to be touched, eaten, and taken within. Let no one approach this staggering nor dissolute. All should be enflamed, all full of zeal, all fully awake. If the Jews stood ready with their sandals and staff in hand, and ate with haste, how much more should we be sober and disciplined. They were about to enter Palestine and so they walked with a roadmap; but we are about to go on a journey to heaven.²⁵

²³ John Chrysostom, *Providence of God* 6.19; translation slightly adapted from *On the Providence of God*, trans. Monk Moses [St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood] (Platina, CA: Saint Herman Press, 2015), 58 (to my knowledge, the only English translation of this treatise).

²⁴ John Chrysostom, *Providence of God* 6.1.

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homily 82 on the Gospel of Matthew: Πόσοι νῦν λέγουσιν, Ἐβουλόμην αὐτοῦ τὴν μορφήν ἰδεῖν, τὸν τύπον, τὰ ἱμάτια, τὰ ὑποδήματα! Ἴδου αὐτὸν ὄραξ, αὐτοῦ ἅπτῃ, αὐτὸν ἐσθίεις. Καὶ σὺ μὲν ἱμάτια ἐπιθυμεῖς ἰδεῖν· αὐτὸς δὲ ἑαυτὸν σοὶ δίδωσιν, οὐκ ἰδεῖν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἅψασθαι, καὶ φαγεῖν, καὶ λαβεῖν ἔνδον. Μηδεὶς τοίνυν ναυτιῶν προσίτω, μηδεὶς ἐκκλελυμένος· ἅπαντες πεπυρωμένοι, ἅπαντες ζέοντες καὶ διεγερμένοι. Εἰ γὰρ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐστῶτες, καὶ τὰ ὑποδήματα καὶ τὰς βακτηρίας ἔχοντες ἐν ταῖς χερσίν, ἤσθιον μετὰ σπουδῆς, πολλῶ μᾶλλον σὲ νήφειν δεῖ. Ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γὰρ εἰς

The Christian in late-antique Antioch or Constantinople is no less able to encounter Jesus than those who lived contemporaneously with him. Not only does the exercise of faith allow one's eyes to behold Christ, but the Eucharist even affords an opportunity not given to those who walked on earth with Jesus. They could see, hear, and touch him, but at the mystical table of the Church the faithful can consume Christ, something infinitely better. This superiority is underscored in two ways by John. Not only does he contrast the Hebrews ready to leave Egypt with Christians ready for their journey to heaven, but he highlights the difference between those who knew Christ on earth and those who take him within (λαβεῖν ἔνδον). If believing hearts of Jesus's time could be moved by his presence, later generations can and should "be enflamed, all full of zeal, all fully awake."

The context immediately preceding the quotation above from Homily 82 explains Chrysostom's confidence in the greater position of the faithful at the table of Christ. All confidence depends upon taking the Son of God at his word when he said, "this is my body." To do so, of course, requires "spiritual eyes" to see metaphysical (νοητός) realities. Our common modern contrast between the physical and the spiritual parses into a threefold division in John's vocabulary. The real world is not physical and spiritual but physical (φυσικός), metaphysical (νοητός), and spiritual (πνευματικός). Because "Christ has delivered nothing to us that can be seen with the senses but metaphysical realities in observable things,"²⁶ then the acts of seeing, hearing, touching, and even consuming Christ entail a metaphysical reality that is in no way inferior to his earthly existence. Accordingly, one is not surprised that John Chrysostom ties the Eucharistic experience of the Church to specific events in the life of Jesus.

The Nativity of Jesus Christ

Many of John Chrysostom's topical homilies seem to treat quite disparate subjects, and often they end with a section discussing the Eucharistic mystery, the table, and the altar.²⁷ His *Homily on the Birth of Christ*²⁸ is no different, but closer reading reveals that in fact he weaves his homily around a common theme, or least that he sees connections between his themes in

Παλαιστίνην ἐμελλον ἐξίεναι, διὸ καὶ ὁδοὶ πόρων σχῆμα εἶχον· σὺ δὲ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν μέλλεις ἀποδημεῖν (PG 58:743; Solano, *Textos Eucaristicos Primitivos*, 1:799).

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homily 82 on the Gospel of Matthew: Οὐδὲν γὰρ αἰσθητὸν παρέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ Χριστός· ἀλλ' ἐν αἰσθητοῖς μὲν πράγμασι. Πάντα δὲ νοητά (PG 58:743; Solano, *Textos Eucaristicos Primitivos*, 1:799).

²⁷ On the other hand, John's sequential homilies on books of the Bible generally stay close to the biblical text.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*, in PG 49:351–62.

a manner easily missed.²⁹ John Chrysostom was nothing if not a man who loved detail in his exegesis and presentation. That meticulous nature comes out in this homily when he argues for the celebration of Christmas day. One can almost hear the objection that the nativity of Christ should not be celebrated because it cannot boast of great antiquity. We learn here that the celebration of Christmas had arrived in Constantinople (or Antioch) only recently from the West.³⁰ John, however, argues that the celebration of the Savior's birth is proper because it has been accepted by both East and West even though it originated in the West. His second argument for its appropriateness comes from the details of Scripture about the birth of Christ. It was God's own plan (*οικονομία*) being worked out which is celebrated. Surely, John argues, celebrating the birth of the Savior is important and valuable if God revealed so many details about his birth.

The Incarnation is his last and most important reason for celebrating Christmas, and it is here that he argues against the cultural derision hurled at God-becoming-man. John turns this criticism on its head by asking, "if it is shameful for God to dwell in a human body, how much more so is it that he would dwell in stone and wood? And all the more so since stone and wood are less honorable than a human being, unless of course our race seems to them to be cheaper than this senseless matter."³¹ God born as a man in fact shows the superior dignity of the human race and at the same times dignifies that nature even more.³² What was the ultimate purpose of the Incarnation? John says it was for God to prepare a temple so that he might bring heaven to earth residing in the human soul: "God, once he prepared a holy temple for himself, introduced into our daily life the citizenship of heaven by that means."³³ The Incarnation then is the lynchpin

²⁹ John's attention to detail may account for his reputation as a literal exegete of the Antiochian school, though Nassif and Rylaarsdam both demonstrate that the classic categories of literal (Antioch) versus allegorical (Alexandria) must yield to more subtle descriptions.

³⁰ For an exploration of the origins of Christmas, see Hans Förster, *Die Feier der Geburt Christi in der Alten Kirche* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

³¹ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: Εἰ γὰρ αἰσχρὸν, ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῳ σώματι Θεὸν οἰκῆσαι, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἐν λίθῳ καὶ ξύλῳ, καὶ τοσοῦτον, ὅσον λίθος καὶ ξύλον ἀτιμότερον ἀνθρώπου, εἰ μὴ ἄρα καὶ τῶν ἀναισθητῶν τούτων ὑλῶν εὐτελέστερον τὸ γένος ἡμῶν αὐτοῖς εἶναι δοκεῖ (*PG* 49:359). John may have drawn his language from the taunts against false gods in Isa 44:9–20.

³² John gives a kind of argumentation similar to the medieval West—the argument from fittingness (*convenientia*).

³³ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: ἐκεῖνο δὲ φαμεν, ὅτι ναὸν ἅγιον ἑαυτῷ κατασκευάσας ὁ Θεὸς, δι' ἐκείνου τὴν τῶν οὐρανῶν πολιτείαν εἰς τὸν βίον εἰσήγαγε τὸν ἡμέτερον (*PG* 49:359).

which connects the event of Christ's birth to the celebration of that event in the liturgy of the Church. That connection naturally leads him to the Eucharist, but only after he again stresses the condescending love of God: "Let us glorify the God who was made flesh for such great condescension [συγκαταβάσεως]. Now there can be no repayment to God from us other than the salvation of our souls and our care for [living a life of] virtue."³⁴ How then does one glorify the God-made-flesh? By properly approaching the Eucharist: "Inasmuch as you are about to approach this awesome and divine table and sacred entrance into the mystery, do so with fear and trembling, with a clean conscience, with fasting and prayer, not causing a commotion, nor in rebellion, nor fighting your neighbor."³⁵

Chrysostom proceeds to contrast our lowly condition with the utmost dignity of the sacrament: "Even though you are dust and ashes, you partake of the blood and body of Christ"³⁶ But why is the Eucharist so worthy of these accolades? Perhaps the very union of heaven and earth in the Incarnation and its extension in the Eucharist is simultaneously enough to evoke admiration and purity of approach. Yet, John does not leave the matter there. Rather, he stresses the saving power of the sacrament: "What lies before you is the saving medicine [φάρμακον σωτήριο] for our wounds. His wealth is unfailing; he is the patron of the kingdom of heaven."³⁷ John adopts the medical metaphor in use since Ignatius of Antioch but makes it more explicit.³⁸ The "saving medicine" is emphasized in John's syntax, as he underscores both its medicinal effect ("for the wounds sustained by sin") and its character as a gift from God himself ("patron of the kingdom of heaven"). What could be more inviting and powerful than the gift of the sacrament?

Let us enfold [it] with our eyes, let our minds be warmed [with it]
that we might not come to judgment or condemnation but to a

³⁴ For the Greek see note 18.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: Μέλλοντες προσιέναι τῇ φρικτῇ καὶ θεῖα ταύτη τραπέζῃ καὶ ἱερᾷ μυσταγωγίᾳ, μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τοῦτο ποιείτε, μετὰ καθαροῦ συνειδότος, μετὰ νηστείας καὶ προσευχῆς, μὴ θορυβοῦντες, μηδὲ λακτίζοντες, μηδὲ ὠθοῦντες τοὺς πλησίον (PG 49:360.).

³⁶ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: Ἐννόησον, ὦ ἄνθρωπε, ποίας μέλλεις ἄπτεσθαι θυσίας, ποία προσέρχεσθαι τραπέζῃ· ἐνθυμήθητι καὶ ὅτι γῆ ὦν καὶ σποδός, αἷμα καὶ σῶμα Χριστοῦ μεταλαμβάνεις (PG 49:361). A few lines later he says "So, let us come as approaching the King of Heaven. After receiving [the sacrament], let us kiss the blameless and holy sacrifice" (PG 49:362). ὡς τῷ βασιλεῖ προσιόντες τῶν οὐρανῶν, οὕτω προσέλθωμεν· καὶ δεξάμενοι τὴν ἄμωμον καὶ ἁγίαν θυσίαν καταφιλήσωμεν,

³⁷ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem* (PG 49:361).

³⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* 20.2.

sobriety of the soul, to love, to virtue, and to reconciliation with God, to confident hope, to the practice [ὑπόθεσις] of a thousand goods. This is also for us to sanctify ourselves and to edify our neighbor.³⁹

The dignity of the sacrament derives from the liturgy as a union of heaven and earth: “When God calls you to his table, and sets before you his own Son, when the angelic powers attend with fear and trembling as the Cherubim hide their faces and the Seraphim cry out, you too cry out, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy Lord.’”⁴⁰ Chrysostom never tires of repeating the union of the heaven and earth made possible by the Eucharist. In his *Homilies on Isaiah Chapter 6* he seeks to lift the mind of his congregants by reminding them, “That altar [in the Church] is a type and icon of this altar [heavenly], that fire a type and icon of spiritual fire.” The means by which a believer can see that celestial fire on the earthly altar resides in the love of God for humanity (φιλανθρωπία): “When you fix upon your Master’s love for humanity, [then you realize that] the grace of the gifts was not reluctant to descend to our lowliness.”⁴¹

The only appropriate preparation for this awesome mystery is silence and calm: “Will you then attend this spiritual banquet in a confused state? Don’t you know that your soul must be filled with quiet [γαλήνη] at that very moment? There is a need for much peace and silence, not confusion, anger, and disturbance. These things make your soul unclean as it approaches.”⁴² Confusion, anger, and wrath will only condemn the communicant because these vices lead to an arrogance unfit for the King.⁴³

³⁹ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς περιπτυσώμεθα, διαθερμάνωμεν ἑαυτῶν τὴν διάνοιαν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς κρῖμα ἢ εἰς κατάκριμα συνερχώμεθα, ἀλλ’ εἰς σωφροσύνην ψυχῆς, εἰς ἀγάπην, εἰς ἀρετὴν, καὶ καταλλαγὴν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, εἰς εἰρήνην βεβαίαν, καὶ μυρίων ἀγαθῶν ὑπόθεσιν, ἵνα καὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἀγιάσωμεν, καὶ τοὺς πλησίον οἰκοδομήσωμεν (PG 49:362).

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲ καλοῦντος ἐπὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τράπεζαν, καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ προτιθέντος Υἱὸν, ἀγγελικῶν δυνάμεων παρισταμένων μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου, καὶ τῶν Χερουβὶμ κατακαλυπτόντων τὰ πρόσωπα, τῶν Σεραφὶμ κραζόντων τρόμῳ, Ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος Κύριος (PG 49:361).

⁴¹ Both quotations come from Homily 6 on Isaiah, nos. 6, 3 (Solano, *Textos Eucarísticos Primitivos*, 1:764).

⁴² John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: Οὐκ οἶδας, ὅτι γαλήνης δεῖ γέμειν τὴν ψυχὴν κατ’ ἐκείνον τὸν καιρὸν; Εἰρήνης πολλῆς καὶ ἡσυχίας χρεῖα, οὐχὶ θορύβου καὶ θυμοῦ καὶ ταραχῆς· ταῦτα γὰρ ἀκάθαρτον ποιεῖ τὴν προσιοῦσαν ψυχὴν (PG 49:361).

⁴³ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem*: “Confusion and wrath become arrogance [ὑβρις] in the presence of the sacrifice lying before us. It is the last [and greatest] contempt for a defiled man to present himself to God” (PG 49:362).

Still, the silence and calm urged are not empty or vapid. They consist of a living humility and self-abnegation which should characterize every approach to the Eucharist: “Let us then tremble as we approach, let us give thanks, let us fall down, confessing our faults, let us weep as we mourn our own evil. Let us offer fervent prayers to God. We will thereby purify ourselves quietly and with a fitting good order. So, let us come as approaching the King of Heaven. After receiving [the sacrament], let us kiss the blameless and holy sacrifice.”⁴⁴ With such exhortations one can readily understand why John would see a deep connection between the birth of Jesus and the celebration of the Eucharist.

This connection becomes even more evident in a rather unexpected place. In his *Homily on Philogonius*, an earlier bishop of Antioch, Chrysostom takes the occasion to highlight the power and value of the sacrament.⁴⁵ This homily, preached five days before the nativity of Christ, contains a variety of themes, but one that stands out at the end is how the celebration transports the Christian back to the very circumstances in which Christ was born:

Because of this I greet and love this day [of Christ’s birth] and I put love front and center that I may make you sharers of this love-charm. For this reason, I beg and entreat you all to be here with all diligence and readiness for each should empty his own house that we may see our Master lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, that awesome and incredible spectacle. What defense can we have, what excuse when he has come down from heaven for our sake, but we don’t come out of our house to him? When the Magi, those barbarians and foreigners, ran from Persia to see him lying in a crib. But you, O Christian, do not remain a little while so as to enjoy this blessed sight. For when we approach with faith we too will certainly see him lying in the manger, for this table fulfills the purpose of the manger.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, *In diem natalem* (PG 49:361).

⁴⁵ Two fine translations of this homily exist, one by Paul W. Harkins in *The Incomprehensible Nature of God*, Fathers of the Church 72 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 164–83, and the other by Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen in *John Chrysostom*, ed. Carol Harrison, The Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 2000), 184–95. The latter dates the homily to December 20, 386 (in Antioch). There are divergences in the manuscript tradition. This homily is only tangentially about the incomprehensibility of God but is titled homily 6 in that series (see the Harkins trans., 164). My translation will differ at times from both of these otherwise excellent alternatives.

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom. *De beato philogonio*: Διὰ τοῦτο μάλιστα ἀσπάζομαι τὴν ἡμέραν

The “love-charm” (φίλτρον)⁴⁷ of which John speaks could be a potion or any other means by which the recipient is rendered unable to resist the advances of a lover. The comparison with the Magi is an argument from the greater to the lesser (*a majore ad minorem*), because the effort of Magi was so much greater than what is required of the Christian in John’s day. The end result, however, is the same, that is, worshiping the infant Christ child. To come to the Eucharist is to place oneself at the manger and to adore Christ in his humble condition. What is striking is John’s practical equivalence of the manger with the table of the Church. The purpose of the birth is to allow the Christian to partake of Christ himself. John’s choice of vocabulary astounds. This table “fulfills [πληροῖ] the purpose or order [τάξις] of that manger.”⁴⁸ The choice of “order” suggests another favorite term of John’s—οἰκονομία, God’s plan or design. In short, the Eucharist is more than an arbitrary divine choice. The sacrament is the purpose or order of God’s saving acts because it incorporates the communicant into God’s plan. Participation in the table is the fulfillment of the Incarnation.

The grandeur of the Eucharist then also explains why John insists on a right approach to the sacrament. The presence of the same man who walked the earth implies that the Christian is in no inferior position to those who lived at the time of Christ’s earthly sojourn:

For the Master’s body shall lie here too, not wrapped in swaddling clothes as then, but wrapped on every side with the Holy Spirit. Those initiated into the mysteries know the things said. Now the Magi only worshiped, but you, if you approach with a pure

ταύτην καὶ φιλῶ, καὶ τὸν ἔρωτα εἰς μέσον προτίθημι, ἵνα κοινωνοὺς ὑμᾶς ποιήσω τοῦ φίλτρον· διὰ τοῦτο δέομαι πάντων ὑμῶν καὶ ἀντιβολῶ μετὰ πάσης σπουδῆς καὶ προθυμίας παραγενέσθαι, τὴν οἰκίαν ἕκαστον κενώσαντα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν τὸν Δεσπότην ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς φάτνης κείμενον, ἐσπαργανωμένον, τὸ φρικτὸν ἐκεῖνο καὶ παράδοξον θέαμα. Ποία γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀπολογία, ποία δὲ συγγνώμη, ὅταν αὐτὸς μὲν ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν δι’ ἡμᾶς καταβαίνει, ἡμεῖς δὲ μηδὲ ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐρχώμεθα; ὅταν μάγοι μὲν, ἄνθρωποι βάρβαροι καὶ ἀλλόφυλοι, ἐκ Περσίδος τρέχωσιν, ὥστε αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς φάτνης κείμενον· σὺ δὲ ὁ Χριστιανὸς μηδὲ μικρὸν διάστημα ὑπομένης, ὥστε τῆς μακαρίας ταύτης ἀπολαῦσαι θεωρίας; Καὶ γὰρ, ἂν μετὰ πίστεως παραγενώμεθα, πάντως αὐτὸν ὀψόμεθα ἐπὶ τῆς φάτνης κείμενον· ἢ γὰρ τράπεζα αὕτη τάξιν τῆς φάτνης πληροῖ (PG 48:753–56; Solano, *Textos Eucarísticos Primitivos*, 1:673).

⁴⁷ Mayer and Allen translate “I put my love on show to make you share in my affection for it” (*John Chrysostom*, 191). It is not obvious that John is speaking about his own love at this point. It may be referring to God’s love. Further, I would rather retain the noun “love-charm” rather than flattening it out as they have done.

⁴⁸ Mayer and Allen translate “this table fulfills the role of the manger” (*Harrison, John Chrysostom*, 192). In my opinion, “role” is too weak for τάξις.

conscience and receive, we will be united to you and you can depart for home. Come then and bring your gifts, not like those of the Magi, but rather more solemn. They brought gold. But you, you bring discretion and virtue. They offered frankincense but you, you bring pure prayers, spiritual sacrifices. They offered myrrh, but you, you should offer humility, a humble heart and alms. If you approach with these gifts, you will enjoy this holy table with much confidence. For this reason, I want to motivate you now with these words, since I know that certainly many will approach on that day and will stumble over the spiritual sacrifice.⁴⁹

The interplay of continuity and discontinuity, so evident in Chrysostom's biblical interpretation, also guides his sacramental theology. The gifts of the Magi are no longer appropriate. They were symbolic in the sense of representing not only their own inner homage to the King, but the even more costly gifts of virtue and faith necessary for the Christian. The latter can offer the greater gifts of an interior nature as well as receiving the King in a manner that the Magi could not.⁵⁰ This affords Chrysostom the opportunity to exhort his congregants to put away strife and anger, which are the greatest obstacles to a proper communion. At the end of his homily he even urges forgiveness of offenses in the light of the fact that it is a greater evil to oneself to remain bitter than whatever the original offense was.⁵¹ In this

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom. *De beato philogonio*: Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα κείσεται τὸ σῶμα τὸ δεσποτικόν, οὐχὶ ἐσπαργανωμένον, καθάπερ τότε, ἀλλὰ Πνεύματι πανταχόθεν ἀγίῳ περιστελλόμενον. Ἰσασιν οἱ μεμνημένοι τὰ λεγόμενα. Οἱ μὲν οὖν μάγοι προσεκύνησαν μόνον· σὺ δὲ, ἂν μετὰ καθαρῶν προσέλθῃς συνειδότης, καὶ λαβεῖν σοι αὐτὸ συγχωρήσομεν καὶ ἀπελθεῖν οἴκαδε. Πρόσιθι τοίνυν καὶ σὺ δῶρα προσάγων, μὴ τοιαῦτα οἷα ἐκείνοι, ἀλλὰ πολλῶ σμενότερα. Προσήνεγκαν ἐκείνοι χρυσόν· προσένεγκε σὺ σωφροσύνην καὶ ἀρετήν· προσήνεγκαν ἐκείνοι λιβανωτόν· προσένεγκε σὺ εὐχὰς καθαρὰς, τὰ θυμιάματα τὰ πνευματικά· προσήνεγκαν ἐκείνοι σμύρναν· προσένεγκε σὺ ταπεινοφροσύνην καὶ τεταπεινωμένην καρδίαν καὶ ἐλεημοσύνην. Ἄν μετὰ τούτων προσέλθῃς τῶν δώρων, μετὰ ἀδείας ἀπολαύση πολλῆς τῆς θῆς τῶν δώρων, μετὰ ἀδείας ἀπολαύση πολλῆς τῆς ἱερᾶς ταύτης τραπέζης. Καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ διὰ τοῦτο τούτους κινῶ τοὺς λόγους νῦν, ἐπειδὴ οἶδα ὅτι πάντως πολλοὶ κατ' ἐκείνην προσελεύσονται τὴν ἡμέραν, καὶ ἐπιπεσοῦνται τῇ πνευματικῇ ταύτῃ θυσίᾳ (PG 48:753. Solano, *Textos Eucaristicos Primitivos*, 1:674).

⁵⁰ Later in *De beato philogonio* John says: "For you're about to receive the King under your roof in communion. As the king enters your soul, you should be in much tranquility, much silence, and deep peace of thoughts [Βασιλέα γὰρ ὑποδέχεσθαι μέλλεις διὰ τῆς κοινωνίας βασιλέως δὲ ἐπιβαίνοντος τῇ ψυχῇ, πολλὴν εἶναι δεῖ τὴν γαλήνην, πολλὴν τὴν ἡσυχίαν, βαθεῖαν τῶν λογισμῶν τὴν εἰρήνην]" (PG 48:756; Solano, *Textos Eucaristicos Primitivos*, 1:678).

⁵¹ See John Chrysostom, *De beato philogonio*: "Have you been greatly wronged and

manner, then, John views the Eucharist as an extension of Christ's earthly life in the world today.⁵²

The Baptism of Jesus

Baptism and Eucharist were universally considered to be the two most prominent sacraments in the ancient Church, so it is not surprising that Chrysostom would preach on the baptism of Jesus, but his method in doing so is all his own. John was always aware of the background of salvation history (οικονομία) when treating mysteries of the New Covenant, always ready to invoke texts and images of the Old Testament

This is the reason for baptism. All that was said beforehand was to fulfill the whole law. So, the Spirit came down in the form of a dove, for where there is reconciliation with God, there is a dove. On Noah's ark the dove was also carrying an olive branch, a symbol of God's love for humanity and of relief from winter.⁵³

The presence of the dove in both the Noahic narrative and in the baptism of Jesus evoked the theme of purity in John's mind, but the purity of the dove in the story of Noah was only a pointer, an index of a greater purity that lay in the Son of God who "is now at the right hand of the Father in a pure and undefiled body."⁵⁴ As John compares the two stories, he sees the truer ark in the Church: "That ark [of Noah] stayed on the earth even though

cannot bear to let go of your anger? What greater, more severe wrong will you do yourself? Those things which your enemy has done, however great they be, are not so bad as you do to yourself if you are not reconciled to him but rather trample on the law of God [Ἀλλὰ μεγάλα ἠδίκησαι. καὶ οὐ φέρεις ἀφεῖναι τὴν ὀργήν; τί τοίνυν σαυτὸν πολλῶ μείζονα ἀδικεῖς καὶ χαλεπώτερα; Οὐ γὰρ τοιαῦτά σε διαθήσεται ὁ ἐχθρὸς ὅσα περ ἂν ποιῇ, οἷα σὺ σαυτὸν μὴ καταλλαττόμενος πρὸς ἐκείνον]" (PG 48:756; Solano, *Textos Eucaristicos Primitivos*, 1:678).

⁵² The idea of the Church and the Eucharist as a kind of ongoing Incarnation, rather than simply juridical entities, became a prominent theme in nineteenth-century German Catholic theology, e.g., Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism* (New York: Crossroads, 1997), and Matthias Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1951).

⁵³ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: Αὕτη ἡ αἰτία τοῦ βαπτίσματος, ἵνα δόξῃ τὸν νόμον ἅπαντα πληροῦν, καὶ αὕτη, καὶ ἡ πρὸ ταύτης εἰρημένη. Διὸ καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐν εἶδει περιστερᾶς κάτεισιν· ὅπου γὰρ καταλλαγὴ Θεοῦ, περιστέρα. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κιβωτοῦ τῆς ἐπὶ Νῶε φέρουσα κλάδον ἐλαίας ἦλθεν ἡ περιστέρα, σύμβολον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ φιλανθρωπίας, καὶ τῆς τοῦ χειμῶνος ἀπαλλαγῆς (PG 49:369).

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Πατρὸς τὸ ἁμωμον ἐκεῖνο καὶ ἀκήρατον σῶμα (PG 49:369).

the harshness of winter was unleashed, so this ark [the Church] snatches one up to heaven.”⁵⁵ The liturgy of the Church, uniting heaven and earth, means that “Christ is present, the angels [are] standing in attendance, the awesome table prepared.” This reality induces John to warn his hearers against a casual indifference to the glories contained in the mysteries:

As your brothers (i.e., catechumens) are still being led into the mysteries, will you leave this and turn away? When you have been invited to a supper, even if you are satiated, you would not dare to leave the other guests before friends. Here Christ is enacting awe-inspiring mysteries, the sacred liturgy is still being performed, are you going to leave and depart in the middle? What sort of defense can you give? May I tell you whose work it is that those who leave before the conclusion are doing? They are not bringing the Eucharistic hymns to the purpose [τέλος] of the table?⁵⁶

John is warning his congregants against the temptation to receive communion because it is a high feast day rather than because of the state of their hearts. As he reminds them of the presence of Christ’s body, he warns against perfunctory communion: “I know that many among us are running toward this holy table because of the custom of the feast.” What then is necessary for the believing Christian? “Not to observe the feasts but to cleanse the conscience and then to touch the sacred sacrifice.”⁵⁷ Even worse would be to leave the liturgy before the consummating end of communion, an act which John likens to Judas leaving the Passover supper of Christ: “Judas shared in the last supper on that very last night while all the others were sitting at table, but he alone jumped up to leave. These here who leave before the last thanksgiving [εὐχαριστίας] are imitating him.”⁵⁸ So,

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: Ἐκείνη μὲν οὖν ἡ κιβωτὸς, τοῦ χειμῶνος λυθέντος, ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· αὕτη δὲ ἡ κιβωτὸς, τῆς ὀργῆς λυθείσης, εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἤρπάζετο (PG 49:369).

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου μυσταγωγουμένων ἔτι, αὐτὸς καταλιπὼν ἀποπηδᾶς; Καὶ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον μὲν κληθεῖς, κἂν λιπῶν ἀποπηδᾶς; Καὶ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον μὲν κληθεῖς, κἂν πρότερον ορεσθῆς, οὐ τολμᾶς τῶν ἄλλων ἀνακειμένων ἀναχωρῆσαι πρὸ τῶν φίλων αὐτός· ἐνταῦθα δὲ τῶν φρικτῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ μυστηρίων ἐπιτελουμένων, τῆς ἱερᾶς τελετῆς συνεστῶσης ἔτι, καταλιμπάνεις ἐν μέσῳ πάντα καὶ ἀναχωρεῖς; Καὶ ποῦ ταῦτα συγγνώμης ἄξια; ποίας δὲ ἀπολογίας; Βούλεσθε εἶπω τίνος ἔργον ποιοῦσιν οἱ πρὸ τῆς συμπληρώσεως ἀναχωροῦντες, καὶ τὰς εὐχαριστηρίους ᾠδὰς οὐκ ἐπιφέροντες τῷ τέλει τῆς τραπέζης (PG 49:370).

⁵⁷ Both quotations are from *De baptismo Christi* (PG 49:370).

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: Ὅτε ἐκοινῶνησε τὸ ἔσχατον δεῖπνον ὁ Ἰούδας τὸ κατὰ τὴν τελευταίαν νύκτα ἐκείνην, τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἀνακειμένων,

to be worldly-minded like Judas is to despise the glorious reality resident in the Eucharist, that “spiritual food which surpasses the whole creation, visible and invisible, being a man and of the same vile nature [as Judas], will you not remain in thanksgiving in words and deeds?”⁵⁹ In the end, treating baptism or Eucharist with contempt or even indifference results from a profound lack of understanding the effects which they can produce: “Where there are mysteries, there is tranquility. So, let us touch this sacred sacrifice and cleanse our soul with much tranquility, much good order, and with fitting piety that we may be drawn to God into greater kindness [εὐνοία] and obtain eternal goods.”⁶⁰

Baptism naturally leads to the Eucharist and the latter forms a kind of completion (τέλος) of the former, but both flow from the redemptive work of Christ. Nothing in the previous history of salvation can compare to what Christ accomplished and what he transmits to the Christian in the mysteries. This becomes evident in Chrysostom’s baptismal catecheses where he contrasts the blood on the doorposts in Egypt with the blood of Christ. The former was a type (τύπος) of the latter, and only the latter is effective in protecting the Christian from the destroyer.⁶¹ The superiority of Christ’s blood induces John to introduce what he terms “a different mystical word.”⁶² The blood and water that flowed from Jesus’s side (see John 19:34) are “symbols” but not in the modern sense of bare signification. They are signs which carry the reality of what they signify:

The first was a symbol [σύμβολον] of baptism; the second of the mysteries. For this reason it did not say, “blood and water flowed out,” but first came water and then blood, since baptism comes first and then the mysteries. So, the soldier pierced his side, he dug through the wall of the holy temple and I found the treasure and

αὐτὸς προπηδήσας ἐξέβη. Ἐκεῖνον τοῖνον μιμοῦνται καὶ οὗτοι, οἱ πρὸ τῆς ἐσχάτης ἀποτηδῶντες εὐχαριστίας (PG 49:371).

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: ἀλλὰ σωματικῆς μὲν τροφῆς ἀπολαύων μετὰ τὴν τράπεζαν ἐπὶ εὐχὴν τρέπη, πνευματικῆς δὲ καὶ ὑπερβαλλούσης τὴν κτίσιν ἄπασαν τὴν ὀρατὴν καὶ τὴν ἀόρατον μετέχων, ἄνθρωπος ὢν καὶ τῆς εὐτελοῦς φύσεως, οὐ μένεις εὐχαριστῶν καὶ ῥήμασι καὶ πράγμασι; (PG 49:372).

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, *De baptismo Christi*: ἔνθα δὲ μυστήρια, πολλὴ σιγὴ. Μετὰ πολλῆς τοῖνον τῆς σιγῆς, μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς εὐταξίας, μετὰ τῆς προσηκούσης εὐλαβείας, τῆς ἱεράς ταύτης ἀπτώμεθα θυσίας, ἵνα εἰς πλείονα τὴν εὐνοίαν τὸν Θεὸν ἐπισπασώμεθα, καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκκαθάρωμεν, καὶ τῶν αἰωνίων ἐπιτύχωμεν ἀγαθῶν (PG 49:372).

⁶¹ See John Chrysostom, Catechesis III, in *Huit catéchèses baptismale inédites* [Eight Unpublished Baptismal Catecheses], trans. Antoine Wenger with notes, in SC 50 (Paris: Cerf, 1957), 158–62.

⁶² John Chrysostom, Catechesis III, no. 17.

received wealth. Thus, it was to the lamb too. The Jews sacrificed the sheep and I have found the fruit of salvation from the sacrifice.⁶³

John is commenting on the passage in John 19:31–36 which recounts the Roman soldier piercing Jesus’s side from which flowed “blood and water” (19:34). Strangely, John insists on the reverse order of “water and blood” to align with the temporal administration of the two sacraments. Scholars have puzzled over this because this is not the only place where John argues this way.⁶⁴ Scholars have suggested different solutions to this conundrum, but the general thrust of John’s point is sufficient for our purposes.⁶⁵ The flesh of Christ is a “holy temple” which housed the sacred waters of baptism and the precious blood of the Eucharist. The change from the third to the first person in the middle of the sentence of the last quotation is also significant. The soldier’s action had the effect that “I [ἐγώ] found the treasure and received wealth.” The Jews’ sacrificing the lamb also made it possible that “I [ἐγώ] have found the fruit of salvation as from the sacrifice.” The members of the new covenant Church are the beneficiaries of all salvation history, both before and during the earthly life of Christ:

“Water and blood came from (his) side.” Beloved, do not pass by the mystery. I have a different mystical word. I said that this blood and water were a symbol of baptism and of the mysteries. It was out of these two that the Church was born “through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” through baptism and through the mysteries. The symbols of baptism and the mysteries from (his) side. So, it was from his side then that Christ created the Church as it was from Adam’s side that he formed Eve.⁶⁶

When John exhorts his hearers not to let the mystery escape them, the choice of the singular “mystery” is significant. He normally uses the plural to designate the Eucharist, as he does above toward the end of this quotation. Speaking of “mystery” in the singular probably refers to the broader idea of the birth of the Church from the side of Christ. This means that

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Catechesis III, no. 16 (see notes by Wenger on *Huit catéchèses baptismale inédites*, 160–61).

⁶⁴ In Homily 85 on the Gospel of John, Chrysostom makes the same point (PG 59:463B). As Wenger notes, John does give the correct order on other occasions (*Huit catéchèses baptismale inédites*, 160n1).

⁶⁵ See Wenger’s discussion of suggested solutions (*Huit catéchèses baptismale inédites*, 160n1).

⁶⁶ Catechesis III, no 17.

the Church was born not only as a result of Christ's will, but from his very inner being. As Eve was taken from Adam ontologically, so the Church as Christ's bride derives ontologically from Christ himself.⁶⁷

John's teaching on baptism, both that of Jesus and of the Christian, means that there exists a deep linkage and inner unity between all the mysteries in Jesus's earthly life. His nativity, baptism, and death are all connected. What his Eucharistic language suggests is that those mysteries of Christ's earthly life are active and efficacious in the consummating sacrament of the Church.

The Healing Ministry of Christ

John preached on many of Christ's miracles, as one would expect when preaching on the Gospels.⁶⁸ One of his more striking expositions treats the story of the woman with a hemorrhage as it appears in Matthew 9:20–22.⁶⁹ This story is embedded in the account of Jairus the synagogue official who came to plead with Jesus for his dying daughter, and so it has the flavor of an inadvertent miracle within a greater miracle story. Unlike many other such stories, the hemorrhaging woman is not healed because of some deliberate action on Jesus's part. It is she who initiates the healing by touching Jesus's garment. In this John finds something very relevant to his audience:

The woman with a hemorrhage taught us how to find wisdom. But the Evangelist showed that Jesus went up into those parts for a long time: "The men knew the place and they sent them into the surrounding region and they brought the sick to him." But the extended time not only did not destroy her faith, but rather made it stronger by preserving her who was at the prime of life.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ John proceeds to draw on and develop marital imagery in the following sections (18, 19) of Catechesis III.

⁶⁸ Chrysostom never preached a series of expository homilies on Mark or Luke as he did on Matthew and John. He may have thought it unnecessary, since he had dealt with the major themes of Christ's life in treating Matthew. Here I select only one healing story for brevity's sake.

⁶⁹ The fullest account of this miracle is actually in the shorter Mark 5:25–34.

⁷⁰ Homily 50 on Matthew: Ἡ γὰρ αἰμορροοῦσα ἅπαντας ἐδίδαξε φιλοσοφεῖν. Δεικνὺς δὲ ὁ εὐαγγελιστῆς, ὅτι καὶ διὰ πολλοῦ χρόνου τοῖς μέρεσιν ἐπέβη, φησὶν, ὅτι Ἐπιγνόντες οἱ ἄνδρες τοῦ τόπου ἀπέστειλαν εἰς τὴν περίχωρον, καὶ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας. Ἄλλ' ὅμως ὁ χρόνος οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἐξέλυσε τὴν πίστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μείζονα εἰργάσατο, καὶ ἀκμάζουσαν διετήρησεν (PG 58:507).

This poor woman's faith becomes the centerpiece of John's reflections.⁷¹ Her wisdom lay in her perception that even a mere touch of Jesus's clothes would bring her the relief she had been seeking for twelve years. Of all the accounts in the Gospels, only Matthew uses the term "hem" or "edge" (κράσπεδον) of Jesus's garment. John finds this significant for his own audience as well. Where could a Christian in the late fourth or early fifth century find the hem of Jesus's garment to touch? John does not hesitate to introduce the Eucharist as the answer:

Dare to touch the hem of his clothes. Or rather, if we wish, we can have all of him. For Christ's body lies before us now. Not only his garment but his very body. Not only to touch but to eat and enjoy. So, let us approach with faith, each of us who is weak. For if those who touch the hem of his garment can draw out such great power, how much more can those who have him whole. And they can approach with faith not only to receive what lies here, but to touch with a pure heart, to be disposed in this way as approaching Christ himself. What then? Only when you hear his voice? But you see him lying here.⁷²

John's appeal moves from the lesser to the greater (*a minori ad majorem*). The Christians of his day may have been tempted to think that such a great miracle could not be repeated in their own day, that the historical Jesus was not present with them as he was to the hemorrhaging woman. John, however, sees the miracle recorded in the Gospel not as the greater but as the lesser of two realities: the historical and the Eucharistic. The Eucharistic presence of Christ allows for more than touching the hem of Jesus's clothes. It provides not only a visual reality ("Christ's body lies before us

⁷¹ Peter Chrysologus of Ravenna preached four sermons on this story in which he also emphasized the reality of this woman's faith. See Kenneth J. Howell, "The Eucharist as a Hermeneutical Lens in the Preaching of Peter Chrysologus," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 35, no. 2 (2019): 199–207.

⁷² Homily 50 on Matthew: Ἀψώμεθα τοίνυν καὶ ἡμεῖς τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ· μᾶλλον δὲ, ἐὰν θέλωμεν, ὅλον αὐτὸν ἔχομεν. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ πρόκειται νῦν ἡμῖν· οὐ τὸ ἱμάτιον μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα· οὐχ ὥστε ἄψασθαι μόνον, ἀλλ' ὥστε καὶ φαγεῖν καὶ ἐμφορηθῆναι. Προσερχώμεθα τοίνυν μετὰ πίστεως, ἕκαστος ἀσθένειαν ἔχων. Εἰ γὰρ οἱ τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ ἀψάμενοι τοσαύτην εἴλκυσαν δύναμιν, πόσω μᾶλλον οἱ ὅλον αὐτὸν κατέχοντες; Τὸ δὲ προσελθεῖν μετὰ πίστεως οὐ τὸ λαβεῖν ἐστὶ μόνον τὸ προκειμένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ μετὰ καθαρᾶς καρδίας ἄψασθαι, τὸ οὕτω διακεῖσθαι, ὡς αὐτῷ προσιόντας τῷ ἄψασθαι, τὸ οὕτω διακεῖσθαι, ὡς αὐτῷ προσιόντας τῷ Χριστῷ. Τί γὰρ, εἰ μὴ φωνῆς ἀκούεις; Ἄλλ' ὄρας αὐτὸν κείμενον (PG 58:507; Solano, *Textos Eucaristicos Primitivos*, 1:783).

now”), but the mystery of consuming his very body (“not only to touch but to eat and enjoy”). In this way, the Christian consuming the Eucharist is in a superior position to the suffering woman. Yet, like the bleeding woman, every person too is weakened by sin (“each of us who is weak”). The only remedy is the same as the woman manifested: faith. Approaching with faith allows one to eat the same body of Christ that healed the woman. The touch which Christians can have is more than the woman’s. It is an inner, spiritual touch (“to touch with a pure heart”) that reaches not the hem of Jesus’s garment but into his very heart.

The Passion and Death of Jesus

Of all the figures of Jesus’s Passion contained in the biblical narratives, few captured Chrysostom’s imagination as completely as that of Judas. John never ceases to marvel at the depths of treacherous depravity of which Judas is the archetype; and he uses Judas as an opportunity to exhort his congregants to a holy and faithful life. We possess two homilies bearing the name of Judas, both of which contain one of Chrysostom’s favorite moral subjects—the forgiveness and love of one’s enemies. The first of these homilies, however, also contains material on the Eucharist in some surprising ways.⁷³ Nothing of what John says here about the Eucharist makes any sense apart from his thoughts on the Savior and Judas. The contrast could not be starker:

He who was betrayed saved the inhabited world.
He who betrayed him lost his own soul.
He who was betrayed sits on the Father’s right hand in the heavens.
He who betrayed him is now in Hell awaiting inevitable punishment.⁷⁴

Yet John draws very surprising inferences from his negative judgment of Judas. He exhorts his hearers to lament, not the Master’s fate but Judas’s, “Weep and groan for him; grieve for him since the Master shed tears for him.”⁷⁵ Chrysostom sees Jesus’s attitudes toward Judas as based on his love of humanity (φιλιανθρωπία):

⁷³ John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae*, in *PG* 49:373–92.

⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae*: Ὁ μὲν γὰρ παραδοθεὶς τὴν οἰκουμένην ἔσωσεν, ὁ δὲ προδοὺς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν ἀπώλεσε· καὶ ὁ μὲν προδοθεὶς ἐν δεξιᾷ κάθηται τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ὁ δὲ παραδοὺς ἐν ἄδου νῦν ἐστι, τὴν ἀπαραίτητον ἀναμένων κόλασιν (*PG* 49:373).

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae* (*PG* 49:373).

O how great is the Master's kind heart! The One betrayed suffers pain for the betrayer. When He saw him, He was troubled and said, "one of you will betray me." For whom was he despondent? At once showing His own love, he taught us that it is right to sing a dirge not for the one who suffers evil but for the one who does evil. What is worse than this? Suffering evil is not evil but doing evil is. Suffering evil procures the kingdom of heaven, whereas doing evil becomes the cause of Gehenna and punishment. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:10).⁷⁶

On the basis of Jesus's example Chrysostom urges his people to show mercy, kindness, and forgiveness for their enemies. If Jesus could love Judas even amidst "the unspeakable madness," how much more should his followers forgive lesser sins. Such divine love overcomes the treachery of others. These thoughts lead John to the shedding of Christ's blood, which in turn leads him to the Eucharist:

O Christ's love for humanity! O the madness of Judas! O the lunacy! Judas sold him for thirty pieces of silver; Christ after this did not refuse his blood to be sold to give the forgiveness of sins for him who sold him. . . . Yes, Judas was present and he shared in the holy table. As Christ washed his feet along with the other disciples, so he partook of the holy table that Judas might have no excuse if he continued in evil.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae*: "Ὡ πόση εὐσπλαγχνία τοῦ Δεσπότου! ὁ προδοθεὶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ προδότος ἀλγεῖ. Ἰδὼν γὰρ αὐτὸν, ἐταράχθη, φησὶ, καὶ εἶπεν· Εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με. Τίνος ἔνεκεν ἠθύμησεν; Ὁμοῦ καὶ τὴν φιλοστοργίαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιδεικνύμενος, καὶ διδάσκων ἡμᾶς, ὅτι οὐ τὸν πάσχοντα κακῶς, ἀλλὰ τὸν ποιῶντα κακῶς, τοῦτον θρηνεῖν πανταχοῦ δίκαιον· τοῦτον θρηνεῖν πανταχοῦ δίκαιον. Τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκείνου χειρὸν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐκείνο μὲν οὐ κακὸν, τὸ κακῶς παθεῖν, κακὸν δὲ τὸ ποιῆσαι κακῶς. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ κακῶς παθεῖν, τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν προξενεῖ, τὸ δὲ κακῶς ποιῆσαι αἴτιον ἡμῖν τῆς γεέννης καὶ τῆς κολάσεως γίνεται. Μακάριοι γὰρ, φησὶν, οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἔνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (PG 49:373).

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae*: "Ὡ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ φιλάνθρωπίας! ὦ τῆς τοῦ Ἰούδα παραπληξίας! ὦ τῆς μανίας! ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐπώλησεν αὐτὸν τριάκοντα δηναρίων· ὁ Χριστὸς δὲ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο οὐ παρητήσατο αὐτὸ τὸ αἷμα τὸ πραθὲν δοῦναι εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν τῷ πεπρακότε, εἶ γε ἠθέλησε. Καὶ γὰρ παρῆν Ἰούδας, καὶ μετείχε τῆς ἱερᾶς τραπέζης. Ὡσπερ γὰρ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἐνίψε μαθητῶν, οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς μετέσχε τραπέζης, ἵνα μηδεμίαν ἀπολογίαν ἔχη πρόφασιν, ἐὰν ἐπιμείνη τῇ πονηρίᾳ (PG 49:380).

Judas's partaking of the first Eucharist was an opportunity for repentance or for making his betrayal more egregious if he did not repent. His madness, his lunacy, lay in his obstinate refusal to turn back from his crime. This in turn leads John to exhort his congregants to proper preparation for receiving from the holy table. Judas provides the example of one who was poisoned with evil intent; his actions are to be avoided at all costs. "Let them not carry one thing in their mouth and another in their heart."⁷⁸

The Christian at the sacred table is in precisely the same position as Judas: "Christ is present and he who once arranged that table and now also arranges this one. For it is not a man who makes the gifts become the body and blood of Christ."⁷⁹ John sees the holy table, the sacred altar, as identical with that historic table of the Last Supper, but even more, he sees Christ as the principal actor:

It is Christ who was crucified on our behalf. The priest stands fulfilling the form [σχῆμα] by uttering those words, but the power and the grace are from God. He says, "This is my body." This utterance transforms the gifts.⁸⁰

Here we have a somewhat rare but clear affirmation in John's homilies of what seems to have been the universal belief of the ancient Church, East and West. The East has generally emphasized the Epiclesis, or the calling down of the Holy Spirit, as the active agent in the transformation of the natural gifts, while the West has emphasized the power of the consecratory words.⁸¹ Here, however, John also emphasizes the power of the words

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, *De proditiōne Judae* (PG 49:380).

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, *De proditiōne Judae* (PG 49:380).

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, *De proditiōne Judae*: αὐτὸς ὁ σταυρωθεὶς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν Χριστός. Σχῆμα πληρῶν ἔστηκεν ὁ ἱερεὺς, τὰ ῥήματα φθεγγόμενος ἐκεῖνα· ἡ δὲ δύναμις καὶ ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστι. Τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα, φησί. Τοῦτο τὸ ῥήμα μεταρρυθμίζει τὰ προκειμένα (PG 49:380). Battifol comments, "Chrysostom makes his point more precisely, namely, that the conversion or sanctification of the gifts is produced by the same word of Christ pronounced by the bishop" (*L'Eucharistie*, 415).

⁸¹ In the Western church, Ambrose speaks of the transforming power of Christ's consecratory words: "But if a human blessing could accomplish something so great, what can we say of the divine consecration itself where the very words of the Lord and Savior are at work? For that sacrament which you receive is made [*conficitur*] by the word of Christ. If Elijah's word accomplished so much, will not Christ's word be powerful enough to change the nature [*species*] of the elements? You read about the entirety of the works in the universe, "Because he said it and it happened; he commanded and they were created." So, the word of Christ, which was able to make from nothing [*ex nihilo*] what did not exist, can it not change

spoken by Christ. While the priest plays an indispensable human role, it is Christ who is the supernatural agent behind the words. The expression “this utterance transforms the gifts” (τοῦτο τὸ ῥῆμα μεταρρυθμίζει τὰ προκείμενα) suggests something similar to what is more commonly expressed in the West. John’s choice of the verb μεταρρυθμίζει is an unusual one.⁸² While the verb generally means “transform” or “change the form of something,” we have few clues as to the deeper meaning that John may have seen in the word. The clearest explanation is John’s own and follows immediately upon this sentence:

It is like the word that said, “Grow and increase, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). It was said once, but through all time it works to enable our nature to bring forth children. In the same way, this word once spoken effects the perfected sacrifice on each table in the churches from that time until now, even until his coming.⁸³

As does Ambrose, John likens the consecratory words to the original creation and the power of divine speech. This analogy underscores the sacred character of the moment of holy communion. Like Judas, the Christian comes face to face, as it were, with the reality of who Jesus is. And so John points back to Judas’s shameless betrayal as a warning:

So then let no one be deceitful, let no one be full of evil with any poison in his mind so that his reception may not lead to condemnation. And then, after receiving the offering, the Devil rushed into Judas without any thought of the Lord’s body that was there. He looked only at the shamelessness of Judas. This happened to

what does exist into something else? For it is not anything less to bring about new things than it is to change their natures” (*De mysteriis* 9.52).

⁸² The word does not occur in the New Testament. In Lampe’s listing it is used in a Eucharistic context only in Chrysostom (G. W. H. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], 860). There are twenty instances in the Chrysostom corpus. The meaning is glossed by μεταπλάττειν (“remold, reshape”) in his homilies on Hebrews where, speaking in God’s voice, he says: “Thus, I am able to remold and transform them [διὸ καὶ μεταπλάττειν καὶ μεταρρυθμίζειν αὐτὰ δύναμαι].”

⁸³ John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae*: καὶ καθάπερ ἡ φωνὴ ἐκείνη ἢ λέγουσα. Αὐξάνεσθε, καὶ πληθύνεσθε, καὶ πληρώσατε τὴν γῆν, ἐρρέθη μὲν ἅπαξ, διὰ παντὸς δὲ τοῦ χρόνου γίνεται ἔργω ἐνδυναμοῦσα τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἡμετέραν πρὸς παιδοποιαν. οὕτω καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὕτη ἅπαξ λεχθεῖσα καθ’ ἐκάστην τράπεζαν ἐν ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις ἐξ ἐκείνου μέχρι σήμερον καὶ μέχρι τῆς αὐτοῦ παρουσίας, τὴν θυσίαν ἀπηρτισμένην ἐργάζεται (PG 49:380).

teach you that to those who partake of the divine mysteries in an unworthy manner, it is these that the Devil rushes into and enters continuously as was the case with Judas at that time.⁸⁴

One can hardly imagine a stronger deterrent for the Christian approaching holy communion than to avoid the sin of Judas, but John takes his exhortation beyond the moment of communion. He equates Judas's betrayal with a Christian's refusal to forgive his enemies by asking, "How can this be and by what means can it happen?" His answer is one that reverberates through his homilies: "If anyone has something against an enemy, expel the anger, heal the wound, banish the enmity that you may receive healing from the table. You are coming to an awesome and holy sacrifice."⁸⁵ The very nature of the sacrifice itself, coming as it does from Christ's transformative words, calls the Christian to the same love of humanity (φιλανθρωπία) that Jesus had for Judas.

In many ways the death of Jesus takes the most prominent position in John's preaching. Like other Eastern Fathers, he sees the Cross as a triumph over evil and the devil. For him, as for them, death destroyed death. Christ turned the instruments of deception against the deceiver and overcame him who had overcome the weakness of the first human pair. John is supremely happy to focus on the Cross. Nowhere is this more evident than in his *Homily on the Cemetery and the Cross*.⁸⁶ Although it is difficult to know when and where many of Chrysostom's homilies were preached, J. N. D. Kelly places this one in the cemetery outside Antioch on a Good Friday.⁸⁷ As John explains, it was the custom of their Antiochene predecessors to journey out to the cemetery north of the city on that occasion, but John is ever after a deeper explanation, which he happily finds in Hebrews 13:12–13: "Therefore Jesus, that he might sanctify the

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, *De proditione Judae*: Μηδεις τοινυν ὑπουλος ἔστω, μηδεις πονηρίας γέμων, μηδεις ἰὸν ἔχων ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ, ἵνα μὴ εἰς γέμων, μηδεις ἰὸν ἔχων ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ, ἵνα μὴ εἰς κατάκριμα μεταλαμβάνῃ. Καὶ γὰρ τότε, μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν προσφορὰν, ἐπεπήδησε τῷ Ἰούδα ὁ διάβολος, οὐ τοῦ σώματος καταφρονήσας τοῦ Δεσποτικοῦ, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἀναισχυντιαν καταφρονῶν τοῦ Ἰούδα, ἵνα μάθῃς, ὅτι τοῖς ἀναξίως μετέχουσι τῶν θείων μυστηρίων, τούτοις μάλιστα ἐπιτηδᾶ καὶ ἐπιβαίνει συνεχῶς ὁ διάβολος, ὡσπερ καὶ τῷ Ἰούδα τότε (PG 49:380).

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, *De proditione Judae*: Ἐὰν ἔχῃς τι κατὰ τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, ἔξελε τὴν ὀργὴν, θεράπευσον τὴν πληγὴν, λύσον τὴν ἐχθραν, ἵνα λάβῃς θεράσον τὴν πληγὴν, λύσον τὴν ἐχθραν, ἵνα λάβῃς θεραπείαν ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης. θυσία γὰρ προσέρχῃ φρικτῆ καὶ ἁγία (PG 49:381).

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, *De cemeterio et cruce*, in PG 49:393–98.

⁸⁷ Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 88.

people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate. So then, let us go outside the camp to him bearing his reproach.”⁸⁸ But then there were many memorials of martyrs (μαρτύριον) within the city. Why come to this particular place of martyrdom? John reminds them of what their own language readily provided: “cemetery” (κοιμητήριον) meant a place to sleep. From this he draws the all-important lesson that Christ changed death to sleep for all who belong to him. Christ’s victory over death then becomes the occasion of exultant joy.

Although *The Cemetery and the Cross* is somewhat shorter than most of John’s homilies, it is full of powerful, gripping language.⁸⁹ Thinking of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:54 (quoting Isaiah) about death being swallowed up in victory, Chrysostom hails the Cross as a war memorial:

The Cross is
the war memorial against the demons,
the sword against sin,
the blade that Christ used to prick the serpent. </EXT1>

The Cross is
is the will of the Father,
the glory of the Only Begotten Son,
the Spirit’s transport of joy,
the world [κόσμος] of angels,
the safety of your Church,
the boast of Paul,
the wall of the Saints,
the light of the whole earth.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ John attributes all his quotations from Hebrews to Paul. Although modern scholars doubt that Paul wrote Hebrews, John follows the unanimous tradition in the East.

⁸⁹ The Greek text has 2,356 words. Most of John’s homilies ranged between four thousand and five thousand words.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, *De ceterio et cruce*: σταυρός τὸ κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων τρόπαιον, ἢ κατὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας μάχαιρα, τὸ ξίφος, ὃ τὸν ὄφιν ἐκέντησεν ὁ Χριστός· σταυρός τὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς θέλημα, ἢ τοῦ Μονογενοῦς δόξα, τὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἀγαλλίαμα, ὁ τῶν ἀγγέλων κόσμος, σῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἢ ἀσφάλεια, τὸ καύχημα Παύλου, τὸ τῶν ἁγίων τείχος, τὸ φῶς τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀπάσης (PG 49:396–97). I have arranged this section in a semi-poetic form justified on the basis of its contents. No printed version has it thus. Chrysostom also preached two homilies treating the thief on the cross who found forgiveness from Christ (see Luke 23:39–43) Although neither has any references to the Eucharist, they contain similar encomia of the Cross.

The “war memorial” (τρόπαιον) is not used in the New Testament, but the word was all too familiar from John’s military culture and hallowed by previous Christian writers.⁹¹ Although Chrysostom’s favorite Saint Paul did not use the word, the latter’s words in Colossians 2: 14–15 certainly justify the term for John. The war memorial captured John’s imagination as a means of exulting in the triumph of the Cross.

Mind what is poured out. It is the blood that wiped away the written condemnation of our sins. This is the blood that cleansed your soul, that washed away the stain, that triumphed over the evil rulers and authorities. For he stripped the rulers and authorities and displayed them openly by triumphantly parading them on the Cross (Col 2:15). The war memorial has many symbols of victory, he says. The spoils of war hang on high on the Cross above. A noble king, once he wins the most difficult battle, places the armor, the shield, and the weapons of the tyrant and of the defeated soldiers up high on the memorial. So also Christ, once he won the war against the devil, hung high upon the Cross all his weapons: death and the curse, as if it were a war memorial that all may see the memorial, the powers above in heaven, and men below on earth, as well as the evil demons that had been destroyed.⁹²

The mention of the blood poured out is a reference not only to the historic crucifixion, but to the Eucharistic celebration presently taking place. When John says “mind” or “take note” (ἐννόησον), it is the second in a pair, the first of which refers to Christ’s body on the altar:

⁹¹ See Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. *τρόπαιον* for earlier Christian writers.

⁹² John Chrysostom, *De cetero et cruce*: Ἐννόησον τί ποτέ ἐστι τὸ κεχυμένον· αἷμά ἐστιν, αἷμα ὃ τὸ χειρόγραφον τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπήλειπεν· αἷμα ὃ τὴν ψυχὴν σου ἐκάθηρεν, ὃ τὴν κηλῖδα ἀπέπλυνεν, ὃ τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐθριάμβευσεν. Ἀπεκδυσάμενος γὰρ, φησὶ, τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ θριαμβεύσας ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ. Πολλὰ, φησὶ, τὸ τρόπαιον ἔχει τῆς νίκης τὰ σύμβολα· τὰ λάφυρα κρέματα ἄνω ἐφ’ ὑψηλοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ. Καθάπερ γὰρ βασιλεὺς γενναῖος πόλεμον νικήσας χαλεπώτατον, τὸν θώρακα καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα καὶ τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ τυράννου καὶ τῶν στρατιωτῶν τῶν ἡττηθέντων ἐφ’ ὑψηλοῦ τοῦ τροπαιοῦ τίθησιν· οὕτω καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὸν πόλεμον νικήσας τὸν πρὸς τὸν διάβολον, τὰ ὄπλα αὐτοῦ πάντα, τὸν θάνατον, τὴν κατάραν ἐκρέμασεν ἐφ’ ὑψηλοῦ τοῦ σταυροῦ, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τροπαιοῦ τινὸς, ἵνα πάντες τὸ τρόπαιον βλέπωσιν, αἱ ἄνω δυνάμεις, αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, οἱ κάτω ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, αὐτοὶ οἱ πονηροὶ δαίμονες οἱ ἡττηθέντες (PG 49:398).

BODY:

Mind the offering and from what cause it came. He was slain for your sake and you are abandoning him who was sacrificed when you see him. He said, "Where the carcass is, there the eagles gather" [Matt 34:28] We approach not as eagles, but as dogs. How great is our shamelessness!⁹³

BLOOD:

Mind what is poured out. It is the blood that wiped away the written condemnation of our sins. This is the blood that cleansed your soul, that washed away the stain, that triumphed over the evil rulers and authorities.⁹⁴

The Eucharistic connection is strengthened when we hear John saying that the altar of the cemetery is as if one were with Jesus: "We are about to stand, not next to an empty tomb, but next to the table itself that has the Lamb."⁹⁵ One can easily imagine John standing before a tomb used as an altar while he preaches this encomium of the Cross. He seems keenly aware of being both an instrument of God and simultaneously only a human one whose role is to invoke the presence of the Spirit who will actually bring the Christ of the Cross to the altar in the cemetery:

When the priest stands in front of the table stretching out his hands to heaven, calling on the Holy Spirit to come down and touch the offerings, there should be much silence, much quietness whenever the Spirit gives the grace, whenever He comes down and touches the offerings. When you see the Lamb slaughtered and prepared, will you also introduce disturbance and confusion, then rivalry and ridicule? How can you enjoy this sacrifice while approaching this table with so much confusion?⁹⁶

⁹³ John Chrysostom, *De cimiterio et cruce*: Ἐννόησον τί ποτέ ἐστὶ τὸ προκειμένον, καὶ πόθεν ἔλαβε τὴν αἰτίαν· ἐσφάγη διὰ σέ, καὶ σὺ ἐγκαταλιμπάνεις αὐτὸν ἐσφαγιασμένον ὀρώων. Ὅπου τὸ πτώμα, φησὶν, ἐκεῖ καὶ οἱ ἀετοί. Ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐχ ὡς ἀετοί, ἀλλ' ὡς κύνες προσερχόμεθα· τοσαύτη ημῶν ἡ ἀναισχυντία (PG 49:398).

⁹⁴ See the Greek in note 92.

⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, *De cimiterio et cruce* (PG 49: 397).

⁹⁶ John Chrysostom, *De cimiterio et cruce*: ὅταν ἐστήκη πρὸ τῆς τραπέζης ὁ ἱερεὺς, τὰς χεῖρας ἀνατείνων εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν, καλῶν τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τοῦ παραγενέσθαι καὶ ἄψασθαι τῶν προκειμένων, πολλὴ ἡσυχία, πολλὴ σιγή· ὅταν διδῶ τὴν χάριν τὸ Πνεῦμα, ὅταν κατέλθῃ, ὅταν ἄψῃται τῶν προκειμένων, ὅταν ἴδῃς τὸ πρόβατον ἐσφαγιασμένον καὶ ἀπηρτισμένον, τότε θόρυβον, τότε ταραχὴν, τότε φιλονεικίαν, τότε λοιδορίαν

John's call to sobriety and silence seems to arise from his realization of all that the Cross of Christ accomplished. The Eucharist itself is a kind of war memorial, in a manner of speaking, for it too brings the reality of death's defeat to the present. As Christ is present on the table, so too are the hosts of heaven, for "where Christ is, there too is heaven"⁹⁷ Nothing could more succinctly capture the triumph of the Cross than the fact that Christ himself came to set free those in prison:

A virgin, and wood—these are the symbols of our defeat. The virgin was Eve, for she had not yet known a man. The wood was a tree. And death was Adam's price. But look! Again there is a virgin, wood, and death. These symbols of our defeat are now the symbols of victory. Instead of Eve there is Mary. Instead of the wood of the knowledge of good and evil, there is the wood of the Cross; Instead of Adam's death, the death of Christ. You see, the very things by which he [the devil] conquered, by these he was defeated.⁹⁸

So the defeat of the devil, evil, and death results from the presence of Christ. Christ took heaven even down to Hades to destroy the last enemy. Now through the Eucharist that same victory belongs to the Christian. No wonder John never tires of exhorting his congregation to silence, sobriety, calmness, and tranquility.

The Resurrection of Christ

For Christians of most ages the resurrection of Christ has been an occasion of great joy, and it was certainly considered the high point of the liturgical year in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. This was so not only because of the inherent reality of new life in Christ but also perhaps because the season of Pascha followed upon the long and arduous fasting of Lent. So,

ἐπεισάγει; καὶ πῶς δυνήσῃ τῆς θυσίας ἀπολαῦσαι ταύτης, μετὰ τοσαύτης ταραχῆς τῆ τραπέζῃ προσίων ταύτη (PG 49:398).

⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, *De cemeterio et cruce*: ὅπου γὰρ ὁ Χριστός, ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ οὐρανός (PG 49:395). This is a pithy but potent expression of John's faith in the real presence of Christ on the altar.

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, *De cemeterio et cruce*: Παρθένος καὶ ξύλον, καὶ θάνατος τῆς ἡττης ἡμῶν ἦν τὰ σύμβολα. Παρθένος ἦν ἡ Εὐα· οὐπω γὰρ ἄνδρα ἐγίνωσκε· ξύλον ἦν τὸ δένδρον, καὶ θάνατος ἦν τὸ ἐπιτίμιον τοῦ Ἀδάμ. Ἄλλ' ἰδοῦ, πάλιν παρθένος καὶ ξύλον καὶ θάνατος, τὰ τῆς ἡττης σύμβολα ταῦτα, καὶ τῆς νίκης ἐγένετο σύμβολα. Ἀντὶ γὰρ τῆς Εὐας ἢ Μαριάμ· ἀντὶ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ εἰδέναι τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ πονηρὸν, τὸ ξύλον τοῦ σταυροῦ· ἀντὶ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Ἀδάμ ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Εἶδες, δι' ὧν ἐνίκησε, διὰ τούτων αὐτὸν ἡττώμενον (PG 49:396).

an occasion of spiritual joy could easily degenerate into a distorted form of celebration. In fact, John was so concerned about sinful behavior of his fellow Christians that he devoted an entire homily on the resurrection to correcting the drunken behavior of some.⁹⁹ The celebration of Easter and the resurrected Christ apparently occasioned inebriation and riotous behavior for Christians. Perhaps after the rigors of Lenten fasting, the Christians of Antioch and/or Constantinople entered the Pascha season with an immoderate attitude. Chrysostom picks up on Paul's warning against drunkenness in Ephesians 5:18 ("Do not be drunk with wine, in which is excess") and explains two salient points. First, he contrasts inebriation by means of ordinary wine with a spiritual inebriation that leads, not to dissolution, but to sobriety and joy:

Let us get drunk with this [kind of] drunkenness. Let us abstain from that other kind that we may not disgrace the present feast. For the present feast is not only of the earth but of heaven as well. Today there is joy on earth; there is joy in heaven. If there is joy in heaven when one sinner turns back, how much more is there joy in heaven when the whole world was snatched from the hands of the devil. Now the angels are skipping, now the archangels rejoice, now the Cherubim and the Seraphim celebrate the present feast. They are not ashamed of their fellow servants but rejoice with our good things. Even if our grace comes from the Master, yet our happiness [ἡδονή] is common to all. And what do I say of these fellow servants? Their Master and ours is himself not ashamed to feast with us.¹⁰⁰

It is this spiritual drunkenness that Chrysostom wants for his people—to be filled with a higher joy that makes all other joys superfluous. But in his

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione domini nostri Jesu Christi*, in *PG* 50:433–42.

¹⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, *Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione domini nostri Jesu Christi*: Ταύτην μεθύωμεν τὴν μέθην· ἐκείνης δὲ ἀπεχώμεθα, ἵνα μὴ καταισχνύωμεν τὴν παροῦσαν ἑορτήν· ἑορτὴ γὰρ ἢ παροῦσα οὐχὶ τῆς γῆς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. Σήμερον ἐν γῆ χαρὰ, σήμερον ἐν οὐρανῷ χαρὰ· εἰ γὰρ ἐνὸς ἁμαρτωλοῦ ἐπιστρέφοντος, χαρὰ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ οὐρανοῦ, πολλῷ μᾶλλον τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀπάσης ἐξαρπασθείσης τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ διαβόλου χαρὰ ἔσται ἐν οὐρανῷ. Νῦν σκιρτῶσιν ἄγγελοι, νῦν χαίρουσιν ἀρχάγγελοι, νῦν τὰ Χερουβιμ καὶ τὰ Σεραφίμ μεθ' ἡμῶν ἑορτάζει τὴν παροῦσαν ἑορτήν· οὐκ ἐπαισχύνονται τοὺς συνδούλους, ἀλλὰ συγχαίρουσι τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἀγαθοῖς. Εἰ γὰρ ἡμετέρα ἢ χάρις ἢ παρὰ τοῦ Δεσπότη, ἀλλὰ κοινὴ καὶ ἐκείνων ἢ ἡδονή. Καὶ τί λέγω τοὺς συνδούλους; Αὐτὸς ὁ Δεσπότης αὐτῶν τε καὶ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται συνεορτάζειν (*PG* 50:436).

allusion to the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 (“If there is joy in heaven when one sinner turns back”) John raises a second point that brings him back to a favorite theme, the neglect of those in need. John makes a link between drunkenness and the misuse of resources such that the poor are deprived. In explaining what drunkenness leads to, he says, “we call the young dissolute who receive their father's inheritance and taking everything together, they do not think about who might need it and then give. Rather, taking clothes, gold, and silver, they divide their paternal inheritance among prostitutes and lechers. Such is drunkenness.”¹⁰¹

Drunkenness turns the sinner in on himself and causes him to forget the very purpose of having worldly goods. But the mystical table is a reminder of the inherent solidarity which in fact all people have and which should impel the Christian to charity:

There is only one table for the rich and the poor. Even if someone is rich, he cannot add anything to the table. And if he is poor, he is served at table no less of communion because of his poverty. For grace is divine. And why are you amazed if there are rich and poor here? One and the same table is set for the King who has a crown, and a purple robe, and who exerts power. Yes, it is for that King and for the poor man who sits begging for alms. Such things are the Lord's gifts. He does not distribute to those who are worthy but to those who come of their own freewill and with understanding.¹⁰²

The resurrection of Christ stands as a beacon to call all Christians to the sobriety of new life, but that new life is never lived in isolation. It is a call away from self-indulgence and to service of others. In the Pascha celebration John is begging his people to turn away from the cultural customs of the season to a deeper faith. He hopes that the superior joy of being inebriated with Christ through communion will instill the same attitudes and actions that Jesus himself demonstrated. Love for the salvation of others

¹⁰¹ John Chrysostom, *Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione domini nostri Jesu Christi* (PG 50:434).

¹⁰² John Chrysostom, *Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione domini nostri Jesu Christi*: μία τράπεζα καὶ τῷ πλουσίῳ καὶ τῷ πένητι, καὶ ἂν πλούσιός τις ᾖ, οὐδὲν τῇ τραπέζῃ προσθεῖναι δύναται· καὶ πένης, οὐδὲν ἔλαττον παρὰ τῆς πενίας τὰ τῆς κοινωνίας διακίσειται· θεία γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ χάρις· καὶ τί θαυμάζεις εἰ πλουσίῳ καὶ πένητι; Αὐτῷ γὰρ τῷ βασιλεῖ τῷ τὸ διάδημα περικειμένῳ, τῷ τὴν ἀλουργίδα ἔχοντι, τῷ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐγκεχειρισμένῳ τῆς γῆς, ἐκείνῳ τῷ βασιλεῖ, καὶ τῷ πτωχῷ τῷ πρὸς τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην καθεζομένῳ μία τράπεζα πρόκειται. Τοιαῦτα τὰ δῶρα τὰ Δεσποτικά· οὐ τοῖς ἀξιώμασι διαιρεῖ τὴν κοινωνίαν, ἀλλὰ τῇ προαιρέσει καὶ τῇ διανοίᾳ (PG 50:437).

and their temporal welfare are natural extensions of the resurrection life in Christ. The Eucharist is a call to live that life of Christ in service to others.

Golden-Mouth Genius

The eponymic fame of John as the “Golden Mouth” (Chrysostom) seems well deserved, but the reasons for this praise are more diverse and subtle than his mere rhetorical skill. Although John’s interpretative approach to Scripture has been characterized as literal and historical, we have seen that his lens on Gospel texts operates at a much wider scope than the modern connotations of “literal” and “historical” suggest. John was preeminently concerned about the moral character of his hearers’ lives, but he always gauged that character by the theological framework of Scripture, especially as expounded by the Apostle Paul. Margaret Mitchell, for example, has amply demonstrated how dear Paul was to the golden-mouthed preacher.¹⁰³ John’s homilies on Ephesians demonstrate how important he thinks the Eucharist is for the Church:

But since the subject is the Lord’s body, let us also recall him who was crucified, nailed, sacrificed. If you are the body of Christ, bear the Cross, for he himself bore it too. Bear the spitting, bear the slaps, bear the nails. Such was his body. That body was without sin, for it says, “he did not commit sin nor was guile found in his mouth” (Isa 53:9). His hands were only for benefitting others. They would do anything for those who asked. Nothing inappropriate came out of his mouth. “You have a demon,” he heard, and he answered nothing back. Now since the subject has to do with the body for us, as many of us as share the body, we taste this blood; ponder that in communion we share in him who makes himself no different nor divides himself because we taste of him as he sits above, [who] is worshiped by angels, as we are close to the power of the Undeified One.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Margaret Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Homily 3 on Ephesians: Ἄλλ’ ἐπειδὴ περὶ σώματος Κυριακοῦ ὁ λόγος, φέρε, καὶ περὶ ἐκείνου μνημονεύσωμεν, τοῦ σταυρωθέντος, τοῦ προσηλωθέντος, τοῦ θυομένου. Εἰ σῶμα εἶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, φέρε τὸν σταυρόν· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ἤνεγκε· φέρε ἐμπτύσματα, φέρε ῥαπίσματα, φέρε ἥλους. Τοιοῦτον ἐκεῖνο τὸ σῶμα ἦν. Τὸ σῶμα ἐκεῖνο ἀναμάρτητον ἦν· Ἀμαρτίαν γὰρ, φησὶν, οὐκ ἐποίησεν, οὐδὲ δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ εὐρέθη· αἱ χεῖρες αὐτοῦ πρὸς εὐεργεσίαν ἅπαντα ἔπραττον τῶν δεομένων· οὐδὲν τὸ στόμα ἐξέβαλε τῶν οὐ προσηκόντων· Δαιμόνιον ἔχεις, ἤκουσε, καὶ οὐδὲν ἀντίπευ· Ἐπεὶ δὲ περὶ σώματος ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος, ὅσοι μετέχομεν τοῦ σώματος, ὅσοι τοῦ αἵματος ἀπογευόμεθα τούτου, ἐννοεῖτε ὅτι τοῦ μηδὲν ἐκείνου διαφέροντος οὐδὲ διεστῶτος

As John discusses the Pauline notion of the Church as the body of Christ, he is drawn to consider the historic, physical body of Christ which is also present in the Eucharist. The body that the faithful partake of in communion is identified with the body that hung on the Cross and which is manifested in the life of the Church. This suggests that in his mind a fundamental unity exists between the events of salvation history and the ongoing life of the Church as Christ's body. We observed above that for John there is a fundamental unity between the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist in his appeal to John 19:34. The water and the blood that flowed from Jesus's side are both a sign of the reality of his death and the source of sacramental grace for the Church. So, too, in speaking of the relation of the Eucharist to the historic death of Christ, John affirms that Christ is the one "who makes himself no different nor divides himself." This means that there is a fundamental unity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the sacraments.

Although the section from the *Homily on Ephesians* (no. 3) above seems vivid enough, John outdoes himself by taking the voice of Christ in a graphic description of his suffering demonstrating his pursuant love. The scourging and maltreatment Christ received in his earthly life are matched by Christ's willingness to be chewed and consumed by the faithful:

He raised us up and seated us at the right hand of the Father (Eph 2). The cherubim and the seraphim worship you. All the angelic powers, rulers, authorities, thrones, lordships through the first fruit. Do not accuse the body which enjoys such a great honor, before which the bodiless powers tremble! But what can I say? I will display this love-charm not only with these but also with the things I suffered. I was spit on. I was beaten with a cudgel. I emptied myself of glory. I left my Father and came to you who hated me and turned away and who cannot bear to hear my name. I pursued and ran after you that I might take hold of you. I united and joined you together with myself.¹⁰⁵

μετέχομεν πρὸς μετοχὴν, ὅτι ἐκείνου τοῦ ἄνω καθημένου, τοῦ προσκυνουμένου παρὰ ἀγγέλων, τοῦ τῆς ἀκηράτου δυνάμεως ἐγγύς, τούτου ἀπογευόμεθα (Solano, *Textos Eucarísticos Primitivos*, 1:912).

¹⁰⁵ Homily 15 on 1 Timothy (PG 62, 586). For analysis, see Ashish J. Naidu, *Transformed in Christ: Christology and the Christian Life in John Chrysostom*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 188 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 143–44. I thank the anonymous reviewer of the journal for this invaluable suggestion.

Even when preaching on a Pauline text, John's mind will not stray very far from the reality of Christ's earthly life that is communicated through the Eucharist. The deep unity between the Eucharist and the earthly life of Christ was captured well by Daniélou when he pointed to the Eucharist as a *kairos*, an extraordinary event, a unique moment. This is not, however, a separate and different *kairos* from that of the Cross: "It is the same *kairos* because it is the presence of the unique *kairos* of the cross in mystery"¹⁰⁶ In both the New Testament and in Chrysostom, the *kairos* is a moment in time, a special moment when God acts in a unique and utterly divine manner. The greatest *kairos* was in the earthly life of Christ, when the plan of redemption was brought to its fulfillment and the work of salvation was definitively accomplished. However, every Eucharistic celebration is no less a *kairos*, because it embodies all the saving events of Christ's life. As the prayers of the Latin rite say, "for whenever the memorial of this sacrifice is celebrated the work of our redemption is accomplished."¹⁰⁷ N.V

¹⁰⁶ Jean Daniélou, introduction to *On the Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature* (SC 28/2:56).

¹⁰⁷ Prayer over the Gifts for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. The great antiquity of this prayer is evidenced in the fact that Thomas Aquinas quotes it in *Summa theologiae* III, q. 83, a. 1.

A Voice Like the Sound of Many Waters: Inspiration, Authorial Intention, and Theological Exegesis

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IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION, Jesus speaks with a voice “like the sound of many waters” (Rev 1:15).¹ At least since Irenaeus, this verse has been taken to describe how God speaks to us through Scripture: with a single voice formed from the roar of a multitude.² This understanding of Scripture, so paradigmatic for patristic and medieval exegesis, challenges us today. In academic theology, the search for what God wants to say through the text of Scripture—the search for God’s own voice, and God’s own intentions—has largely been abandoned. When it is not rejected as misconceived,³ it is typically set aside in favor of other hermeneutic objectives.⁴ And for understandable reasons: the individual human voices of Scripture, for too long, had been neglected, marginalized, and forced into boxes into which they did not fit,

¹ Scripture translations are from RSV throughout, occasionally modified.

² See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.14.2.

³ For a representative example of skepticism about the hermeneutic usefulness of appeals to authorial intention, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), xxx–xxxiv.

⁴ Recent publications on scriptural exegesis and theological exegesis usually give little attention to the category of authorial intention, human or divine. For example, a recent work on the theological reading of Scripture (which begins with a survey of the current state of the question) mentions intention hardly at all. The author explains that this omission was conscious and deliberate. “This project has not foregrounded authorial intention, but has put its focus on how the biblical text signifies something about its subject matter” (Darren Sarisky, *Reading the Bible Theologically* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 306n44).

especially when they were inconvenient to ecclesial traditions or theological systems—often precisely through tendentious appeals to God’s authorship and inspiration. Yet faith in God’s unity compels us to acknowledge that if God speaks through Scripture, he must speak with a single voice. Likewise, faith in God’s wisdom gives us confidence that if God speaks to us, he does not speak to no purpose, and he must make it possible to know what he wants to say, at least to some extent.

This article will offer an account of how God speaks through the many waters of Scripture. It will argue that God speaks through every word of Scripture, but that he speaks through those words differently from the human authors. Then it will discuss principles for discerning what God wants to say in any given passage of Scripture. Along the way, it will aim to rehabilitate a nuanced appreciation for authorial intention, both human and divine. It will also defend notions like plenary verbal inspiration and attempt to show that they can be understood in ways compatible with post-critical scholarship. If this article does not succeed in these objectives, at the very least it hopes to demonstrate that fundamental theology remains relevant for exegetical praxis, and that attempting to ground theological exegesis in sidelined topics like authorial intention, inspiration, and divine authorship need not seem stubbornly antiquated from the perspective of contemporary hermeneutics or contemporary biblical studies.

It will proceed in the following way. First, drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s and Elizabeth Anscombe’s analyses of intention, and developing Gottlob Frege’s distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*), it will offer some clarifications about authorial intention and its relationship to the literal sense or meaning (*sensus*) of Scripture.⁵ Second, building on these clarifications, and reflecting on the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old Testament, it will draw conclusions about how God’s intended meaning relates to the human authors’ intended meaning.⁶

⁵ To avoid the confusion that would result from translating both the Latin word *sensus* and the German word *Sinn* as “sense,” from here on this article will generally translate the Latin word *sensus* as “meaning.” For similar reasons, rather than speaking of the different “senses” of Scripture, it will generally speak of the literal or spiritual “meanings” of Scripture.

⁶ In my review of the literature, I have not been able to find anything written in the past fifty years that discusses at any length how the intentions of the human authors relate to the intentions of the divine author, with the exception of Michael Gorman, “Inspired Authors and Their Speech Acts: A Philosophical Commentary on the Essay by Denis Farkasfalvy,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4, no. 4 (2006): 747–60. In his article, Gorman makes some observations about seeming disjunctions between divine and human intention in Scripture. He explores and critiques

Finally, it will discuss the implications of these conclusions for inspiration, the truth of Scripture, and theological exegesis, thus hopefully contributing to the fulfillment of Pope Benedict XVI's "fervent hope" that research on the inspiration and truth of Scripture "will progress and bear fruit both for biblical science and for the spiritual life of the faithful."⁷

The central thesis of this article is that, properly applied, Frege's distinction between sense and reference has great potential for solving many long-standing puzzles about inspiration, authorial intention, and theological exegesis.⁸ But while this central thesis is relatively straightforward, to explain what it entails and demonstrate its potential, it is necessary to touch on a number of highly contested topics. Consequently, while this article makes an attempt to engage a wide range of sources and respond to possible objections, it cannot discuss all the relevant secondary literature, nor can it adequately develop its proposals to address all of the many legitimate concerns that might be raised. Whether or not these omissions are ultimately justified, it is hoped that this article will be judged not for any individual failure in this regard, but rather for what it is: an attempt to pick up a conversation about inspiration and authorial intention that, after being advanced considerably by *Dei Verbum* (especially in paragraphs 11 and 12), dropped off abruptly and still awaits resolution, and to suggest a possible way forward.

Philosophical Clarifications

Before proceeding to questions about Scripture, we first need to clarify some philosophical issues about intention, meaning, and the way that words work. We need these clarifications because confidence in our access to authorial intention, now widely held in doubt, is crucial to this article's proposal, and because a sound appropriation of Frege's distinction between sense and reference opens up possibilities for clarifying how God's intended

different ways to account for them, and then argues for one of them. His approach and his tentative solution, however, differ from those proposed in this article.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), §19.

⁸ After realizing that Frege's distinction between sense and reference could be helpful for solving certain problems regarding inspiration and authorial intention, I looked to see if others have made similar applications. It seems not, but a recent article defends Origen's exegetical method using Frege. Its argument, while more theoretical, is highly complementary to the proposal given here, not least in its common sympathy with Origen; see Sergey Trostyanskiy, "Reading Origen of Alexandria from the Perspective of Contemporary Semantics," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 63, nos. 3–4 (2012): 34–43.

meaning relates to the human authors' intended meaning in Scripture.⁹

Intentions, Actions, and Words

Intending is a component of conscious action. It is a kind of wanting, but more than mere wishing. When we intend something, we want it to happen, but we also *cause* it to happen, or at least attempt to cause it to happen. To put it otherwise: when we perform conscious actions, we are seeking to cause certain effects. Our seeking to cause these effects is our intending. The same physical action can be intended for very different reasons. For example, we can give money to a needy person out of compassion, or we can give money to a needy person in order to fool our friends into trusting us so that we can defraud them later. In both cases, we intend to give money, but our ultimate objectives differ.¹⁰

That much is fairly straightforward and uncontroversial. Many aspects of intention, however, are notoriously subtle and complex. It is easy to get tangled in partial but incomplete insights. Confused notions are pervasive.

Three misconceptions are particularly widespread. The first is that intentions are hidden and invisible, entirely removed from the realm of the physical. Wittgenstein explodes this misconception with a simple observation:

What is the natural expression of an intention?—Look at a cat when it stalks a bird; or a beast when it wants to escape.¹¹

We do not need to get inside the cat's head to know what it wants. We can figure it out by just looking at what the cat is doing. Intentions are partly invisible and partly private, but due to the fact that we perform our actions with our bodies, they are also partly visible and partly public. We can learn something about what people intend by observing their bodies and the movements of their bodies. We do not need to get inside their heads.

The second misconception is that intentions are separable from actions. According to this misconception, intentions are mental acts attached to

⁹ When contrasting humanly and divinely intended meaning, this article habitually speaks of "human authors" in the plural, not just because different authors wrote different books of the Bible, but because with any portion of Scripture, more than one human author may have been involved in producing the text as we now have it.

¹⁰ For a fuller description of my account of intention, see Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Father's Will: Christ's Crucifixion and the Goodness of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–41.

¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), §647.

self-contained, ontologically distinct actions. They can be detached from actions without damaging the integrity of either intention or action. Yet agents intend something only in the course of performing actions. Intentions can be isolated conceptually, but they cannot be isolated ontologically. Intending is constituent of conscious action. Intention is not external to action; intention is *in* action.

The third misconception is that, as Anscombe puts it, “‘intention’ has a different sense when we speak of a man’s intentions *simpliciter*—i.e., what he intends to do—and of his intentions in doing or proposing something—what he aims at in it.”¹² This misconception grows out of the fact that, in the order of deliberation, we start with an objective and then settle on a means to achieve it. Given the significant difference between means and end, it seems natural to say that our intending of present effects and our intending of future effects are very different kinds of intending. But our present and future intentions are equally intentions, because both involve wanting to cause effects through our actions. The only difference is that one set of effects concerns the present and the other set of effects concerns the future.

These philosophical clarifications about intention apply to words as well as physical actions.¹³ Words, after all, are the fruits of intentional actions. Consequently, everything we have said about intention applies to words, both spoken and written. The implications are numerous.

First, verbal intentions are not entirely private. They are partly private, but they are also partly public. Just as our physical actions make our intentions perceptible, so too our words make our intentions perceptible. We might speak words that are vague and ambiguous, or we might be speaking with hidden motives. Nevertheless, just as the movements of our bodies reveal a great deal about our intentions, so too our words always reveal a great deal about our intentions. They also significantly constrain any plausible speculation about our hidden or unexpressed intentions. When we say, “I would like a hamburger and a large fries,” for example, we might

¹² G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), §1.

¹³ My approach to verbal intentions has been greatly influenced by the work of Ben F. Meyer, especially: *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Alison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1989), 17–55; *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical, 1994), 87–101. For a different but complementary approach to verbal intentions, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of Covenant,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Moller (Carlisle, England: Paternoster; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 1–49, esp. 11–13.

plausibly be taken as trying to cause offense, if we speak them at a fine French restaurant, but we cannot plausibly be taken to be asking about the weather.

Second, words and intentions cannot be separated. Words are not separate, self-contained realities to which intention is attached. Without the implicit intention to communicate, words would not be words; they would not even be symbols. They would be mere sounds or lines on a page. Intentions are not external to words; intentions are *in* words. In fact, we might say that words are mental intentions made perceptible. Spoken words are mental intentions made audible; written words are mental intentions made visible.

Third, authorial intention is not just about our future and final objectives, nor is it merely about our desire to communicate thematic points. Authorial intention includes our more prosaic intentions, such as our intention to convey meaning through recognized, established symbols.¹⁴ Consequently, even when an author's ultimate intentions are inaccessible or unverifiable, we still have access to authorial intention. We may not be able to discern the author's ultimate objectives, but as long as we can understand the language, we can still discern what meaning the author wanted to convey, at least to a significant extent, and thus access the author's intentions.

This last conclusion is especially important for the argument of this article, but it runs counter to many current views about authorial intention. For some time, especially since the publication in 1946 of W. K. Wimsatt's and M. C. Beardsley's seminal article "The Intentional Fallacy," skepticism about our access to authorial intention and its relevance to textual hermeneutics has been widespread.¹⁵ Wimsatt and Beardsley are

¹⁴ In his comments about the human authors of Scripture, Thomas Aquinas affirms a similar view of authorial intention. Authors intend not only the end (*finis*) to which their words are directed; they also intend the meaning (*sensus*) of their words; see Timothy Bellamah, "Qui Primo Per Verba Intenditur: Notes on Thomas's Understanding of Authorial Intention and the Literal Sense," in *Dominicans and the Challenge of Thomism*, ed. Michał Paluch and Piotr Lichacz (Warsaw: Instytut Thomistyczny Warszawa, 2012), 261–77.

¹⁵ See W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468–88. For a strong but carefully nuanced defense of our epistemic access to authorial intention, and the impossibility of interpreting texts without some implicit reference to authorial intention, see John C. Farrell, *The Varieties of Authorial Intention: Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). On our access to authorial intention in the context of interpreting Scripture, see: Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge

correct that our access to future and final intentions is tenuous. They are also correct that an author's ultimate objectives have only limited relevance to textual interpretation and literary criticism. They are wrong, however, to draw categorical conclusions.¹⁶

The fact that words work—the fact that we can read words and find them intelligible—implies that we have a great deal of access to authorial intention. Considered as mere sensible phenomena, as mere sounds or lines on a page, words can mean anything; they do not give us any direction about how to interpret them. Only when we consider words as intended by their authors—as having been written by their authors to communicate something—do we find them intelligible. To find words intelligible, we do not need to know who wrote them, or what the author's ultimate objectives were. We do, however, need to read them as though they were intended by someone. Otherwise, they cease to be intelligible.

For example, suppose we find a slip of paper on the ground with these words: "Get on the next train." We have no idea if the words are an actual instruction to someone, a coded message, or a line from a poem. In short, we know very little about what Wimsatt and Beardsley meant by "authorial intention." Yet we still understand what the words mean, and the fact that we find the words intelligible implies that we are looking at them *as though* they were intended by someone, and *as though* this person knew English and meant to communicate something through conventional symbols. If we did not read the words as though intended by someone, we could not find the words intelligible; we would see lines on a page but no words.

All these reflections lead to a simple but important conclusion: we are not wrong to read texts thinking that we have significant access to the intentions of their authors.

Sense, Reference, and Intended Meaning

In an article published in 1892, Frege makes a distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*). He writes:

University Press, 1995); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998); 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.

¹⁶ As Meyer writes: "It is perfectly true that the object of interpretation is not the intention of the writer as in the writer, in other words, as extrinsic to the text. But the definers of the so-called intentional fallacy overlooked the far more basic issue of intention precisely as *intrinsic to the text*" (*Reality and Illusion*, 97).

A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense, *refers to* or *designates* its referent. By means of a sign we express its sense and designate its referent.¹⁷

The precise meaning of Frege's distinction is difficult and somewhat obscure.¹⁸ There are also disagreements about translation.¹⁹ His essential point, however, is straightforward. There is a difference between *what* words refer to (reference) and *how* they evoke their reference (sense). He uses the example of the planet Venus. The expressions "morning star" and "evening star" both in fact designate the planet Venus. Yet if we did not know that the two expressions ultimately refer to the same celestial body, we might incorrectly suppose that a claim about the morning star could be true while the same claim about the evening star was false. Consequently, the two expressions cannot have the same meaning. Frege concludes that we must distinguish between an expression's sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*).

His argument is widely regarded as having established something important and true.²⁰ Evidence for its essential validity is found in the fact that many other philosophers have made similar distinctions, such as the distinction between connotation and denotation, or between intension and extension. Frege's distinction also closely parallels the medieval distinction between signification and supposition,²¹ a distinction which

¹⁷ Gottlob Frege, "Sense and Reference," *Philosophical Review* 57, no. 3 (1948): 209–30, at 214.

¹⁸ On Frege's distinction and its origins, see Michael Kremer, "Sense and Reference: The Origins and Development of the Distinction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frege*, ed. Tom Ricketts and Michael Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 220–92.

¹⁹ In English, *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* are most commonly translated as "sense" and "reference," but the latter has also been translated as "meaning" even in the context of this pairing because that is its usual translation in English (when not in the pairing). For a persuasive defense of the standard practice of translating *Bedeutung* as "reference," see David Bell, "On the Translation of Frege's *Bedeutung*," *Analysis* 40, no. 4 (1980): 191–95.

²⁰ It has not been universally accepted, however. For a defense of Frege's distinction against critics such as Donald Davidson, W. V. O. Quine, and Saul Kripke, see Michael Dummett, "Frege's Distinction between Sense and Reference," in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 116–44.

²¹ This observation is made frequently in the literature. For example: "Just as signification corresponds most closely—though not exactly—to contemporary ideas of meaning or sense, so supposition corresponds in some ways to modern notions of reference, denotation and extension." (Stephen Read, "Medieval Theories: Properties of Terms," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2015, plato.

sets medieval logic apart from its Aristotelian sources.²²

For our purposes, it is not necessary to grasp fully the way that Frege understood his own distinction, let alone follow him on every point. What is important for us is that his observations bring to light an essential aspect of words. Words do not simply signify referents; they also *present* what they signify.²³ Accordingly, we can and must distinguish between *how* words signify (sense) and *what* they signify (reference).

We might say—though Frege does not put it this way—that sense and reference are two components of an expression’s meaning. The sense is *how* the expression signifies what it signifies. The reference is *what* the expression signifies. Of these two components, sense is more intangible. While reference has a definite grounding—namely, the world and all that exists—sense has no such independent grounding. Sense exists only in our minds. It does not correspond to anything in the world (that is, apart from our thinking about the world, which, of course, is also part of the world). Moreover, reference designates something in the world, but sense is not a thing, nor is it even a mental entity or a miniature model of the reference in our heads; it is merely the medium through which our mind grasps a reference.²⁴ Sense presents reference.²⁵ We could even say that sense *is*

stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/medieval-terms/).

²² For an overview of medieval supposition theory, see Catarina Dutilh Novaes, “Supposition Theory,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 1229–36.

²³ For a phenomenological reflection on how words present their referents in the context of Scripture, and how words, to a certain extent, even make it possible to think, see Robert Sokolowski, “God’s Word and Human Speech,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 11, no. 1 (2013): 187–210.

²⁴ Here I am applying Robert Sokolowski’s reflections on the ontological status of concepts to the category of *Sinn* (“Exorcising Concepts,” *Review of Metaphysics* 40 [1987]: 451–63).

²⁵ Frege does not put it this way, but he comes close when he describes the sense of a sign as containing “the mode of presentation” (“Sense and Reference,” 210). Emphasizing how sense *presents* reference helps to draw out some underappreciated connections between analytic philosophy and phenomenology. It is widely recognized that Frege and his distinction between sense and reference were foundational for the analytic tradition. It is not so widely recognized, however, that Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, developed many of his distinctive ideas in the course of reflecting on Frege’s notion of sense (for example, about how objects present themselves to our consciousness), and that phenomenology, therefore, also traces back to Frege in some of its most foundational commitments. See David Woodruff Smith and Ronald McIntyre, “Intentionality via Intensions,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 18 (1971): 541–61. The intellectual fecundity of Frege’s distinction is further proof of its truth and importance. For a related

presentation. And just as the act of presenting implies something being presented, so too sense implies reference. Sense exists only in conjunction with reference.²⁶ Likewise, reference implies sense, because references must be presented. Therefore, while sense and reference are distinct, they cannot be separated.

Attention to the way that meaning involves both sense and reference sheds light on a striking feature of words: the interplay of the universal and the particular. On the one hand, words are universals. The same word can refer to many different things (or actions, or qualities, or states of affairs). Words are oriented toward the world in definite ways established by custom and convention, but their orientation toward the world is vague and provisional. On the other hand, words are particulars. They take on a definite meaning only in actual use. For example, the expression “that man” directs us toward the world in a definite way, toward a range of possible referents. Apart from its actual use, however, the expression does not refer to anyone in particular. Even when we isolate words from ordinary usage and engage in second-order reflection, even then words do not cease to be particulars. For example, when we talk about the expression “that man” in the abstract, it does not lack a reference. It may not designate a particular individual, but it still designates something: in this case, a mental abstraction.

The distinction between sense and reference allows us to account for the interplay of the universal and the particular in words. Sense is what makes words universal, while reference is what makes words always and everywhere particular. The same word can be used to designate multiple references because its sense can *present* multiple references. The expression “that

argument (with which I agree) that the analytic tradition would be well advised to draw on the resources of phenomenology to explain the distinction between sense and reference, see Shannon Vallor, “Frege’s Puzzle: A Phenomenological Solution,” *Philosophy Today* 46, Supplement (2002): 178–85, and “The Intentionality of Reference in Husserl and the Analytic Tradition,” in *Intentionality: Past and Future*, ed. G. Forrai and G. Kampis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

²⁶ Frege holds that sense can exist without reference. For example, he maintains that the name “Odysseus” has a definite sense, but as the historical existence of Odysseus is doubtful, it may not have a referent (Frege, “Sense and Reference,” 215–16). Yet, applying Frege’s own principles, we might well argue that the name “Odysseus” does have a reference. Fictional characters exist in the minds of those thinking about them. It is a different kind of existence from that of an actual historical person, but there is something in the world to which the name refers. Kremer likewise holds that, according to Frege’s own principles but contrary to his conclusions, we need not grant the possibility of sense without reference (Kremer, “Sense and Reference,” 290–92).

man” can present a variety of individuals because its sense is universal. And yet, whenever the expression is used, it always has a reference as well, no matter how abstract that reference might be. Just as sense and reference always exist side by side and cannot be separated from each other, so too every word is both universal and particular at one and the same time.

This analysis of sense and reference applies not just to words but also to complete sentences as well. (Here I am applying Frege’s distinction in a way that he does not.)²⁷ For example, a drama teacher could tell her students, “that’s the worst acting I’ve ever seen,” in order to shock her students into seriously rethinking their acting, but without meaning her words literally. Or she could speak the same words simply out of amazement, without intending to help her students, because it was in fact the worst acting she had ever seen. In these two scenarios, even though the drama teacher says the same words, her intended meaning differs. What differs is not the intended sense of her words, but their intended reference: that is, how she intends the sense of her words to latch on to the world.

Sense presents reference, but sense does not determine reference. For example, just knowing the sense of the expression “that man” does not tell us which man is being designated. The sense of the expression narrows down the range of plausible references, but it does not determine reference. The same sense remains capable of presenting multiple references. Consequently, something other than sense must determine reference. *Intention* is what determines reference. Out of all the many possible referents an expression could designate, intention selects one. In this way, intention joins sense to reference. Meaning is not possible without intention, because without intention there would be nothing to join sense and reference. In his famous article “On Referring,” P. F. Strawson makes a related point. “‘Mentioning,’ or ‘referring,’” he writes, “is not something an expression does; it is something that some one can use an expression to do.”²⁸ Expressions do not refer because expressions do not intend. It is the speaker who intends, and therefore it is the speaker, not the expression, that determines the expression’s reference. Consequently, to discern the meaning of an expression, we cannot avoid attending to the speaker’s intentions. Otherwise, we have no grounds for attaching the sense of the expression to any particular reference, and without reference, there can be no meaning.

²⁷ According to Frege, the referent of an expression terminates in the world, but the referent of a sentence is its truth value. This aspect of Frege’s account has not been widely accepted.

²⁸ P. F. Strawson, “On Referring,” *Mind*, n.s., 59, no. 235 (1950): 320–44.

Intended Meaning and Intended Purpose

When we speak, we do not merely intend to convey meaning. We also intend other objectives. For example, when we say to someone, “please go to the store and buy some milk,” we do not merely intend to convey meaning. We also intend for our words to prompt someone to go and buy some milk. Furthermore, in verbal performances, intending to do more than convey meaning is not simply a possibility; it is a logical necessity. Whenever we speak, we always intend some larger purpose as well. In this article, we are interested primarily in meaning, not purpose, but for the sake of completeness, it is important nonetheless to clarify the distinction between them.²⁹

²⁹ This analysis of verbal performances bears some similarity to speech act theory. In speech act theory, as established by John Austin and developed by John Searle, and as appropriated by theologians such as Nicholas Wolterstorff and Kevin Vanhoozer, verbal utterances are categorized according to a threefold distinction: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. The precise meaning of each category is debated, but the threefold distinction can be roughly summarized as follows. Locutionary acts consist in the sheer conveying of meaning through words (e.g., “this book is long”). Illocutionary acts convey something through words beyond the mere conveying of meaning (e.g., “please buy some milk,” insofar as the speaker makes a request). Perlocutionary acts are similar to illocutionary acts in that they go beyond the mere conveying of meaning, but whereas illocutionary acts are defined by the intention infused in the words themselves, perlocutionary acts are defined by the intended effect of those words on the listener (e.g., “please buy some milk,” insofar as the speaker aims to have someone buy some milk). The same verbal utterance might be classified as more than one kind of speech act. Illocutionary acts typically presuppose locutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts typically presuppose illocutionary acts. Like speech act theory, the account given here recognizes that verbal utterances not only convey meaning; verbal utterances are also directed toward purposes. Nevertheless, the terminology of speech act theory has not been followed here, for a few reasons. First, speech act theory does not prioritize Frege’s distinction between sense and reference, nor can it easily accommodate the understanding of sense and reference given above. Second, since this article is concerned mainly with intended meanings, not intended purposes, much of the work done in speech act theory is irrelevant to its interests. Third, the terminology of speech act theory is cumbersome, and potentially misleading: rather than talking about multiple kinds of speech acts, with the same verbal utterance potentially being classified as more than one kind of speech act, it seems better to say that the same verbal utterance might be informed by multiple kinds of intentions. See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* and “The Promise of Speech-Act Theory for Biblical Interpretation,” in Bartholomew, Greene, and

The case of lying illustrates this point well. Two individuals might say exactly the same thing, each intending to convey exactly the same meaning, but with different purposes, because one is lying and the other is telling the truth. The case of lying helps us to notice that we cannot avoid intending more than the sheer conveying of meaning. We always have a larger purpose, even when that purpose is simply to inform someone of what we know. Our verbal intentions thus encompass two elements: first, the intent to convey meaning, which includes both sense and reference; and second, the intent to accomplish objectives that go beyond the conveying of meaning, which we might call purpose, and which explains why we are attempting to convey meaning in the first place. (Quentin Skinner makes a similar distinction between intentions and motives,³⁰ so does Aquinas, who distinguishes between the *sensus* that authors intend by their words and the *finis* to which their words are directed.³¹)

Authorial Intention and the Literal Meaning of Scripture

Going back at least to Jerome and Augustine, the bulk of the Christian exegetical tradition has hermeneutically privileged what it calls the literal meaning (*sensus*) of Scripture, especially in contradistinction to the spiritual meaning (*sensus*) of Scripture. Thomas Aquinas, for example, maintains that the literal meaning provides the foundation for the other meanings of Scripture.³² Yet for all its emphasis on the literal meaning, the Christian exegetical tradition has never come to agreement about what exactly the literal meaning is, or how it relates to authorial intention, or how it should be distinguished from the other meanings (*sensus*) of Scripture.

The case of Thomas Aquinas provides an illuminating example of the tradition's ambiguity about how the literal meaning of Scripture relates to authorial intention. In an important article in the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*], Thomas Aquinas identifies the literal meaning with the author's intended meaning, and then notes that the author of Scripture is God.³³ Clearly, therefore, Scripture's literal meaning is intended by God. Aquinas does

Moller, *After Pentecost*, 1–49. See also Kit Barker, "Speech Act Theory, Dual Authorship, and Canonical Hermeneutics: Making Sense of 'Sensus Plenior,'" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3, no. 2 (2009): 227–39.

³⁰ Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 393–408. Mark Brett ("Motives and Intentions in Genesis I," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 42, no. 1 (1991): 1–16) and Fowl ("Role of Authorial Intention," 74) each make this distinction their own.

³¹ See Bellamah, "*Qui Primo*."

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 1.

³³ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10.

not, however, say whether it is also intended by Scripture's human authors. Interpreters of Aquinas have come to different conclusions. Some hold that, for Aquinas, the literal meaning is always intended by both God and the human authors.³⁴ Others hold that Aquinas never fully worked out his account of the literal meaning and its relation to the human authors, and that his views are fundamentally "underdetermined."³⁵ Setting aside which interpretation is best, for our purposes the important point is that Aquinas never explicitly identifies the literal meaning with human authors' intended meaning, nor does he ever explicitly claim that what the human authors intend is necessarily intended by God.³⁶ In this respect, Thomas Aquinas is not an outlier.³⁷ Precritical exegesis generally refrains from identifying the literal meaning with the human authors' intended meaning,³⁸ yet without necessarily ruling out that identification, and sometimes positively encouraging it.

Then, in the nineteenth century, Christians found their beliefs challenged by early forms of historical-critical exegesis. In response, many Christian exegetes started to rally around the idea that proper attention to authorial intention would fend off the challenge and allow them to appropriate the tools of historical-critical methods for themselves. They began to emphasize that it was not the words per se that were theologically relevant, but rather what the human authors intended to communicate

³⁴ Mark F. Johnson, "Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 117–41, at 119; Bellamah, "Qui Primo," 267–68.

³⁵ Eugene F. Rogers, "How the Virtues of an Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Religion* 76, no. 1 (1996): 64–81, at 66–67; Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, "(Mis)Reading the Face of God: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 513–28, at 519.

³⁶ In "Qui Primo," Bellamah implicitly concedes as much: while he provides numerous instances where Aquinas associates the literal *sensus* with what the human authors intend, he does not cite any text where Aquinas defines the literal *sensus* in terms of human intentionality, seemingly because none exists.

³⁷ Augustine, for example, encourages the identification of the literal *sensus* with the human authors' intended meaning in some places and discourages it in others; see David Graham, "Defending Biblical Literalism: Augustine on the Literal Sense," *Pro Ecclesia* 25, no. 2 (2016): 173–99, at 180–82.

³⁸ See: Brevard S. Childs, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beiträge Zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 80–93; Charles J. Scalise, "The 'Sensus Literalis': A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical Exegesis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42, no. 1 (1989): 45–65; Ayres and Fowl, "(Mis)Reading," 519–20.

through the words. Naturally, they framed their new method in terms of the theological tradition they had received, which put great emphasis on the literal meaning of Scripture, and they began to define the literal meaning in terms of authorial intention. Very quickly, they came to identify the literal meaning of Scripture with the meaning intended by the human authors—perhaps without fully realizing that the tradition had never settled on a common definition for the literal meaning, or that their absolute identification of the literal meaning with the human authors' intended meaning was a new theological development. Official Catholic teaching gave significant encouragement to this new, totalizing identification of the literal meaning with the human authors' intended meaning. Beginning with *Providentissimus Deus*, magisterial documents started emphasizing the literal meaning of Scripture and the importance of attending to what the human authors meant to say.³⁹ While magisterial documents never explicitly or definitively identify the literal meaning with the human authors' intended meaning, they sometimes say things that can be taken as encouraging such an identification.⁴⁰

By the late twentieth century, a definition of the literal meaning as the human authors' intended meaning seems to have become normative among most exegetes.⁴¹ Not everyone welcomed this development. After the literal meaning had become widely identified with the human authors' intended meaning, many scholars began to sound the alarm, noting that this identification went beyond what Christian tradition had established and posed serious exegetical problems. While continuing to give herme-

³⁹ Mark Reasoner, "Dei Verbum and the Twentieth-Century Drama of Scripture's Literal Sense," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 1 (2017): 219–54. In the course of his narrative, Reasoner suggests that, since *Dei Verbum*, magisterial documents have been moving beyond constricted definitions of the literal sense and an earlier one-sided emphasis on its exegetical significance, most notably in *Verbum Domini*.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), §§26, 34.

⁴¹ In the late 1980s, Raymond Brown wrote: "Without denigrating the ongoing interpretative possibilities of the biblical text (which some literary critics less confusingly designate as 'literary' rather than literal), most exegetes, if we may judge from the commentaries on Scripture, would be working with a definition of the literal sense closely resembling the following: *The sense which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed*" (Raymond E. Brown and Sandra M. Schneiders, "Hermeneutics," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990], 1146–65, at 1148). Joseph Fitzmyer repeats this definition of the literal sense and describes it as "a standard, modern definition" of the literal sense (*The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008], 87).

neutic priority to the literal meaning of Scripture, they argued that it should not be identified with the human authors' intended meaning.⁴² Currently, the debate remains unresolved, and great disagreement continues to pervade discussion of the literal meaning of Scripture.⁴³

Clarifying the Literal Meaning Vis-à-Vis Authorial Intention

The philosophical clarifications of the previous section allow us to resolve much of the ambiguity that has plagued discussion of authorial intention and the literal meaning of Scripture.

First, these clarifications make plain that we cannot bracket authorial intention from the literal meaning of Scripture. In keeping with trends in literary criticism, many exegetes and theologians have argued that we should move away from trying to discern authorial intention and instead focus on the literal meaning of Scripture. Yet, however we define the literal meaning, we cannot bracket authorial intention from our reading of Scripture. The reason is that we cannot bracket authorial intention from words. Intentions are *in* words. Without intentions, words would be mere lines on a page. Therefore, we cannot hope to discern the literal meaning of Scripture without reference to the human authors' intentions.⁴⁴

⁴² See, e.g.: Childs, "Sensus Literalis"; Sandra M. Schneiders, "Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture," *Theological Studies* 39, no. 4 (1978): 719–36; Hans W. Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?," in *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*, ed. Frank McConnell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36–77; Scalise, "Sensus Literalis."

⁴³ For a discussion of the literal meaning of Scripture from the perspective of contemporary biblical criticism, see John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 69–116. In his book, Barton distinguishes between what he calls the original sense, the intended sense, the historical sense, the literal sense, and the plain sense. Barton's categories are somewhat idiosyncratic and lack philosophical precision, and thus obscure as well as illuminate, but he offers many perceptive observations related to the literal meaning of Scripture. Furthermore, and less contestably, being the work of an eminent representative of his exegetical approach (which, for thoughtful and well-defended reasons, he prefers to call "biblical criticism" rather than "the historical-critical method"; see 31–68), Barton's analysis provides a good introduction to the sort of exegetical and methodological quandaries currently facing practitioners of biblical criticism when it comes to talking about the literal meaning of Scripture.

⁴⁴ For arguments that the words of Scripture gives us genuine albeit limited access to the human authors' intentions, and that they do so necessarily, see: Meyer, *Critical Realism*, 17–55 ("Primacy of the Intended Sense"); Max Turner, "Historical Criticism and Theological Hermeneutics of the New Testament," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B.

Yet it is also true that we do not have complete and unrestricted access to the human authors' intentions. Frege's distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*) allows us to make an important clarification. As with any text, every passage of Scripture has both a sense and a reference. While mastery of ancient languages in their historical context usually suffices to determine the human authors' intended sense, determining their intended reference—that is, how the human authors intended their words to latch on to the world—often requires conjecture and speculation. As a result, we can often have a firm grasp on the intended sense of a passage without possessing any certainty about its intended reference.⁴⁵ For example, consider the story of Samuel anointing David as future king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 16:1–13). Among those able to read Hebrew, the intended *Sinn* of the passage is obvious and uncontroversial. No one claims that the passage is about, for example, Portuguese spice traders in the sixteenth century. The intended *Bedeutung*, however, is neither obvious nor uncontroversial. Did the human authors intend the story as a historical claim? Or do historical categories not apply because they merely intended to retell an edifying story without any concern for its historicity? Or did they intend something in between history and fiction? In short, assuming we can read the original languages, or trust the translators, we have ready access to the intended sense of any passage of Scripture, but we do not necessarily have ready access to the intended reference.

Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 44–70; Fowl, “Role of Authorial Intention.”

⁴⁵ Exegetical strategies that prioritize authorial intention are often criticized on the grounds that they are chasing an illusory objective. For example, Reimund Bieringer writes: “If texts were static semantic containers, interpretation would amount to the effort of a neutral observer to identify the meaning contained *in* the text by identifying the intention which the author put there. If this were a correct model, we would have to expect that the search for the author's intention would lead to more unanimity among neutral observers” (“The Normativity of the Future: The Authority of the Bible for Theology,” in *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd [Leuven: Peeters, 2010], 27–45, at 40–41). Bieringer's remarks are correct when authorial intention is understood to encompass both sense and reference (as are his cautions about overlooking the reader's subjectivity and the fusion of horizons between reader and text that takes place in the interpretative process), but when we focus on merely the intended sense (*Sinn*) of texts, there is often great unanimity among neutral observers. The fact that neutral observers can usually agree about the intended sense of a text defuses this line of criticism, at least insofar as it touches the argument of this article.

This distinction sheds light on the ambiguity surrounding the literal meaning of Scripture. Historically, the Christian exegetical tradition has not distinguished between anything like sense and reference. It distinguishes between literal meaning and spiritual meaning, but it does not distinguish between sense and reference. Yet, as we have seen, the distinction between sense and reference is unavoidable; it is essential to the way that words work. Even when we do not think in terms of sense and reference, the distinction captures something that is truly there, and we cannot help stumbling over it. If we take the literal meaning of Scripture to encompass both sense and reference, various results follow concerning the relationship between the literal meaning of Scripture and authorial intention; if we take the literal meaning of Scripture to encompass merely its sense, other results follow; and if we fail to apply either definition in a consistent way—which is what has been happening most of the time—we get chaos and confusion.⁴⁶ We can of course define a technical term like “the literal meaning of Scripture” any way we like, but if we fail to give it a consistent definition with respect to sense and reference, we have compromised its usefulness.

Consequently, the Christian tradition’s ambiguity about the literal meaning and its relationship to authorial intention should not surprise us. It is the inevitable result of a corporate failure, first, to distinguish between sense and reference, and second, to come to a consensus about whether the literal meaning of Scripture should be defined as including both intended sense and intended reference or only intended sense. As a result of this corporate failure, there is nothing to prevent even the same exegete from moving back and forth between two contradictory definitions of the literal meaning without realizing it, thus generating immense confusion for both the exegete and the exegete’s readers.

Divine and Human Intended Meaning in Scripture

Using Frege’s distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*) and applying it to Scripture, let us now consider the following hypothesis. In every passage of Scripture, the following premises apply at one and the same time. First, God always intends the sense that the human authors intend, and possibly some of the same references. Second, God may intend references that the human authors do not intend. Third, the human authors may intend references that God does not intend.

⁴⁶ We will return to the question the literal meaning and its relationship to authorial intention in the later sections of this article, when we turn to the topic of theological exegesis.

God Always Intends the Sense Intended by the Human Authors

Christian tradition attributes to Scripture a stable, divinely intended meaning which, at least in principle, is accessible to all. Unless at least some of its divinely intended meanings were both stable and universally accessible, Scripture could not fulfill its normative function for Christian belief and practice. Christian tradition has always accepted that particular passages might be obscure, and that certain interpretative questions might be humanly unresolvable, but it has always believed that Scripture, taken as a whole, has a stable, accessible meaning which is normative for Christian belief and practice.⁴⁷

To account for this stable, accessible meaning, we must posit a stable, permanent connection between the words of Scripture and God's intended meaning. And since the words of Scripture are not mere lines on a page, but lines infused with the intentions of their human authors, we must also posit a stable, permanent connection between the human authors' intended meaning and God's intended meaning. To put it otherwise, God's intentions must always overlap with the human authors' intentions, at least to some extent, and they must overlap in a stable, reliable manner. Otherwise, we could not move with any confidence from the words of Scripture, considered as words and not mere lines on a page, to God's intended meaning.

The minimum possible overlap is the intended sense. Therefore, at bare minimum, God must always intend the sense intended by the human authors. God and the human authors may also intend some of the same references—"This I command you, to love one another" (John 15:17) is one of the most obvious examples; both human and divine authors mean to convey the same divine command—but they must always intend at least the same sense.

God Intends References That the Human Authors Do Not

While Christian tradition has always affirmed that Scripture has a spiritual

⁴⁷ We see an early witness to this confidence in Augustine. In a letter to Jerome, he writes: "I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it" (Letter 82, no. 1.3, trans. J. G. Cunningham, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Co., 1887], 1:350; translation modified).

meaning which goes beyond its literal meaning,⁴⁸ it has never reached consensus about exactly what this spiritual meaning is, or how it relates to the intentions of its human and divine authors, or whether God could be said to intend more than the human authors of Scripture.⁴⁹ Consequently, when historical-critical methods began to draw more attention to the category of authorial intention and these questions became more prominent, there were no default answers to fall back on. Theologians and exegetes had to develop their own.

Starting in the early twentieth century, the question was addressed especially under the rubric of the *sensus plenior*, a term coined by Andrés Fernández in 1926. The *sensus plenior* is typically defined as a fuller meaning of the literal meaning of Scripture, which God intends but the human authors do not.⁵⁰ Many scholars used the concept of the *sensus plenior* to articulate their conviction that God does in fact sometimes intend more meaning than the human authors. They saw it as a helpful way to talk about what Christians have always believed about the Old Testament. Others rejected the concept. Some rejected it because they held for a strict identity between human and divine intentions; others because they thought that the new, nontraditional classification was redundant and only injected additional confusion into the ongoing discussion about the senses of Scripture.⁵¹ Still others rejected it because, in their opinion, it undermined efforts to root exegesis in the human authors' intentions⁵² or improperly claimed access to God's own intentions.⁵³ As the discussion progressed, the concept of the *sensus plenior* both lost ground and gained ground. Many of its initial proponents, including Raymond Brown, came

⁴⁸ The classic works on the senses of Scripture in ancient and medieval Christianity are: Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Marc Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998–2009).

⁴⁹ For an overview of more-than-literal senses from Christian origins to the recent past, with some attention to the question of what God intends, see Raymond E. Brown, "Hermeneutics," in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 605–23, at 610–19; Brown and Schneiders, "Hermeneutics," in *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1990 ed.), 1153–58.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore, MD: St. Mary's University Press, 1955), 92.

⁵¹ Raymond E. Brown, "The History and Development of a *Sensus Plenior*," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1953): 141–62, at 148, 153.

⁵² Bruce Vawter, "The Fuller Sense: Some Considerations," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 85–96, at 86; Brown, "Hermeneutics," 615.

⁵³ Schneiders, "Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense," 727–29.

to distance themselves from it.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, it also acquired new adherents, spreading from Catholic circles to Protestant circles; it was also taken up by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in its landmark 1993 document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.⁵⁵

Putting aside the question of the *sensus plenior* and its usefulness as a concept, acceptance of Christian revelation leads almost inevitably to the conclusion that God sometimes intends meaning—and, specifically, references—that the human authors did not. Christianity was founded on the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures. Many of these prophecies can be recognized as prophecies only in hindsight, in the light of Jesus’s life and teaching, strongly suggesting that God intended references that the human authors of those prophecies did not.⁵⁶

The sacrifice of Isaac, for example, has long been interpreted as prophetically foreshadowing Christ’s crucifixion, including, seemingly, in Hebrews 11:17–19.⁵⁷ Just as Isaac, the “only one” of Abraham, carries wood on his back to the place of sacrifice in obedience to his father’s command, so too Jesus, the only-begotten Son of the Father, carries wood on his back to his place of sacrifice in obedience to the Father’s will. In the story of Abraham and Isaac, did God intend more than the human authors? We have three main options. First, we could say that it is pure coincidence, and that neither God nor the human authors intended Genesis 22 to prophesy Christ’s crucifixion. Second, we could say that God gave the human authors supernatural insight into the full meaning of the story of Abraham and Isaac, and that both God and the human authors intended it as a prophetic type of Christ’s crucifixion. Third, we could say that God intended a deeper meaning, but the human authors did not.

Of these options, the third is by far the most plausible. In the context

⁵⁴ Matthew W. I. Dunn, “Raymond Brown and the *Sensus Plenior* Interpretation of the Bible,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 36, no. 3–4 (2007): 531–51.

⁵⁵ Dunn, “Raymond Brown,” 544–47. For a defense of the *sensus plenior* using speech act theory, see Barker, “Speech Act Theory.”

⁵⁶ On the evangelists’ reading of the Old Testament as full of prophetic types fulfilled in Christ, but identified as prophetic only in retrospect, see Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). See also Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

⁵⁷ On the history of Christian theological interpretation of Gen 22 and its prophetic foreshadowing of Christ’s crucifixion, see Carey Ellen Walsh, “Christian Theological Interpretations of God’s Grace in the Binding of Isaac,” *Perichoresis* 10, no. 1 (2012): 41–66.

of Christian faith, the idea that it was all just a big coincidence is not plausible. And while the possibility of infused supernatural insight cannot be excluded, the text gives no indication that the human authors intended the story to be prophetic, let alone prophetic of God having a Son and handing him over to be crucified for our sake. We are left to conclude that God intended a deeper meaning—a reference—that the human authors did not. Arguably, it is precisely the fact that the human authors seem to have no clue that Genesis 22 foreshadows Christ's crucifixion in eerie detail that explains its prophetic power and its grip on the Christian imagination. In a similar way, it is highly implausible that the human authors of the book of Jonah intended Jonah to serve as a prophetic type of Jesus in the way that Christians have always understood him to be, or that the human authors intended the three days that Jonah spends in the belly of the whale to be the source of the early Christian conviction that the Scriptures had prophesied that Christ would rise on the third day (as it seems to have been).⁵⁸ Based on these two examples alone, and of course many more could be considered, Christians have sufficient reason to conclude that God sometimes intends more than the human authors of Scripture—or more specifically, that he sometimes intends references that the human authors did not.

The Human Authors Sometimes Intend References That God Does Not

In the first half of the third century, Origen faced a pastoral challenge virtually unknown today: a significant number of Christians in his congregations believed that they were obligated to observe Jewish ritual laws.⁵⁹ Apparently, their reverence for the Old Testament had led them to think that they were obligated to keep its ceremonial precepts, or at least some of them. In his homilies, Origen corrects members of his congregation for attending Jewish synagogue on Saturdays in addition to Christian liturgies on Sundays, and for keeping the feast of unleavened bread.⁶⁰

Origen's corrections flow from a carefully worked out account of Scrip-

⁵⁸ On the significance of the book of Jonah for early Christology and the probability that Jonah 2:1 was at the root of the early Christian conviction that Jesus's resurrection on the third day had been prophesied by Scripture, see Lombardo, *The Father's Will*, 212–21.

⁵⁹ Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Countours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 148–56.

⁶⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 5.8.3 and 10.2, and *Homilies on Jeremiah* 12.13.1. For my understanding of Origen's exegetical method and why he is concerned about exegetical literalism, and also for the texts cited here and below, I am indebted to Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 133–60.

ture, which includes a distinction between literal and spiritual meaning.⁶¹ In his response to Celsus, for example, Origen explains: “The reason why we do not live like the Jews is that we think the literal interpretation of the laws does not contain the meaning of the legislation.”⁶² Likewise, at the beginning of his homilies on Leviticus, Origen cautions against reading Leviticus according to the letter. He warns that this exegetical approach would “draw out” the voice of the lawgiver, namely Moses, and thereby compel Christians to keep Jewish sacrificial precepts, missing the true spiritual meaning of Leviticus.⁶³ For Origen, reading Old Testament laws according to the letter—and, implicitly, according to what the human authors intended to communicate—misses God’s intended meaning. God intends both less and more than the human authors: less, because he does not require perpetual observance according to the letter, and more, because he requires Christians to observe them in a deeper spiritual way. Furthermore, for Origen, this exegetical approach is not one option among many. It is necessary for Christians to make sense of the Old Testament.⁶⁴ It is also implicitly mandated by the letters of Saint Paul, according to whom “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).⁶⁵

The arguments Origen deployed in the third century remain equally valid today. By any reasonable application of historical-critical methods, we must conclude the human authors of the Pentateuch understood its legislation to be permanently binding on their fellow Israelites. And yet, after a period of disagreement, still visible in the various strata of the New Testament, the earliest Christians reached the conviction that God no longer required even Jews to observe Jewish ritual precepts. The New Testament canonized this discernment. The New Testament does not merely teach that Gentiles need not keep Jewish ritual observances; it implies that Jews also are exempt.⁶⁶ And by canonizing this discernment,

⁶¹ For Origen’s views on Scripture, see especially his *On First Principles* 4.

⁶² *Against Celsus* 5.60, in *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

⁶³ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.1–2, in *Homilies on Leviticus*, trans. G. W. Barkley (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1990); see also Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 136–37, 42.

⁶⁴ Origen, *On First Principles*, 4.2–3, esp. 4.2.2 and 4.3.4. Against the claim that Origen’s position can be accurately categorized as supersessionist, see Michael G. Azar, “Origen, Scripture, and the Imprecision of ‘Supersessionism,’” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10, no. 2 (2016): 157–72.

⁶⁵ Origen, *On First Principles* 1.1.2. On the reception history of 2 Cor 3:6, see Bernardin Schneider, “The Meaning of St. Paul’s Antithesis ‘the Letter and the Spirit,’” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1953): 163–207, at 164–87.

⁶⁶ From the earliest Christian sources until the present day, the New Testament has

the New Testament also canonized the exegetical principle that God sometimes intends less than the human authors of Scripture—or more precisely, that the human authors sometimes intend references that God does not.⁶⁷

One might object that the human authors of the Old Testament did not rule out the possibility that God would one day change the law or abrogate some of its precepts. Consequently, their intentions need not be seen to diverge from God's intentions. Yet, even if we grant that this argument succeeds with most Old Testament laws, it does not work with all of them.

been overwhelmingly read as implying that Jewish Christians, and not merely Gentile Christians, no longer needed to keep the ceremonial precepts of the Mosaic law, and that Paul and Peter felt free to depart from Jewish purity laws when it suited them (see esp. Acts 10:1–11:18; Rom 14:1–15:6; Gal 2:12–16). In recent years, a small but significant wave of scholarship has challenged this view. It argues that Paul never departed from full Torah observance, and that he never meant to teach Jewish Christians that they were free to do so, either. See, for example, Mark Nanos, “The Myth of the ‘Law-Free’ Paul Standing between Christians and Jews,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4, no. 1 (2009): 1–21; David Rudolph, “Paul and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Romans 14:14, 20,” in *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia, Gabriele Boccaccini, and Cameron J. Doody (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 151–81. This line of scholarship has shone a light on ambiguities in the texts and overlooked complexities in Paul's understanding of the law. Nevertheless, its main line of argument contradicts the most obvious reading of multiple independent texts, and it runs against a consensus that has been near unanimous for most of Christian history. For a reading of Paul in keeping with that consensus, see: John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). For critical responses to this new wave of scholarship, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Why the ‘Weak’ at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2000): 64–82; Philip La G. Du Toit, “Was Paul Fully Torah Observant According to Acts?,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (2016): 1–9.

⁶⁷ In his *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure proposes a similar exegetical principle, seemingly also rooted in observations about certain Jewish ritual precepts described in Scripture as perpetually obligatory. “The third rule is this: When a certain Scriptural passage has a possible literal and spiritual meaning, the interpreter ought to judge whether that passage relates better to the literal or to a spiritual meaning—if, that is, it cannot be accepted in both senses. For if it can be accepted in both senses, then it ought to be given both a literal and a spiritual interpretation. But if it is capable of only one interpretation, then it must be taken in the spiritual sense alone. Examples of this are the statements that the law of the Sabbath has perpetual force, that the cultic priesthood is eternal, that Israel's possession of the land is unending, and that the covenant of circumcision is everlasting. All of these statements have to be referred to their spiritual meaning” (*Breviloquium*, prologue, 6.3, trans. Dominic V. Monti [St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2005], 21). I am grateful to Matthew Ramage for bringing this passage to my attention.

A handful of laws and statutes are described as binding in perpetuity (see Exod 12:17; 31:16–17; Lev 16:29–31, 34; 24:8). In these texts, God does not merely command ritual observances. God states that their observance shall be perpetual and everlasting.

Granted, we could imagine describing commands as binding in perpetuity for rhetorical emphasis, without meaning to imply that they must be observed through all generations until the end of time. It is not plausible, however, to say that the human authors meant their words to be understood in this way. Every reasonable application of historical-critical methods leads to the asymptotically certain conclusion that the human authors meant for their words to convey the idea that these ritual practices were permanently required of their fellow Israelites.⁶⁸ And yet, for Christians, God could not have meant for their words to be understood in that way, because according to near unanimous opinion among Christians, the Holy Spirit teaches the opposite through the New Testament. Unless we hold that God changed his mind, or that Christians have misinterpreted God's revelation in Christ virtually from the beginning and that Jewish Christians are not in fact free from the obligation to keep Jewish ritual practices, we must conclude that the human authors of the Pentateuch intended to convey meaning—references—that God did not.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ By “historical-critical methods” I mean all recognized methods for clarifying the meaning of texts in their original historical and literary contexts, without meaning to imply that there is a monolithic understanding of historical-critical exegesis, and without meaning to favor one approach over any other. My claim is that any reasonable attempt to understand the texts in their original context, without appealing to special claims about divine revelation or the status of inspired Scripture, will inevitably arrive at this conclusion.

⁶⁹ A common reading of *Dei Verbum* §11 has encouraged the opposite view among Catholic scholars. According to this common reading, whatever the human authors intend to affirm, God intends to affirm as well. See, for example, Matthew Levering, “The Inspiration of Scripture: A *Status Quaestionis*,” *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 281–314, at 301. This reading of *Dei Verbum* has its roots in a strong trend among Catholic exegetes in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council. At that time, it was common to take this view of the relationship between divine and human intentions. For example, in 1955, Brown writes: “The literal sense must be *intended by both God and the human author*. It is the meaning which the human author, inspired by God, wanted to express when he composed a passage” (*Sensus Plenior*, 5; emphasis original). When *Dei Verbum* was promulgated, this paragraph was naturally read in light of this trend; indeed, its phrasing was likely influenced by this trend as well.

Dei Verbum §11, however, states only that “everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit.” It does not state that everything that the human authors *intend* to affirm is necessarily

We can say even more: insofar as Christian belief is founded on the conviction that the Jewish Scriptures were inspired by God, and insofar as Christianity as a social phenomenon is founded on the conviction that even Jewish Christians are now free from the obligation to observe the ritual practices legislated in those Scriptures, Christianity in its beliefs and essential culture is founded on the conviction that God sometimes intends less than the human authors of Scripture. And since this exegetical principle is canonized by the New Testament, and since the New Testament is constitutive of Christian revelation, this exegetical principle and its associated exegetical practices can be said to be revealed by God.

To be clear, to say that God intended Jewish ceremonial precepts differently from the human authors does not mean he did not intend the ceremonial precepts at all. Nor does it mean that the Jewish covenant has been revoked and superseded by the new covenant in Christ. It simply means that God intended the ceremonial precepts differently from the human authors. While the authors of the Old Testament intended the precepts in a straightforward way, not aware of their provisionality, God intended their literal observance as a stage of divine pedagogy, fully valid in itself, but imperfect and destined to give way to a deeper fulfillment,⁷⁰ as when the Sabbath rest finds fulfillment in the everlasting rest of heaven (Heb 4:8–11). God intends to communicate his message precisely through the flawed and limited understanding of the human authors, without positively willing the flaws and limitations of their understanding. In this way, to say that God intends less than the human authors does not mean that God did not intend the precepts at all, nor does it allow for neo-Marcionite interpretations which would render the Old Testament and God's covenant with the Jewish people a kind of divine pantomime, something which did not have any point other than to provide matter for Christian interpretation.⁷¹

affirmed by the Holy Spirit. Different parties can make verbally identical assertions but mean them differently. Consequently, *Dei Verbum* need not be read as implying that the Holy Spirit intends to affirm whatever the human authors intend to affirm. In fact, a subsequent line can be read as suggesting, or at least supporting, the view that the human authors might intend an assertion in a way that the divine author does not: "The interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to perceive clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, must carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, *and what it pleased God to manifest through their words*" (*Dei Verbum* §12; emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ See Gal 3:19–25 and *Dei Verbum* §15.

⁷¹ It also does not rule out the possibility, contrary to the main line of Christian tradition over the centuries, but consonant with the convictions of a substantial number of Jewish Christians of the first century, that God still wants some Christians to witness to the Jewish covenant by observing at least some of its ceremonial

Furthermore, while it is not tenable from the perspective of the New Testament to claim that God intends certain precepts of the Mosaic law as literally as their human authors, it does not follow that the Old Testament is for that reason reduced in stature to a kind of second-rate revelation. A key reason why is that whenever God intends less, he also intends more. When God intends less about the day of atonement (Lev 16:29–34), or the feast of unleavened bread (Exod 12:17), or the bread of the presence (Lev 24:8), or the Sabbath (Exod 31:16–17), he also intends more: the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, its memorial in the Eucharist, and the eternal rest of heaven. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Letter to the Hebrews focuses not merely on Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament, but specifically on Christ’s fulfillment of those Old Testament precepts that have attached to them a stipulation of perpetual observance: the Sabbath rest as a type of heaven; the day of atonement as a type of Christ’s priestly sacrifice; and possibly the unleavened bread as a type of Eucharist (see especially references in Heb 5–7 to Melchizedek, the priest who offered bread and wine in Gen 14:18, as well as to the altar from which gifts are eaten in Heb 13:10). It is quite possible that the author of the letter decided to focus on these precepts not simply to illustrate Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament, but also because he and other early Christians were keenly aware that the Old Testament had commanded them to be kept in perpetuity, and that therefore no longer keeping them literally demanded greater theological justification than with other ritual precepts.

The story of Caiaphas’s prophecy supports the idea that the human authors of Scripture sometimes intend references that God does not. In John’s Gospel, Caiaphas declares, “It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.” Afterward, the evangelist comments: “He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:49–52). The clear implication is that, on an account of his office, Caiaphas was speaking under God’s influence, and that, ironically, his words were true but not for

precepts (though without regarding them as salvific in and of themselves; see Gal 5:4). For an exploration of this possibility from the perspective of Messianic Judaism, see Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Judaism: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2009). From within the Catholic tradition, see: Gavin D’Costa, “The Mystery of Israel: Jews, Hebrew Catholics, Messianic Judaism, the Catholic Church, and the Mosaic Ceremonial Laws,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 16, no. 3 (2018): 939–77; D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrines on Jews after the Second Vatican Council* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

the reasons that he thought. When Caiaphas affirms the value of one man dying for the people, he is referring to the benefits of getting Jesus out of the way, but God is referring to the benefits that come from Jesus humbly accepting death for our sake. Applying Frege's terminology, Caiaphas and God each intend the same sense, but they do not intend the same reference. The evangelist does not draw any implications for scriptural inspiration from his narrative, but we can: the story and the evangelist's commentary—each of which themselves Christians hold to be inspired by God—strongly suggest that God can use the words of Scripture to convey meanings that are different from, or even opposed to, the meanings intended by the inspired writers.

The idea that God's intended reference can differ from the human authors' intended reference resolves numerous exegetical dilemmas. Consider the story of Saul and the conquest of Amalek.⁷² God commands Saul to put the Amalekites under the ban and kill every man, woman, and child in Amalek (1 Sam 15:1–3).⁷³ We cannot rule out the possibility that the human authors of this passage intended to make a positive historical claim about what God commanded. If we hold that everything intended by the human authors is also intended by God, but balk at the idea of God commanding genocide, we are cornered. Either we must prejudge the results of historical-critical inquiry, and hold that the human authors could not possibly have intended to make a positive historical claim about what God intended, no matter what the evidence suggests, or we must make our peace with a sword of Damocles forever hanging over heads: "I am pretty sure that God's goodness precludes the possibility that he might actually command genocide, but if new evidence comes to light proving that the human authors of 1 Samuel thought that he did, then I might have to revise my opinion." But if we grant that the human authors sometimes intend references that God does not, the exegetical dilemma evaporates. Whether or not the human authors intended to make a historical claim about the ban becomes irrelevant. Even if they did, we need not conclude that any divine order was actually given. Of course, we may still conclude that, as a matter of fact, God did order Saul to wipe out the Amalekites, but we are not *compelled*

⁷² For a history and analysis of exegetical attempts to interpret these sorts of passages in light of Christian belief, see Christian Hofreiter, *Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide: Christian Interpretation of Herem Passages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁷³ God gives a similar command to Moses in Deuteronomy (see Deut 7:1–2; 20:16–18).

to make this inference. Other exegetical dilemmas can be resolved along similar lines.⁷⁴

Jewish Readings of Scripture

Among the most serious objections that can be raised against this threefold hypothesis are those concerning its implications for Jewish readings of Scripture and for Jewish–Christian relations. According to these objections, the claim that some of God’s intended meaning in the Old Testament can be discerned only in the light of Christian revelation is problematic because it denigrates Jewish readings of Scripture and ultimately Judaism itself. It thus flies in the face not only of Christian repentance for past anti-Semitism, ecclesial declarations such as *Nostra Aetate*, and other advances in Christian appreciation for Judaism, but also Christian Scripture itself, which states that God’s covenant with the Jewish people is “irrevocable” (Rom 11:29).

To these objections, it must immediately be conceded that, if this threefold hypothesis did in fact have implications that, however unintentionally, denigrated Jewish readings of Scripture or Judaism itself, then it would be problematic for that reason alone. Yet it need not be construed to have any such implications. Setting aside questions of biblical interpretation, we can observe that friends frequently disagree about the meaning of an existentially important text, and tell each other so, while also showing great respect for each other’s reading of the text and even learning from each other.

Consequently, to someone who might object that it is one thing for

⁷⁴ Joseph Ratzinger comes close to affirming that the human authors of Scripture sometimes intend to convey meaning that God does not. In the face of the apparent errors found in Scripture, he occasionally speaks about what Scripture intends, seemingly in opposition to what the human authors intend. He does not clarify what he means when he talks about Scripture intending something. Nevertheless, he appears to hold that what Scripture intends—and by implication what the divine author intends—does not necessarily encompass all that the human authors intend. See: Jared Wicks, “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and During Vatican Council II,” *Gregorianum* 89 (2008): 233–311, at 269–85, esp. 280; Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 5; Aaron Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Inerrancy,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 12 (2014): 307–30, esp. 311–16. According to the most natural reading of certain critical passages, the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s recent document, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, also seems to assume or acknowledge that the human authors sometimes intended to make claims that were inaccurate (see §§ 108, 123, 134).

Christians to find Christological meaning in an Old Testament text, but to claim that God put it there—that this meaning informs the text intrinsically, from the inside—is intrinsically denigrating of Jewish readings of Scripture, we have reason to say that the burden of proof is with objector.⁷⁵ In any event, as many Christian scholars have demonstrated, it is indeed possible to hold simultaneously for the truth of Christian readings of the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Christ, on the one hand, and the irrevocable nature of the Jewish covenant and the enriching value of learning from Jewish readings of Scripture, on the other.⁷⁶ Also, as Reinhard Hütter has pointed out, a strongly Christological reading of the Old Testament offers a corrective against the perennial Marcionite temptation to disregard or downplay the importance of the Old Testament for Christianity.⁷⁷ Christological readings of the Old Testament can be used to justify chauvinistic disrespect for Judaism, but they also provide a reason for Christians to take the Old Testament seriously and honor the Jewish people from whom they receive it. By thus countering the Marcionite dismissal of the Old Testament and its sweeping disregard for Jewish belief and practice, Christological readings of the Old Testament are not merely compatible with respect for Judaism; when properly contextualized, they play an important role in *enhancing* Christian respect for Judaism.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that concerns about the implications of this article's threefold hypothesis for Jewish readings of Scripture and for Jewish–Christian relations are valid and important, and require greater attention than can be given here.

Implications for the Inspiration and Truth of Scripture

The principle that God and the human authors always agree on the intended sense, but sometimes differ on the intended reference, has a

⁷⁵ For a helpful discussion of supersessionism and how Christian readings of Jewish Scripture can be distinctive without being denigrating of Jewish readings, see Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 129–31. See also Claire Mathews McGinnis, “Stumbling over the Testaments: On Reading Patristic Exegesis and the Old Testament in Light of the New,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (2010): 15–31.

⁷⁶ See, e.g.: Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2002); Matthew Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom: Engagements with the Theology of David Novak* (Bloomsbury, 2010).

⁷⁷ Reinhard Hütter, “In’: Some Incipient Reflections on ‘The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible,’” *Pro Ecclesia* 13, no. 1 (2004): 13–24, at 23.

number of implications for the theology of inspiration.⁷⁸

The Metaphysics and Psychology of Inspiration

Assuming that the human authors sometimes intend to affirm things that are not in fact true (for example, that the Jews are bound to specific ritual observances in perpetuity), and that God, it is widely agreed, cannot inspire falsehood, then it cannot be the case that God inspired every aspect of the human authors' intending. God inspires many aspects of the human authors' intending, but he cannot inspire *every* aspect of their intending, because that would imply inspiring falsehood. It does not matter that the human authors may be speaking the truth as best they know it. Even if the human authors lack any intention to deceive, God knows the truth, and he cannot inspire them to affirm something that he knows is false. The fact that, on a deeper level, what the human authors say is true in ways that they do not realize—for example, about the perpetual obligation of Jewish ritual practices, which in the Christian dispensation is fulfilled in spiritual ways—is irrelevant. It does not change the fact that some of what they *intend* to affirm is false. And since God could not have inspired them to intend anything false, some of the human authors' intended meaning must come entirely from themselves.

This striking conclusion points to an excess of intended meaning in Scripture: an excess that comes purely from the human authors, beyond what God inspires. While the human authors choose their words for reasons that are inspired by God, they also choose their words—at least occasionally—for reasons that are entirely their own, reasons that are somehow outside the sphere of God's direct inspiration. To put it otherwise, as the human authors choose their words, the Holy Spirit does not inspire every aspect of their choosing. Something about their choice of words must originate entirely in the human authors themselves, from wellsprings that do not trace back to the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

⁷⁸ The theology of inspiration, widely regarded as having stalled over the past few decades, has been undergoing a revival in some circles. On the state of contemporary theology of inspiration, see Matthew Levering, "The Inspiration of Scripture: A *Status Quaestionis*," *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 281–314; Philip Moller, "What Should They Be Saying about Biblical Inspiration? A Note on the State of the Question," *Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (2013): 605–31. For two recent attempts to revive the theology of inspiration, see: Denis Farkasfalvy, *A Theology of the Christian Bible: Revelation—Inspiration—Canon* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018); Gerard O'Collins, *Inspiration: Towards a Christian Interpretation of Biblical Inspiration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Strictly speaking, we can demonstrate the existence of this excess only when it is absolutely clear that the human authors intend something that the divine author does not, like when they describe certain ritual precepts as binding in perpetuity. Yet in thinking about how divine inspiration would have to work to account for these clear-cut instances, the most natural conclusion is that these instances are not exceptions, but limit cases. They are occasions when the veil is lifted on the hidden mechanism of inspiration. Assuming that we can indeed extrapolate from these clear-cut instances to a general rule, then it must be the case that in the composition of each and every word of Scripture, the human authors are not merely expressing what God inspires them to say. They are also and always writing for their own independent reasons, reasons which God may well approve but which somehow fall outside the sphere of his direct inspiration. To put it another way: the human authors have many reasons for choosing their words. Some of these reasons trace back to God's inspiration, but others do not.

This excess of intended meaning in Scripture suggests a complex psychology of inspiration. It suggests that God influences the human authors without overwhelming them.⁷⁹ God inspires them as they choose their words, so that they choose them for his reasons, but they also choose their words for their own reasons. There is a dialogical element to inspiration.⁸⁰ The inspired writers may not perceive what is happening as they write, but regardless of what they perceive, they experience in their subjectivity a dialogical interplay between the impulse of inspiration and their own normal psychological functioning. God guides them along paths of thought and emotion, but he does not walk the paths for them. God leads them along paths that they would not have chosen otherwise, in a direction he has chosen, but they walk at their own pace, in their own way, until they arrive together with God at their destination: words that are truly God's and truly theirs. The human authors thus contribute something to Scripture that is neither inspired by God nor determined by God: something that is truly from them.⁸¹

⁷⁹ In a presentation delivered during the Second Vatican Council, Joseph Ratzinger stresses that, counter to theories tracing back to Philo and Augustine which take their origin from Middle Platonic mysticism, God's inspiration should not be understood as overwhelming the human authors or swallowing them up (Wicks, "Six Texts," 278).

⁸⁰ Wicks, "Six Texts," 269–85.

⁸¹ The communities of Scripture's human authors also contribute something to Scripture. Since these communities shaped the sensibilities and religious horizons of the human authors, they contribute to Scripture not merely historical backdrop,

The Truth of Scripture

Traditionally, convictions about the truth of Scripture have flowed from convictions about inspiration. Since Scripture is inspired, the reasoning goes, it must be free from all error.⁸² Theological reasoning does not usually run in reverse. Theologians do not usually argue that Scripture's evident freedom from all error means that it must have been inspired by God. There are too many problematic passages in Scripture.⁸³ The compelling truth of individual passages of Scripture may well convince someone that the whole of Scripture must be inspired, and therefore inerrant, but convictions about the truth of Scripture taken as a whole typically derive from convictions about inspiration. Naturally, different understandings of inspiration lead to different understandings of the truth of Scripture.

According to the account of inspiration given here, God's inspiration does not extend to every aspect of the human authors' intended meaning. God's inspiration always encompasses their intended sense (*Sinn*), but it does not always encompass their intended reference (*Bedeutung*). Under the assumption that only what God inspires need be immune from error, two important consequences follow. First, to know what Scripture teaches without error, we must first discern God's intended meaning. It does not suffice to discern the human authors' intended meaning. The human authors' intended meaning may not correspond to God's intended meaning, because the human authors sometimes intend references that God does not. Second, there is no great difficulty in acknowledging that the human authors of Scripture sometimes intend to make claims that are not in fact correct. God's intended reference is what is immune from error, not the human authors' intended reference.

One might object that this account of the truth of Scripture reduces to a trivial tautology: whatever truth God intends to communicate through Scripture is true. In response, it can be granted that, yes, it can be reduced to that premise, but it is not for that reason a trivial tautology.

literary context, and modes of expression, but something that is truly from them. The text of Scripture reflects not only the human authors' free and creative contributions and the human authors' inner dialogue with God, but also those of their communities.

⁸² See, for example, Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), §§20–21, and *Dei Verbum*, §11.

⁸³ Famously, Cardinal Franz König cited some of them on the floor of the Second Vatican Council. See (*History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak, vol. 4, *Church as Communion—Third Period and Intersession, September 1964 – September 1965* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis; Leuven: Peeters, 2004], 220).

The reason is that, according to the account of inspiration given here, God always inspires the sense (*Sinn*) intended by the human authors. Since the intended sense significantly constrains our attempts to discern God's intended reference, claiming that "whatever truth God intends to communicate through Scripture is true" does not open the door to an exegetical free-for-all, nor does it reduce Christian convictions about the truth of Scripture to an empty cipher. It does indeed allow for a great deal of interpretative leeway, but difficult passages in Scripture often require that interpretative leeway in order to be read in ways compatible with fundamental Christian beliefs.⁸⁴ It also helps to explain the role of—and points to the need for—ecclesial authority. If anyone with a grasp of Scripture's humanly intended meaning could infallibly judge what God meant to assert, there would be substantially less need for authoritative interpretations of Scripture.

Plenary Verbal Inspiration

Despite being the default assumption from the early Church through the nineteenth century, plenary verbal inspiration—the view that every word of Scripture is inspired by God—has fallen on hard times. Objections have centered on its alleged inability to explain Scripture's evident humanness, especially its apparent errors, and its seeming implications for theological exegesis. For example, Sandra Schneiders rules out plenary verbal inspiration as "theologically untenable" for "almost inevitably lead[ing] to fundamentalism in interpretation and to irresolvable conflicts with empirical data."⁸⁵ To better account for the empirical data, alternative theories of inspiration have been proposed. Johann Baptist Franzelin theorized that God inspired the human authors with concepts and nonverbal messages and then stepped back and let them express those concepts and nonverbal messages as they saw fit.⁸⁶ Around the same time as Franzelin, John Henry Newman and others proposed that Scripture includes incidental remarks by the human authors,

⁸⁴ See, for example, the challenge posed by "dark passages of the bible" for traditional theories of Scripture: Matthew J. Ramage, *Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013). Applying this article's threefold hypothesis—and especially the idea that God need not intend every reference intended by the human authors of Scripture—allows us to regard these "dark passages" as divinely inspired and yet also fully compatible with a maximal account of God's goodness.

⁸⁵ Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 48.

⁸⁶ James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 88–120.

obiter dicta, which do not share in the charism of inspiration.⁸⁷

If we grant, however, that God sometimes intends less than the human authors, these concerns about plenary verbal inspiration can be addressed easily. The key point is that plenary verbal inspiration need not imply that God and the inspired writers intend the same reference, only that they intend the same sense. With this point in mind, these sorts of objections evaporate. God inspires every word of Scripture, but he does not predetermine every word of Scripture. Rather, God and the human authors find the words together. As the human authors compose each phrase of Scripture, they are drawing on their own freedom and creativity in what they say and how they say it, but God is also guiding them so that, without depriving them of their freedom or their creativity, they consign to writing “everything that he wanted, and only what he wanted.”⁸⁸ There is plenary verbal inspiration, but not *predetermined* plenary verbal inspiration.

The idea of God finding the words with the inspired writers can seem to reduce God to the status of mere coauthor. Christian tradition, meanwhile, while generally recognizing that God’s authorship must be understood in analogous terms, has typically referred to God as the principal author of Scripture.⁸⁹ This account of divine inspiration, however, does not demote God from principal author to mere coauthor. It still has God transcendently guiding the process from beginning to end. Furthermore, when we reflect on the obvious fact that the inspired writers could only choose words that they already knew, the idea of God finding the words with the inspired writers does not appear reductive, but instead necessary. Consider, for example, the fact that every inspired writer wrote in languages that they already spoke before being inspired. This obvious fact

⁸⁷ John Henry Newman, *On the Inspiration of Scripture* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1967); Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 65–79; Raymond F. Collins, “Inspiration,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1023–33 at 1030.

⁸⁸ *Dei Verbum* §11.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1. Karl Rahner and others have rightly cautioned against understanding God’s authorship of Scripture in ways too closely analogous to human authorship: Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, trans. Charles H. Henkey (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 13–18, 58–66; Denis Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation: A Theological Introduction to Sacred Scripture* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 213–19; Moller, “What Should They Be Saying?,” 621–22. Nevertheless, while acknowledging that God’s authorship differs from human authorship, for God’s authorship to mean anything, he must want to say something through the words of Scripture, and he must somehow be involved in the actual choosing of each and every word.

means that their words did not come into their minds *ex nihilo* from God. God worked with what they gave him. And since verbal performances necessarily originate from unique and unrepeatable movements of thought (that is, we never say the same words for exactly the same reasons), it is, arguably, ontologically impossible for God to inspire words except by finding them with the human authors, if God's inspiration is to leave their freedom intact. In short, this account of inspiration does not deny or minimize God's status as principal author of Scripture. It is rather the necessary implication of affirming that the inspired writers are themselves true authors—or of calling God the principal author of Scripture in the first place, since the title implies that he is not the *only* author of Scripture.

Implications for Theological Exegesis

These reflections on the inspiration and truth of Scripture have numerous implications for theological exegesis.

The Literal Meaning and Theological Exegesis

In theological readings of Scripture, the primacy of the literal meaning of Scripture continues to be asserted across a wide range of theological perspectives. Among theologians relying primarily on historical-critical methods, neo-Scholastic categories, canonical criticism, or insights drawn from contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, and everything in between, there is great consensus that the literal meaning is foundational to theological exegesis. Yet as discussed earlier, there is no agreement about what it is, or how it relates to authorial intention, or how exactly it should function in theological exegesis.

Applying the distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*) allows us to clarify the role of the literal meaning in theological exegesis. On the one hand, if we define the literal meaning as encompassing both the human authors' intended sense and their intended reference, as Origen seems to do when arguing against keeping Jewish law according to the letter, then we must significantly qualify the primacy of the literal meaning. Since the human authors sometimes intend references that God does not, we will sometimes need to interpret Scripture not according to the literal meaning, but against it. In these cases, we will need to kick it away like a ladder after we have ascended to God's intended meaning. On the other hand, if we define the literal meaning as encompassing the human authors' intended sense, but excluding their intended reference (as seems to be required if we hold, as Aquinas does, that the literal meaning is always intended by God, because the human authors sometimes intend references that God does not), then we could hold for the hermeneutic

primacy of the literal meaning without any qualification. We can define the literal meaning either way; there is nothing preventing us from defining a technical term however we please. But however we define the literal meaning of Scripture, if we want to privilege the literal meaning in our exegetical method, we must somehow take into account the excess of intended meaning in Scripture: the meaning intended by the human authors but not by God.

Given that we can define the literal meaning either way, can we draw any conclusions about which definition would be preferable? Yes, we can. The whole point of privileging the literal meaning of Scripture is to provide a stable foundation for theological exegesis. Yet we have easy and reliable access only to the intended sense (*Sinn*). We do not have easy and reliable access to the intended reference (*Bedeutung*). Consequently, if we want to privilege the literal meaning of Scripture in our exegetical method, it is more logical to identify the literal meaning of Scripture with the intended sense alone, rather than as encompassing both intended sense and intended reference.

The claim that we have easy and reliable access to the intended *Sinn* of a text was explained and defended above, but it bears repeating and elaborating here, because a lot hangs on this claim, and it is easily misunderstood. To say that we have easy and reliable access to the intended *Sinn* does not mean that we therefore have easy and reliable access to the intended meaning; it simply means that, if we speak a language, we necessarily have knowledge of its conventions, and therefore easy and reliable access to the range of references typically associated with particular words and expressions. For example, to return to an earlier example, if we come across a slip of paper with the words, "Get on the next train," we have easy and reliable access to the intended *Sinn*, but without further context, we have neither easy nor reliable access to the message it was intended to convey. Is it an actual instruction to someone, a coded message, or a line from a poem? We do not know. Likewise, when considering the story of God's command to Saul to kill the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:1–3), we have easy and reliable access to the text's intended *Sinn*, but we have neither easy nor reliable access to the message either God or the human authors intended to convey. Is it a historical account, historical fiction, a fable, or what? Is it meant as a factual account of something that really happened, coupled with a religious message about faith and obedience? Or is it not meant to be taken as something historical, but simply as a dramatic device, something meant to communicate the radical necessity of cleaving to God in faith, and the importance of eliminating anything that could pose an obstacle to living a life of faith? Coming to a conclusion on this score is neither easy nor

uncontroversial. In short, our access to the intended *Sinn* is secure, but this secure access does not get us what we are most interested in: the intended meaning, for which we also need access to the intended reference, which is much more elusive, and often requires great effort and a lot of training, both intellectual and spiritual, to acquire—and perhaps a bit of luck, too.

The Seed That Must Die to Bear Fruit

Over recent decades, after a great deal of struggle and debate, a tentative, ecumenical consensus about theological exegesis has begun to take shape. Gradually, more and more exegetes and theologians have come to agree on a number of hermeneutical principles, largely drawn from the tradition in one way or another, as a foundation for postcritical theological exegesis.⁹⁰ The following provides a representative list. First, we should interpret each part of Scripture in view of the whole, reading individual passages in light of the entire canon,⁹¹ and giving pride of place to the Gospels.⁹² Second, Scripture can be properly interpreted only according to the rule of faith and the Christian community which preserves and interprets it.⁹³ Third, we need to read Scripture through the lens of the Paschal mystery.⁹⁴ Fourth,

⁹⁰ For a survey of contemporary approaches to theological exegesis, see Sarisky, *Reading the Bible Theologically*, 1–72.

⁹¹ See *Dei Verbum* §12 and the genre of canonical criticism initiated by Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970). For a survey of recent applications of canonical criticism, see Ron Haydon, “A Survey and Analysis of Recent ‘Canonical’ Methods (2000–2015),” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10, no. 1 (2016): 145–55.

⁹² *Dei Verbum* §18.

⁹³ In *On First Principles* (preface, 2; 4.2.2), Origen is among the first Christian authors to appeal to “the rule of faith” as a guide for the interpretation of Scripture (see Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 105, 13, 27–31). On the rule of faith in early Christianity, see: Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang, eds., *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Tomas Bokedal, “The Rule of Faith: Tracing Its Origins,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (2013): 233–55. On the rule of faith in contemporary theological exegesis, see Leonard G. Finn, “Reflections on the Rule of Faith,” in *The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Word of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz, Kent Harold Richards, and Robert C. Kashow (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

⁹⁴ For an illuminating exchange on this subject, see Ayres and Fowl, “(Mis)Reading,” and Roland E. Murphy, “Quaestio Disputata: Is the Paschal Mystery Really the Primary Hermeneutical Principle?” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 139–46. While Murphy objects to Ayres and Fowl describing the Paschal mystery as a hermeneutical principle, let alone *the* primary hermeneutical principle, preferring to describe it as a context which Christian reading of Scripture presumes, they ultimately agree

God speaking his Word in human words parallels God sending his Word to become human, and so Scripture should be understood in terms analogous to the Incarnation.⁹⁵ While these principles are often given different theoretical justifications and applied in very different ways, even contradictory ones, they are now well established and widely accepted. All of them have some role to play in passing from the words of Scripture to God's intended meaning.

Of themselves, however, none of these principles can account for a crucial characteristic of Scripture: its excess of intended meaning, that is, the references intended by the human authors but not by God.⁹⁶ This lacuna can be supplied by thinking of Scripture as a seed, an image well justified by the words of Jesus in the New Testament. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus uses the image of a seed and its sowing to describe God's word, variously describing it as either simply "the word" (Mark 4:14), "the word of the kingdom" (Matt 13:18), or "the word of God" (Luke 8:11). In John's Gospel, in the context of discussing his own impending death, Jesus describes how a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die in order to bear fruit (John 12:24). Even without the gloss of Jesus's explanation in John, the image of a seed inevitably suggests the seed's growth, and the seed's growth inevitably suggests the casting aside of its shell—all in order that the seed may cease being a seed, and the life that is the seed's innermost reality may continue to grow and become more fully what it already is.

In this way, the image of the seed that must die to bear fruit perfectly captures the occasional necessity of transcending the human authors' intended meaning in order to arrive at God's intended meaning. In the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, Stephen Langton wrote, "Christ's passion, like a key, has opened for us the understanding of sacred Scripture."⁹⁷ He meant that Christ's Passion has opened for us the understand-

about the central significance of the Paschal mystery for Christian exegesis.

⁹⁵ Origen, *Philocalia* 15.19; *Dei Verbum* §13; Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, §18; Mary Healy, "Inspiration and Incarnation: The Christological Analogy and the Hermeneutics of Faith," *Letter & Spirit* 2 (2006): 27–41. For a more critical view, see James B. Prothro, "The Christological Analogy and Theological Interpretation: Its Limits and Use," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 14, no. 1 (2020): 102–19.

⁹⁶ Which is not to say that those employing these principles fail to accommodate the excess of intended meaning in Scripture in actual practice; in fact, quite often and generally speaking they do. The point is that these principles, of themselves, cannot account for the excess of intended meaning in Scripture.

⁹⁷ Stephen Langton, *Commentary on Micah*, 6. Paris, BnF lat. 505, fol. 73ra; Vaticano, BAV vat.lat. 1295, fol. 95va. I am indebted to the late Dominican scholar

ing of Scripture's meaning. But we might also say that Christ's Passion has opened for us the understanding of Scripture's *nature*, because the form of Scripture is Christ himself. Like Christ himself, Scripture passes from death to life. It gives up its outer form for the sake of its inner life, and then, after that outer form has been buried underground by those who loved it, Scripture rises glorified and transformed.

The key innovation of Christian exegesis was the conviction that the Jewish Scriptures testified to Jesus of Nazareth, often in ways that the inspired writers could not have foreseen. But there was another innovation, which the first generation of Jewish Christians often struggled to accept, and which is much less appreciated today: the conviction that God sometimes intends less than Scripture's human authors. The second innovation followed from the first. Once the disciples of Jesus realized that God's intentions could go beyond the human authors' intentions—a possibility they had no reason to entertain until they read the Jewish Scriptures in light of the Paschal mystery—they came to conclude that God sometimes intended less than the human authors, precisely because Jesus fulfilled the Jewish Scriptures not merely by way of glorification, but also by way of casting off, like a new shoot shedding the husk of its shell.

In many ways, it was this second exegetical innovation, not the first, that was the greater obstacle to Jewish acceptance of Christian beliefs. And for good reason: if Scripture is truly inspired by God, how could God not endorse the meaning obviously intended by its human authors?⁹⁸ Yet without this second innovation, Peter and Paul would not have felt free to depart from Jewish observance. The history of Christianity would have played out very differently, too. It would have taken the legs out of the mission to the Gentiles. For good reason, then, this second innovation was canonized by the New Testament and absorbed into Christian culture. Consequently, Christian theology that does not accept this second exegetical innovation is performatively incoherent, both on intellectual grounds, for contradicting key elements of Christian revelation, and on existential

Louis Bataillon for the original Latin of this quotation and the manuscript citations.

⁹⁸ Paul seems to have understood the seriousness of this intellectual difficulty. In his letters, Paul often speaks about stumbling blocks to faith (Rom 11:9; 14:13, 20; 1 Cor 1:23; 8:9; Gal 5:11), which center on three things: dietary observances, circumcision, and the Cross of Christ. Each of these stumbling blocks—including the Cross of Christ, since in Galatians 5:11, Paul seems to suggest that Christ's crucifixion is a stumbling block for Jews precisely because, properly understood, it leads to the relativization of circumcision—pertain to the intellectual difficulty of thinking that God might intend less than the human authors of Scripture.

grounds, for contradicting Christian self-identity. Nevertheless, it is a radical innovation, in some ways more radical than the first. Appreciation for the depth of its radicality—and the ways that it challenges even many traditional Christian readings of Scripture—should give Christians greater respect for the reasons that Jews have for reading their Scriptures differently from Christians.

Practical Applications

Practically speaking, how should we apply these exegetical principles? How should we go about trying to determine what meaning God intends to convey in a particular passage of Scripture? Exegesis can never be reduced to an algorithm—exegesis always involves irreducibly complex judgments—but the following sketch gives a very rough sense of how these exegetical principles might be applied in practice.

As the Christian exegetical tradition has long affirmed, our first point of departure for theological exegesis must remain the literal meaning of Scripture—but for the reasons discussed above, the literal meaning understood as the human authors' intended sense (*Sinn*) alone, and not as encompassing both their intended sense (*Sinn*) and their intended reference (*Bedeutung*), because we have easy and reliable access only to the former. And since the literal meaning of Scripture is a human construction (albeit divinely inspired), it is fully proper to enlist all the tools of historical-critical exegesis to clarify what it might be.⁹⁹

After determining the human authors' intended sense, which we know must also be God's intended sense, we can then turn to investigating God's intended reference. This inquiry proceeds by asking ourselves: given what we know about God, the world, and God's interventions in human history, what could God plausibly intend to communicate through the intended

⁹⁹ While theological exegesis is not interested in the human authors' intended reference for its own sake, we cannot ignore their intended reference, either. The reason is that sense does not exist apart from reference. Sense exists only in the mind as an abstraction of concrete particulars. As a result, we cannot clarify the intended sense of an expression without implicit attention to the range of its possible references. Consequently, when we set out to clarify the human authors' intended sense, we must also pay attention—however implicitly—to the range of their possible intended references, which often requires historical and critical expertise, and not just a dictionary. A dictionary does not suffice because this historical and critical expertise involves the ability to recognize and interpret literary genre, a capacity which goes far beyond grammatical and lexical fluency, and which generally requires hard-won familiarity with the historical, literary, and cultural context in which the text was produced.

sense of this passage? That is, what reference might God plausibly intend to *present* through this passage? The human authors' intended reference might be a good place to start, but depending on the passage, it might not be. Fortunately, we do not need to know their intended reference to come to conclusions about God's intended reference. We simply need to ask ourselves: given the text's intended sense, and given what we know about God from other elements of revelation (including natural revelation), what could God mean by this text?

To arrive at a satisfactory answer, we need to balance respect for the constraints of the text with theological imagination.

On the one hand, the meaning of words is not infinitely malleable. The intended sense of a text constrains speculation about God's intended reference. The sheer movement of our bodies drastically constrains any plausible speculation about our intentions. For example, when we see baseball players swing at a pitch, we can plausibly infer that they are trying to hit the ball, or at least trying to make it look like they are trying to hit the ball (in the event that they have been paid to throw the game). We cannot plausibly infer that they are trying to repair a garage door. In the same way, from the words of a text, we are limited in the plausible stories we can tell about what the author is trying to communicate. For example, we cannot plausibly interpret the instruction manual for a rice cooker to be a critical analysis of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The words of the text constrain us. Likewise, after clarifying the intended sense of a Scripture passage, we are severely limited in the range of plausible stories we can tell about what God was trying to communicate. The words of the Scripture constrain us. There is certainly room for twisting the words of Scripture to suit a theological agenda, but even so there are limits. We cannot plausibly argue that a baseball player swinging at a baseball is trying to make an espresso. The movements of his body constrain the set of plausible constructions of his intentions. Likewise, the human authors' intended sense constrains the set of plausible constructions of God's intended reference.

On the other hand, we must be ready to exercise our imagination, because God's intended reference might depart considerably from the human authors' intended reference. For example, in Genesis 1:27, God uses the first-person plural, saying, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The human authors could not have intended this grammatical form to hint at the Trinity, or at least it is extraordinarily implausible to think that they did. But might the divine author have intended to allude to the Trinity? As early as the second century, Christians such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus read this passage as an instance of Trinitar-

ian discourse.¹⁰⁰ Many contemporary scholars, though, reject this sort of reading as forced and implausible. Who is right? Our own answer will ultimately take the form of a judgment of plausibility, and judgments of plausibility are not an exact science. The hermeneutic principles discussed above may help, but in the end these principles can only inform our judgment; they will not make it for us.

We must also be ready to exercise our imagination in another, more difficult manner. We must be ready to abandon deeply held theological convictions if the intended sense of the text admits of no other plausible option. We might even need to abandon what we had previously taken to be the only possible way to understand Christian doctrine. It is not enough to read each passage with the rule of faith and the rest of Scripture. Since every portion of Scripture is itself constitutive of Christian revelation, we must also be ready to let that passage correct our reception of the rule of faith and the rest of Scripture. But that requires humility, imagination, and courage. It requires a lively awareness of the limitations of our grasp of Christian revelation (and more than just a superficial awareness); it requires imagination, in order to entertain alternative conceptions of Christian doctrine; and it requires the courage to accept them, whatever the consequences, assuming they are compatible with Christian revelation, if that is where the text leads us.¹⁰¹

In sum, in order to arrive at God's intended meaning in any particular text, we need to take a twofold approach that joins historical-critical exegesis with the standard methods of patristic and medieval exegesis. On the one hand, after determining the intended sense through the best historical-critical tools available, we must respect its constraints. On the other hand, we must also read the text with an imagination formed by the whole of revelation and the whole of our personal and communal experience of faith, and with a mind open to the possibility that God intends to convey a meaning that the human authors do not. And as patristic and medieval authors were keenly aware, we also need a minimum amount of virtue,

¹⁰⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 62; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.1.

¹⁰¹ Which does not mean relativizing or disregarding the definitive judgments of the Christian community, as expressed by its authoritative representatives, nor does it mean asserting that "a meaning (*sensus*) may be assigned to the doctrines proposed by the Church which is different from that which the Church has understood and understands," a notion rejected by the First Vatican Council in *Dei Filius*; rather, it means being open to the possibility that we have not yet fully grasped what "the Church has understood and understands" (*Dei Filius*, canon 4.3, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, vol. 2 [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990]), 811; translation modified).

both intellectual and moral. When we read any great work of literature, we are not the only ones doing the interpreting. The text is also interpreting us: questioning us, probing us, challenging us, expanding our horizons.¹⁰² And when the text is the Word of God, “it pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).¹⁰³

In many cases, after carefully parsing the intended sense of a text and exercising our imagination, we might well find ourselves in a state of genuine uncertainty about just what meaning God intends to convey. Perhaps God’s reference is the same as the human authors’ reference; perhaps God’s reference is different; we are not sure. In such cases, as long as both possibilities are compatible with the rule of faith and the hermeneutical principle of interpreting individual passages of Scripture in light of the entire canon (and especially the Gospels), we can remain comfortable in our uncertainty. The fact that God’s meaning is theoretically knowable does not imply that, in our concrete existential situation, we will ever come to know it. It is also possible that God does not want us to understand everything he says, at least not yet. Sometimes we say things to people when they

¹⁰² See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 152–53: “The major texts, the classics, in religion, letters, philosophy, theology, not only are beyond the initial horizon of their interpreters but may also demand an intellectual, moral, religious conversion of the interpreter over and above the broadening of his horizon.” In the end, we may not be up to the challenge of interpreting a text; there is such a thing as a bad interpretation. As Meyer puts it: “When the literature to be interpreted is great, it may well call for an understanding of the world and a self-understanding on the part of the interpreter that at the moment are simply beyond him” (*Critical Realism*, xiii).

¹⁰³ Arguably, the exegetical approach outlined here is not far from what many theologians and biblical scholars actually do—whatever their preferred mode of exegesis—when they turn their attention to theological exegesis. Yet without explicit recognition that the human authors might mean something different from the divine author, and vice versa, it is easy to fall into one of two exegetical errors. The first error is to think that, once the meaning of text—considered from the point of view of the human authors—has been exegeted, we have immediate access to God’s intended meaning, or (more typically, and more ambiguously) the “theological” meaning of the text. The other error is to think that we can read Scripture theologically without regard for the human authors’ intended meaning. When both divine and human authors intend largely the same meaning, falling into one or the other error matters little or nothing, in terms of practical exegetical results. But when the meaning of a text varies significantly depending on whose authorship we consider, these errors can have grave exegetical consequences. Very frequently, they also lead to useless exegetical controversies which pit historical-critical methods against theological methods.

are sleeping that we would not say to them when they are awake. Perhaps God does something like that too. In any event, even if we fail to catch what God is saying, or even come to the wrong conclusion, the spiritual exercise of attempting to discern God's meaning will have borne spiritual fruit in ourselves. It will also have trained us to interpret Scripture more insightfully in the future—and to recognize God's voice when he speaks in other ways.¹⁰⁴ N&V

¹⁰⁴ This article is the final result of many drafts and revisions, and I would like to express my gratitude to the many friends, colleagues, and reviewers who read some version of it, or responded to one presentation or another, for their comments, suggestions, and bibliographical recommendations. I am especially grateful for their criticisms, which saved me from many errors, and which pushed me to dig deeper for more satisfying answers.

The Dimensions of the Kingdom of Heaven in Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on Matthew*

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IN HIS INAUGURAL LECTURE as a Master of Theology at the University of Paris, Saint Thomas Aquinas states that the three Synoptic Gospels “are distinguished according to the three dignities which relate to Christ the man. Of these, Matthew defines what pertains to the royal dignity; hence, in the beginning of his Gospel he shows that he had descended from kings according to the flesh, and shows him adored by the royal Magi.”¹ Thus, Aquinas’s commentary on Matthew makes a natural place to start investigating the Angelic Doctor’s treatment of the theme of the Kingdom of God.

Earlier scholarship dated the *Lectura super Mattheum* to Thomas’s first period as a *Magister in Sacra Pagina* at the University of Paris from 1256 to 1259.² However, more recent work has concluded that it belongs to the second Parisian period, most likely during the academic year of 1269–1270.³ This means that the Matthew commentary is an immediate predecessor to Aquinas’s better-known commentary on John, and as Jeremy Holmes points out, it is the work of “Aquinas at the height of his powers, with the entire patristic

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Hic est liber*, in *Principium* [*Inaugural Lectures*], transl. Ralph McNerney, in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1998), revised and html-edited by Joseph Kenny, O.P., isidore.co/aquinas/english/Principium.htm.

² See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, rev. ed. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 55–56, and Jeremy Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura in Matthaeum*,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 75–76.

³ See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:55–56, and Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 75–76.

tradition at his fingertips and a complete command of scholastic theology.⁴

Unfortunately, the text available to us may not represent Aquinas at his full brilliance. As Holmes notes, “the *lectura* come down to us through *reportationes*, that is, notes taken down by person in the audience and later filled out from memory or other sources to look more like the actual transcript of a lecture.”⁵ Unlike the commentary on John, Thomas does not appear to have reviewed these notes for publication.⁶ In addition, the manuscript tradition is limited—only four manuscripts, from two sources, survive. “Peter [d’Andria] seems to have written down the comments on chapters 1–12 of Matthew, while Leodegar [of Besançon] recorded the lectures from 6.9 through to the end of the Gospel.”⁷

The tradition is further complicated by the fact that the manuscripts are “not only incomplete but erroneous.”⁸ Key portions of the text of chapters 5 and 6—dealing with the Sermon on the Mount—were missing from all the manuscripts available until recently; the commentary’s first editor, Bartholomew of Sina, filled in the gaps with a commentary by Peter de Scala, a late-thirteenth-century Dominican.⁹

Fortunately for scholars of Thomas, in 1955, a copy of Peter d’Andria’s *reportatio* containing the missing material was discovered in a library at Basel.¹⁰ Until recently, only fragments of this text were available to the public.¹¹ However, as of September 2013, the Aquinas Institute of Lander, Wyoming, has published a Latin–English edition of the commentary on Matthew which, though primarily based on the earlier Marietti text, uses the Basel manuscript to correct the lacunae and replace the interpolated portions.

While a final critical edition awaits the work of the Leonine Commission, for the first time, the academic community has easy access to a complete and uncorrupted version of the commentary text. Whatever faults remain in what has come down to us, this remains a valuable

⁴ Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 77.

⁵ Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74.

⁶ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:339, Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74.

⁷ Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74.

⁸ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:57.

⁹ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:56–57 and Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74–75.

¹⁰ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:57 and Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74–75.

¹¹ Selections of it were reproduced in J.-P. Renard, “*La Lectura super Matthaeum* V. 20–48 de Thomas d’Aquin (Edition d’après le ms. Bale, Univ. Bibl. B.V. 12),” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 50 (1983): 145–190, and H.-V. Schooner, “*La Lectura in Matthaeum* de S. Thomas (Deux fragments inédits et la *Reportatio* de Pierre d’Andria),” *Angelicum* 33 (1956): 121–42.

commentary and source of insight into Aquinas's biblical theology, and thus to his doctrine on the Kingdom, which is harder to derive from his more famous systematic works.

We should briefly address this commentary's relationship to Thomas's other major work on the Evangelists, the *Catena aurea*. Thomas began this collection of patristic commentary on the Gospels "at the request of Urban IV toward the end of 1262 or the beginning of 1263"¹² and had the volume on Matthew ready to offer to that Pope before his death in October 1264.¹³ The rest of the text took somewhat longer to complete, but it was finished "between 1265 and 1268, before Thomas returned to Paris."¹⁴ Thus, it predates the commentary on Matthew, and Holmes, having selected the passage on the Transfiguration as "typical" of the commentary, concludes that "those parts of Thomas' text which are directly dependent on the *Catena* make 70 per cent of the total commentary on Mt. 17.1–9."¹⁵ While the *Catena aurea* contains little of Thomas's own thought, its structure and influence on the commentary on Matthew make it an invaluable companion as a way to track his sources and demonstrate the depth of his engagement with the Fathers, as well as his gifts in bringing them all into a unified, coherent whole.¹⁶

Some previous attempts at studying the topic of the Kingdom have dismissed the Matthew commentary, if not Aquinas's work as a whole. Writing in 1980, Benedict Viviano stated: "Thomas Aquinas does not devote any significant portion of his principal theological enterprise to the kingdom of God, the central theme of the preaching of Jesus. This may be considered a serious weakness in the greatest doctor of the medieval Church."¹⁷ Viviano was aware of the Matthew commentary, but when considering the definition of the Kingdom in the commentary on Matthew 3, he characterized it as containing "the familiar false start based on Luke 17:21, which becomes the basis for an individualist, private interior definition, . . . the usual Augustinian line, . . . [and] a rather remote, arbitrary equivocation."¹⁸ The reason for those multiple descriptions is

¹² Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:136.

¹³ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:136–37.

¹⁴ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:137.

¹⁵ Holmes, "Aquinas' *Lectura*," 86.

¹⁶ The *Catena aurea* has also been studied and annotated with more depth than those commentaries, especially the neglected Matthew text, making it an easier source for determining precise references to earlier authors.

¹⁷ Benedict T. Viviano, "The Kingdom of God in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 44, no. 4 (1980): 507–24, at 509.

¹⁸ Viviano, "Kingdom of God," 510.

that, in this passage, Aquinas puts forth a definition of the Kingdom that includes no less than *four* distinct dimensions.

Later writers have had a more positive view of Thomas's work here. Contemporary theologian Matthew Levering has used this passage as the starting point when discussing "the Kingdom, the Church, and the Holy Spirit" in his *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*.¹⁹ Levering provides a brief overview of the four dimensions laid out at the start of Aquinas's commentary on Matthew 3, and highlights how each of the first three dimensions helps provide "the addition of an imminent dimension to the sense of eschatological imminence."²⁰ Levering does not follow up on the work on the Kingdom in the rest of the commentary, though, opting to develop his thesis through a study of other texts of Aquinas. Thus, while Aquinas's views of the Kingdom are treated more respectfully than in Viviano, the *commentary on Matthew* is used only as a starting point rather than a topic for deep research.

This paper takes some steps in the other direction, arguing that a careful examination of the commentary on Matthew demonstrates Thomas's broad knowledge of the Fathers on the topic of the Kingdom and that Thomas understands these dimensions of the Kingdom as interconnected and dependent on each other. Rather than being four independent interpretations, or even three dimensions feeding into an eschatological whole, these are four dimensions of a unified concept of the Kingdom, and this unity can be seen throughout Aquinas's discussion of the topic in his study of this Gospel. In addition, going beyond the fourfold definition laid out in the commentary on Matthew 3:2 leads the careful reader to a text that is easy to overlook, but which provides a Christological dimension that anchors the other dimensions of the Kingdom in an even more profound unity than the eschatological dimension.

I begin with a breakdown of Aquinas's exegesis of the proclamation of the Kingdom in Matthew 3, which provides the fourfold definition mentioned above, as well as the less obvious but more fundamental fifth dimension. I then examine Aquinas's commentary on some other "Kingdom texts" in Matthew, examining how Thomas explains and connects the dimensions of the Kingdom, and conclude by exploring the question of the unifying dimension of the Kingdom and some further explorations of this doctrine.

¹⁹ Matthew Levering, *Exploring the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 234–35.

²⁰ Levering, *Exploring*, 235.

Matthew 3: Defining the Kingdom of Heaven

The first lecture on Matthew 3, which opens with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven by John the Baptist, provides Thomas with the opportunity to state his understanding of that Kingdom.

“The Kingdom of Heaven,” Aquinas says, “is received in four ways in Scripture,” following Remigius, down to the scriptural citations used.²¹ This is the only source cited on this passage in the *Catena aurea* as well, so we can be confident Thomas is using Remigius as the baseline for his interpretation. The first dimension of the Kingdom is based on the common medieval reading of Luke 17:21 (“The Kingdom of God is within you”) and is Christ’s indwelling by grace in the individual soul. “And this is called the kingdom of heaven because, by grace, the road to the kingdom of heaven is begun in us.”²² Viviano calls this a “familiar false start based on Luke 17:21, which becomes the basis for an individualist, private interior definition.”²³ Thomas is working in the medieval tradition that draws in turn from the Fathers; the *Catena aurea* cites Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Venerable Bede in support of this interpretation.²⁴ Defining it as a “false start” thus requires dramatically different premises from those of the medieval Scholastics, since it requires both dismissal of the Church Fathers and a modern skepticism about the text of the Gospels themselves. Since the Kingdom has not yet manifested in its visible fullness, and neither Jesus nor the report of his words in Scripture could be fundamentally in error, “the kingdom of God is within you” in the present tense must refer to the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers.²⁵

The second dimension of the Kingdom given is Scripture. This interpretation has been a stumbling block for some; Viviano calls it one that “can only be characterized as a rather remote, arbitrary equivocation.”²⁶ Thom-

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Matt 3*, lec. 1, (Marietti) no. 250; translations of *Super Matt* are my own guided by *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura*, trans. Jeremy Holmes, 2 vols. (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2013). Quotations of *Catena aurea* trans. John Henry Parker, in *Catena Aurea*, vol. 1, *Matthew* (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1842).

²² Aquinas, *Super Matt 3*, lec. 1 no. 250. Since Remigius, and through him Aquinas, cites Matthew 21:43, which refers to the transfer of the Kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles, in the context of Sacred Scripture, it can be taken as being read that Scripture here encompasses the Old Testament as well as the New.

²³ Viviano, “Kingdom of God,” 510

²⁴ Aquinas, *Catena aurea: Luke 17*, lec. 6

²⁵ For further discussion of the relationship of Christ’s preaching, the kingdom, and the degree of fulfillment, see Levering, *Exploring*, 210–40.

²⁶ Viviano, “Kingdom of God,” 510

as's reasoning becomes clearer with a further reading of the commentary, which shows that this interpretation centers on the understanding of Scripture as the "Book of the New Law." For Saint Thomas, the concept of law is central to the idea of a kingdom or people; his commentary on Psalm 2 goes so far as to state that "a populace is a mass of men joined by harmony of the law."²⁷ Scripture thus "is called the kingdom, because this law leads to the kingdom."²⁸ This is in keeping with what he saw about law in the *Summa theologiae*: "The intent of every lawgiver is to make good citizens."²⁹ In this case, the New Law of the Gospel makes the good citizens who constitute the Kingdom of Heaven. Based on other passages in the commentary on Matthew (especially the exposition of the parables of chapter 13) and elsewhere in his corpus, "Scripture" here should be understood as referring to the fullness of revelation or *sacra doctrina*.

The third dimension of the Kingdom is a more obvious one, "the present Church Militant."³⁰ However, this is not the central meaning, but only one of the several dimensions, since the earthly Church is modeled on the heavenly Church. Walter Mitchell, who wrote his dissertation on the relation between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church, puts it well:

[The Kingdome here] denotes the earthly church's exemplary cause. Thomas does not mean equivalence of kingdom and church; rather he is explaining the operative force within the church now of its eschatological goal. This operative force makes the present church to be *like*, to *participate* in, the kingdom's reality, but does *not* make it now the kingdom to come nor declare it such.³¹

Levering makes the same point in reviewing the Kingdom text in Matthew 3, referring back to the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* to establish that Thomas "identifies the kingdom with beatitude, either the

²⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Super Psalmos* 2, no. 1, Parma text of 1863, adapted to electronic format by Roberto Busa, S.J., reviewed by Enrique Alarcón, corpusth-omisticum.org.

²⁸ *Super Matt* 3, lec. 1, no. 250.

²⁹ *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 92, a. 1. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: Benziger, 1947). Reference has also been made to the Leonine edition (see corpusth-omisticum.org for index of volumes).

³⁰ *Super Matt* 3, lec. 1, no. 250.

³¹ Walter A. Mitchell, "The Relationship Between Kingdom and Church in the Writings of St. Thomas" (PhD diss., Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomase de Urbe, 1973), 51.

imperfect beatitude we possess by faith informed by charity or the perfect beatitude of heaven."³²

That leads us to the fourth dimension of the Kingdom, the "heavenly court" (*caelestis curia*), a meaning Aquinas supports by reference to Matthew 8:11, with Christ's proclamation about the eschatological Kingdom in which peoples of all nations will join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.³³ This is not only the last dimension explicated by Aquinas in commenting on Matthew 3:2, but as Mitchell and Levering point out, it is also arguably the final dimension in the sense of being the end toward which the others are ordered.

However, after laying out these four dimensions, Aquinas adds one more near the end of this lecture. Commenting on John's proclamation of the coming Messiah in Matthew 3:11, Saint Thomas states simply "that kingdom is Christ," again referring to Luke 17:21 and following a tradition that goes back to Origen.³⁴ Referring again to the *Catena aurea*, the connection of this passage specifically to the Kingdom comes from the *Glossa ordinaria* and its statement that Matthew 3:11 speaks of "the approach of the kingdom of Heaven."³⁵ This idea of the identity of the King and his Kingdom will further be developed by Robert Bellarmine, Joseph Ratzinger, and others.³⁶ Aquinas moves back and forth in his commentary on Matthew 3 between seeing John the Baptist's mission as a preparation for the Kingdom and a preparation for Christ; this is the point where he clearly identifies the two in this context.

This raises the question of what provides the unifying dimension of the Kingdom in Aquinas's thought. Levering and Mitchell make a strong case for the three other dimensions pointing toward the eschatological one, which suggests that the identification of the Kingdom with Christ may have no deeper relevance. On the other hand, Christ is so fundamental to Aquinas's work that the identification cannot be lightly dismissed, especially with the pride of place that Aquinas typically gives to the *Glossa ordinaria* in his exegesis. In the "worst case scenario," Viviano may have discerned the truth, and Aquinas is holding views in tension that do not fundamentally cohere—which also seems contrary to his overall approach

³² Levering, *Exploring*, 236.

³³ Again following Remigius.

³⁴ *Super Matt* 3, lec. 1, no. 275; Viviano, "Kingdom of God," 503.

³⁵ *Catena aurea: Matthew* 3, lec. 5

³⁶ See Ezra Sullivan, O.P., "Seek First the Kingdom: A Reply to Germain Grisez's Account of Man's Ultimate End," *Nova et Vetera* (English), 8, no. 4 (2010): 959–95, especially 990–93.

and method. To explain this, the first step is to see what else Thomas has to say about the Kingdom in his commentary on Saint Matthew's Gospel. While passages related to the Kingdom can be found throughout the Gospel and the commentary, in the interests of space and focus, this paper hones in on four key sections—the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of Matthew 13, the Parable of the Vineyard in Matthew 21, and the Judgment Discourse in Matthew 25.³⁷

The Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount

The lectures on Matthew 5 and 6, which contain most of the Sermon on the Mount, also contain some of the richest Kingdom of Heaven material in Matthew's Gospel, and have been the hardest parts of Aquinas's commentary to access. Many lectures on these two chapters were lost or corrupted parts of an already scanty manuscript tradition. These lacunae were only filled in by the discovery of the Basel manuscript in the 1950s, and it took several decades after that for the text to become easily accessible to most students of Saint Thomas.³⁸

The first reference to the Kingdom of Heaven in this part of the commentary is when Thomas analyzes the structure of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–10): “In these beatitudes, some things are set forth as merits, and some as rewards, and this is clear in each. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*—here is the merit; *because theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*—here is the reward.”³⁹ These rewards, he goes on to say, “may be had in two ways, namely perfected and complete, and so it is fully in the homeland, or secondly inchoate and imperfectly, and so it is in this life. Hence, the holy have a certain inchoate form of this blessedness.”⁴⁰ This demonstrates the unity of the dimensions of the Kingdom by providing a baseline for how the “present” or “earthly” forms of the Kingdom—sanctifying grace, Scripture, and the Church Militant—are subordinated and directed to the

³⁷ While Thomas also refers to Matt 8:11 in identifying the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom, his commentary on that passage only refers to the Kingdom briefly, highlighting its universality and its contemplative nature (*Super Matt* 8, lec. 2, no. 704).

³⁸ For a brief discussion of this issue, see Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:56–57, Holmes, “Aquinas' *Lectura*,” 74–75, and Beryl Smalley, *The Gospel in the Schools, c.1100–c.1280* (London: Hambleton, 1985), 257–58. The full Basel text of chapters 5 and 6 has been reproduced in the Aquinas Institute's Latin–English edition of the commentary on Matthew and has been used here.

³⁹ *Super Matt* 5 lec. 2, no. 409.

⁴⁰ *Super Matt* 5 lec. 2, no. 413. Cf. Augustine, *Sermo in Monte* 1.5, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 5, lec. 9.

eschatological form of the eternal Kingdom, which supports the eschatological understanding of the Kingdom's unity. Yet the Beatitudes are also a means of becoming Christ-like and sons of God, as Thomas states when discussing "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9), commenting, "because by peace with charity one comes to the eternal kingdom, in which all will be called sons of God," hinting again at the union of the eschatological and the Christological dimension, especially when one considers the importance of participation in Aquinas's theological and philosophical thought.⁴¹

Thomas's third lecture on Matthew covers 6:9–15, the Lord's Prayer, with the petition "Thy kingdom come." Aquinas identifies this petition as the second petition of the prayer, and the first pertaining to us: "The last end is eternal life, and we request this by saying *thy kingdom come*."⁴² Citing Augustine and Chrysostom, Aquinas says: "I believe that this is the literal meaning; hence we ask *come*, that is, make us to arrive at and share in eternal blessedness."⁴³ However, Thomas provides two other readings.

The first comes from Augustine, who says that "Christ began reigning from when he redeemed the world, . . . thus *your kingdom come*, that is, the completion of your reign."⁴⁴ This argues for an interwoven eschatological and Christological understanding of the petition; "Lord, may you come to judge, and may the glory of your kingdom appear."⁴⁵ In addition, tying the beginning of the Kingdom to the redemption highlights both the internal and eschatological dimensions of the Kingdom.

The second alternative fits in with the moral sense of Scripture, as

⁴¹ *Super Matt 5*, lec. 2, no. 439. For more on participation in Aquinas, see: Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), esp. 96–97, 105 (citing definitions of participation from Aquinas's commentary on *De hebdomadibus*); and Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015), 24 (which also summarizes the Boethian definition).

⁴² *Super Matt 6*, lec. 3, no. 585.

⁴³ *Super Matt 6*, lec. 3, no. 586. Cf. Augustine, *Sermo in Monte 2.6*, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew 6*, lec.4. Curiously, no citation from Chrysostom is given; conversely, an explanation given by Cyprian in the *Catena* but not mentioned here is that the Kingdom is Christ Himself; cf. Aquinas's comments on Matthew 3, above.

⁴⁴ *Super Matt 6*, lec. 3, no. 586. Thomas makes a similar point in his *Expositio in orationem dominicam*, a. 2.

⁴⁵ *Super Matt 6*, lec. 3, no. 586.

well as the anagogical sense: “Let the reign of sin be destroyed, and reign over us, O Lord: when we serve justice, then God rules, but when sin, the devil.”⁴⁶ Thomas continues by noting that “they could most rightly ask *your kingdom come* who have justified themselves as sons . . . since the inheritance is due to sons, but that kingdom is in heaven; hence you cannot go hence without being made heavenly.”⁴⁷ Here again, the internal sense of the Kingdom leads to the eschatological dimension, and the reference to “being made heavenly” reflects the participatory dimension in Christ noted above, as well as the moral dimension that involves our becoming deiform in virtues and actions.

This connection is reinforced when we return to the Kingdom in Thomas’s fifth lecture and the Lord’s command in Matthew 6:33—“Seek you therefore first the kingdom of God.” This statement, according to Saint Thomas, “sets forth three things.”⁴⁸ The Kingdom is the end, “because by the kingdom of God is understood eternal beatitude.”⁴⁹ This is “because in life anything is ruled properly when it is under a governing rule. But in life things are not fully submitted to God, because we are not without sin; and it will be so in glory, where we will accomplish the divine will perfectly.”⁵⁰ Implicit in this are both the internal dimension, where the individual conforms to Christ, and to a lesser extent the scriptural dimension, which provides us with the “governing rule.”

The second part of this verse is “the right way” to reach the Kingdom, which is by justice. Here, Thomas is apparently drawing from Pseudo-Chrysostom. “Hence if you would go to the kingdom of God, it is needful that you keep the justice of the kingdom.”⁵¹ This justice is specifically God’s justice, “because man, by the help of grace, believes that he can be saved.”⁵² The third part of the verse, where Jesus says, “and all these things will be added unto you,” returns to the motif of wages, where the day’s wages are identified as eternal life.

In a final note, the words “*to seek first*” are understood in two ways: as an end or as a reward. And thus he says *Seek first the kingdom of God*, and not temporal things. We ought not evangelize so that we might eat, but

⁴⁶ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586; cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 6, lec. 4.

⁴⁷ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586.

⁴⁸ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁴⁹ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵⁰ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵¹ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630. Cf. Pseudo-Chrysostom, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 6, lec. 20.

⁵² *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

the other way around.”⁵³ Returning to the Lord's Prayer, Aquinas gives a hierarchy of goods to be sought: “Therefore first we should seek the very good of God, namely his glory; in other matters first the kingdom of God, second justice, third *your will be done*, fourth those things which are added, *our daily bread*, etc.”⁵⁴ One could easily argue that Thomas is saying the same thing in two ways, since the glory of God and the Kingdom of God are, in many ways and contexts, the same thing—the full manifestation of God in his creation and the bringing of that creation into the fulfillment of his purpose for it.

The Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13

Chapter 13 of Matthew contains a set of parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, which provides us with further examples of how Thomas approaches the topic—and the approach is unique enough that one can again understand why some might be put off by it. Although the Gospel uses the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” repeatedly, Thomas introduces chapter 13 in his first lecture by describing the parables as dealing with “the power of the evangelical doctrine.”⁵⁵ While it may sound odd, a close reading shows that this is consistent with Matthew's Gospel, which continuously refers to the “Gospel [*Evangelium*] of the Kingdom of Heaven.” It also highlights the emphasis on Christ as preacher and teacher that we find in Thomas and other medieval Dominicans.⁵⁶ This section of the commentary is also where Thomas develops and supports his understanding of the doctrinal dimension of the Kingdom.

Despite this, Aquinas's study of the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3–9) has only a few direct references to the Kingdom. This is not surprising

⁵³ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵⁴ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec.1, no. 1077. Cf. Remigius as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 2.

⁵⁶ See: Richard Newshauser, “Jesus as the First Dominican? Reflection on a Sub-theme in the Exemplary Literature of Some Thirteenth-Century Preachers,” in *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans*, ed. Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 238–57; Michael Sherwin, O.P., “Christ the Teacher in St. Thomas' *Commentary on the Gospel of John*,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 173–93. For an examination of this same theme in Romans, see Hans Boerma, “*Ressourcement* of Mystery: The Ecclesiology of Thomas Aquinas and the Letter to the Romans,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 61–63.

when one sees that, for Thomas, this parable is concerned primarily with the “impediment of the evangelical doctrine.”⁵⁷ We get the glimmers of both the interior and ecclesiological dimensions in his comments on Matthew 13:8 (“And they produced fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold”), where the various levels of fruitfulness are applied to various states in earthly life—martyrs, virgins, and married folk, respectively.

The mention of the Kingdom of Heaven in his treatment of 13:11 provides some more material. “In these words, three things are set forth.”⁵⁸ The first is that “there are some understanding, and some not.”⁵⁹ This is relevant to the Kingdom when set in conjunction with the discussion in Matthew 21. Aquinas attributes this to “the divine ordination,” but also considers it a sign of divine love and “of great use, since it is a certain sign of blessedness.”⁶⁰ This is the second factor. The third is that such understanding is “from gift, not from merit.”⁶¹ Although Aquinas goes on in his commentary on 13:12 to explicate factors that make one apt to receive such a gift—desire, zeal, charity, and faith—he concludes with the note that even these are gifts from God.⁶²

The exegesis of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13: 31–32) opens with another examination of the Kingdom’s contents: “In a kingdom there is the king, the prince, the subjects, and likewise the imprisoned. Similarly, there are riches and other things. Therefore, we can liken the kingdom to all of these things.”⁶³ In contrast to the two parables before this, which Aquinas explained as dealing with what impedes entry into the Kingdom or what prepares one for entry into it, this parable deals with the Kingdom in itself.

Following Jerome, Saint Thomas identifies the grain of mustard as the evangelical teaching, which produces the “heat” of faith and drives away the poison of error.⁶⁴ The smallness, likewise, is in the way that it “preached a God who suffered, was crucified and so forth. And who could believe

⁵⁷ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1084.

⁵⁸ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁵⁹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁶⁰ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁶¹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁶² *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, nos. 1102–6.

⁶³ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1159.

⁶⁴ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1159. Cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 5, as well as Augustine, who is there cited in reference to the warmth of faith and the antidote to poison.

such a thing?"⁶⁵ The largeness, of course, is in the way that the preaching spread to and bore fruit among every nation, and "greater in solidity, in generality and in utility."⁶⁶ The solidity comes from the teaching's grounding in the Divine Word, the generality, from its applicability to all states and issues of life, and usefulness "because the birds dwell in its branches, that is, all who have their spirit in heaven."⁶⁷

Although Thomas follows Jerome's interpretation, which fits into the scriptural dimension of the Kingdom, he also gives space to two other Fathers. Chrysostom identifies the apostles as the mustard seed—thus providing a prototype of the ecclesiological dimension—and Hilary applies it to Christ, thus supporting the Christological dimension, although the unity of Christ and the Church may be so obvious as to need no further comment.⁶⁸ This same diversity of explanations is repeated in the Parable of the Leaven, with the three Fathers mentioned cited again as giving the same explanations as the mustard seed. Aquinas adds Augustine to the Parable of the Leaven as well; according to him, "the fervor of charity is signified by the leaven," which harmonizes well with the interior dimension.⁶⁹ Unlike in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Aquinas does not seem to give preference to any one of these interpretations, but states from the beginning that "four things are signified."⁷⁰ The diversity of patristic explanations on this and other parables helps us understand why Aquinas's understanding of the Kingdom is so multidimensional. Like all Catholics, Thomas is working within a tradition that provided various interpretations, and his approach to Scripture, following Augustine, is such that he does not want to reject any interpretation out of hand unless it is obviously deficient or contrary to the Faith.⁷¹ However, the connections that Thomas draws between the various interpretations of the Kingdom also show that he does not simply want to set them all out as equally valid, but actively

⁶⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1160.

⁶⁶ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1162.

⁶⁷ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1162.

⁶⁸ *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 5, includes these citations, as well as citations from Gregory I the Great that identify the mustard seed with Christ (e.g., *Moralia* 19.1).

⁶⁹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1167. Cf. *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 6. All four interpretations mentioned in this lecture of the commentary can be found in the *Catena*.

⁷⁰ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1166.

⁷¹ See John Boyle's discussion of Aquinas's approach to exegesis in "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio textus*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 3–8.

works to reconcile and harmonize them whenever possible, so that, rather than contradicting each other, the interpretations work symphonically to strengthen one another.

While most of the parables of Matthew 13 have a predominantly evangelical bent in Thomas's reading, the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matt 13:24–30, with Jesus's own explanation given in Matt 13:36–43) is more ecclesiological. The parable opens with a description of the most basic structure of the Kingdom: "In a kingdom are contained the king, and those who are ruled: and those are heavenly men, who have been made equals of the angels."⁷² The Kingdom here, based on Thomas's exegesis of the parable, is the Church, with the apostles as the servants, faithful Catholics as the wheat, and heretics as the tares.⁷³ The end of the parable, speaking of the "gathering of the crops," is not applied directly to the Kingdom, but Aquinas does state that "there is a twofold collection: one in the present Church, and another in the heavenly."⁷⁴ The first harvest is referred to the preaching of the apostles, and the second to the Last Judgment. However, Aquinas applies the separation and final disposition of the wheat and tares solely to the latter here. When he discusses Jesus's explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares at the end of this section of Matthew 13, Aquinas confirms that here, Kingdom is "understood as the present Church, because in the Church Triumphant there are no scandals."⁷⁵ However, he also cites Chrysostom, who, looking forward to the end of the parable, "exposits that the kingdom is the heavenly homeland. And he says that *all scandals* should not be understood as that they are there, but that they are not,"⁷⁶ having been gathered and cast out already.

The last set of parables (Matt 13:44–52, although the lecture goes through to the end of the chapter at Matt 13:58) deals with the dignity of the evangelical teaching, which "is shown in three ways: with regard to its abundance, with regard to its beauty, and with regard to its commonality."⁷⁷ The abundance is described by the parable of the treasure hidden in a field, and Thomas once more refers to the evangelical teaching, which "is like a treasure, because just as a treasure is a plentitude of riches, so is the

⁷² *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1134.

⁷³ See *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, nos. 1134, 1136, 1138.

⁷⁴ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1153. Cf. Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, et al. cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 4.

⁷⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1182. Cf. Chrysostom *In Mattheum* (*Catena Aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 8).

⁷⁶ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1182.

⁷⁷ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1187. Aquinas is again following Chrysostom here (cf. *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9).

evangelical teaching: *riches of salvation, wisdom and knowledge: the fear of the Lord is his treasure* (Isa 33:6).⁷⁸

However, Thomas provides numerous differences of detail in exactly how to understand the treasure and the field in which it is hidden, again referring to the Fathers. Chrysostom describes it as the evangelical doctrine, “which is hidden in the field of this world, namely from the eyes of the unclean.”⁷⁹ Gregory the Great, by contrast refers to the same verse from Isaiah as Thomas did, but identifies the treasure as “heavenly desire” and the field as “spiritual discipline, because it seems contemptible outside, but truly has sweetness within.”⁸⁰ Jerome, interestingly enough, provides the interpretation that the treasure is the Word himself, hidden in flesh, but “in another way, it is understood as sacred teaching, which is hidden in the field of the Church.”⁸¹

Thomas continues with the idea of the treasure of the Kingdom as evangelical teaching when he turns to the passage about how “a man, having found it, hides [the treasure].” He takes this, however, in a more personal and interior direction than any of the Fathers he cites. The treasure “is found in all through faith . . . but it is necessary that it be hidden, following what is said in Psalm 118:11: *In my heart I have hidden your words.*”⁸² This hiddenness within the heart increases fervor, prevents vainglory, and guards a newborn faith from being discovered by “he who steals it away.”⁸³

The last part of this parable, about how the subject “out of joy goes, and sells all that he has, and buys that field,” is interpreted as about the progress of the spiritual life.

When he by faith finds it, *out of joy goes*, and begins to progress *and sells everything*, that is has contempt for [everything else], that he might have spiritual [goods], *and buys that field*, that is, either he seeks out good company for himself, or gains for himself the rest which he does not have, namely, spiritual peace.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1188.

⁷⁹ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1189. Cf. Chrysostom as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9.

⁸⁰ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1189. Cf. Pope Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.1, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9.

⁸¹ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1189. Cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9. Aquinas does not here cite Augustine, whom he quotes in the *Catena aurea* as referring to this as “despising temporal things.”

⁸² *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1190.

⁸³ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1190.

⁸⁴ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1192.

The parable of the “pearl of great price” demonstrates “beauty, or charity.”⁸⁵ Aquinas again turns to the Fathers here, and this time Jerome and Chrysostom are in agreement that the pearl refers to the evangelical doctrine, in contrast to false teachings which “are not pearls.”⁸⁶ Further emphasis is placed on the oneness and uniqueness of this teaching, drawing on [Pseudo-]Dionysius, who “says that power divides, but truth gives unity.”⁸⁷ Gregory, by contrast, argues that the pearl represents heavenly glory, “because the good is naturally desirable, and man always wishes to exchange a lesser good for a greater one. The supreme good of man is heavenly glory; when he has found it, he ought to abandon everything for it.”⁸⁸

Thomas also provides three different interpretations from Augustine, which all hinge on the merchant as representing a seeker and which emphasize the excellence and supremacy of the “pearl” among many other things of similar species. The pearl of great price could thus be taken as Christ among virtuous men, charity among the virtues, and the Word of God among the sciences.⁸⁹

Unlike with most of the other parables, Thomas does not set out his own explanation before surveying the Fathers, although the use of “beauty or charity” to describe what this parable symbolizes is suggestive.

The next parable under consideration is the “fishing or net parable” (Matt 13:47–50), which Thomas describes as depicting the *communitas* of the evangelical doctrine. The net, he says “can signify either doctrine or the Church, since the first teachers [*doctores*] were fishermen.”⁹⁰ The sea represents the world, and so this parable demonstrates the commonality of the Gospel. “The law was only given to one nation [*non erat data nisi uni genti*]. . . . The evangelical law gathers all together,”⁹¹ connecting law—or Scripture—and community. The community is both the present Church and the eschatological Kingdom; the latter is signified by the end of the

⁸⁵ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1193.

⁸⁶ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1193.

⁸⁷ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1193. Cf. also Chrysostom in *Catena Aurea*, Matthew 13, lec. 10. Jerome also refers to the Law and the Prophets as “goodly pearls” in a section cited in the *Catena*; the Gospel is so precious that the others appear as “dung” by contrast.

⁸⁸ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1194.

⁸⁹ See Augustine, *Quaestiones XVI in Mattheum*, q. 13 (cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 10).

⁹⁰ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1197. Cf. *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 11, where Gregory I, *Homiliae xl in Evangelia* 6.4, is cited in support of the Church, while Jerome says that “they made for themselves a net of evangelical dogma from the Old and the New Testament.

⁹¹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1197.

parable, where Thomas comments, “by the shore is signified the end of the world, because there will be no turbulence among the saints, but they will be in good peace.”⁹²

A comparison of ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions shows up in the discussion of the separation of the wicked from the just: “For a time the evil are among the good, . . . but they will be separated from the communion of the good, and according to this the evil are excommunicated; for this is a sign of that, but also different, for the Church is often deceived, but then there will be no deception.”⁹³ The difference between this parable and that of the wheat and tares, according to Thomas,⁹⁴ is that “here by the net is understood both the good and the evil; hence it signifies those who are not cut off [*praecisi*] from the Church. But the weed signifies those who are cut off by diversity of dogma, and these are not of the Church.”⁹⁵

The Parable of the Vineyard

The Parable of the Vineyard in Matthew 21: 33–45 is another point where Thomas draws on multiple interpretations and dimensions of the Kingdom. Even the target of the parable can be interpreted in two ways: “some say that he speaks against the vineyard [following a similar parable in Isaiah] . . . but here [he speaks] against the farmers.”⁹⁶ Thomas again turns to two of his favorite patristic sources, Jerome and Chrysostom. Jerome says that “the Jewish people are called the vine,” following the Isaian parable, “insofar as this present evil proceeds not from the people, but from the leaders. . . . Therefore this parable is not against the vine.”⁹⁷ A second explanation (given without transition, suggesting a failure in our manuscript tradition of the commentary on Matthew) says that “this vine is not the house of Israel, but the justice of God, which is handed down hiddenly in Sacred Scripture.”⁹⁸ This note on the “justice” or righteousness of God could also

⁹² *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1197. Cf. Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.4, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 11.

⁹³ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4., no. 1199. Again, cf. Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.4, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 11.

⁹⁴ Thomas appears to be taking a hint from Chrysostom here (cf. citation in *Catena aurea*, Matthew 13, lec.11).

⁹⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1200.

⁹⁶ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734.

⁹⁷ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734. Cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 (“Plantavit autem . . .”).

⁹⁸ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734. Origen also gives this as an interpretation; see *Catena aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 (“Sed forte in Evangelio . . .”).

be taken as referring to the soul's justification, which connects this meaning to the internal dimension of the Kingdom, or to God's universal judgment, which would bring in a link to the eschatological dimension.

Similarly, the hedge around the vineyard is either "what is set up for protection, whether they be the prayers of the saints or the protection of the angels," or the words of Scripture, "because, following a mystical understanding, the hidden meaning of Scripture should not be opened to everyone."⁹⁹ Thomas does not pursue the mystical explanation beyond the establishment of the vineyard and its accoutrements; rather, he takes the parable as expounding salvation history from Moses, through the prophets, up to the coming of Christ.

The conclusion, "Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you" (Matt 21:43), is taken in two ways. The first, as mentioned back in Matthew 3, is that the Kingdom is Sacred Scripture, following the interpretation of the vineyard as Scripture and the vine as divine justice given at the start of the parable. Scripture is said to be taken from them "because [they] have forsaken the understanding of Sacred Scripture."¹⁰⁰ The second interpretation is similar, but is applied to "prelateship over the Church of the faithful, because their glory has been transferred," referring to Isaiah 55:4–5.¹⁰¹ This interpretation is used again in the commentary on John, where Aquinas cites this verse when discussing the cleansing of the temple in the second chapter of that Gospel. "By this evicting of these things from the temple, He gave understanding that the time approached when the sacrifices of the law ought to cease, and the true worship of God be transferred to the Gentiles."¹⁰²

In any event, while these two interpretations apply to two dimensions of the Kingdom as identified in chapter 3—the scriptural and the ecclesiastical—the conclusion is the same: a change in the Kingdom from in the "possession" of the Jewish nation to the community of the faithful. The fundamental issue, based on Thomas's exegesis of the surrounding passage, hinges on the relationship to Christ, who is "the stone the build-

⁹⁹ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734. Aquinas's patristic sources in the *Catena aurea*—Jerome, Pseudo-Chrysostom, and Origen—favor some form of the first explanation. Origen also gives the second option as an interpretation cited in *Catena Aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 ("Sed forte in Evangelio. . .").

¹⁰⁰ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1750. Cf. Origen as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 ("Regnum Dei dicit mysteria regni Dei . . .").

¹⁰¹ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1750.

¹⁰² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 2, lec. 5 (Marietti) no. 386, in *Super evangelii S. Joannis*, trans. Fabian Larcher (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2013).

ers rejected, [which] has become the cornerstone."¹⁰³ This is reinforced by Matthew 21:44, and Thomas's account that "when a man stumbles over the rock Christ, then he is broken according to the greatness of sin; when he is truly faithless, he is totally crushed."¹⁰⁴ This provides an indication that the Christological dimension is of deep importance to Thomas, and may provide the unifying factor of his Kingdom theology.

The Last Judgment

Finally, we come to the great discourse on the Last Judgment that ends Christ's teaching ministry in the Gospel according to Matthew, recorded in Matthew 25:31–46. Christ is called King here because "it is a king's to judge."¹⁰⁵ The Kingdom is here mentioned as the reward, although Thomas makes it clear that "it will not be given to us according to our merit, but according to how we are grounded in [*confirmamur*] the merits of Christ."¹⁰⁶ This seems to imply a more complete union with Christ, since he brings up an objection: "Are not the good even now in some way joined to God? I say yes, through charity, but not the fullness of charity, and through a mysterious [*aenigmaticam*] faith; but then they will be gathered in the fullness of charity and in faith which is not enigmatic."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, he states that, in the judgment, "the cause of damnation is from man, the cause of salvation is from God."¹⁰⁸ That cause is twofold: "The temporal is the application of glory; . . . the other cause is the predestination of God."¹⁰⁹

The reward itself is "the kingdom of heaven: . . . Who possesses God, possesses the Kingdom."¹¹⁰ And you cannot have one without the other, as Thomas rebukes those who just want to "scrape by" and avoid hell. "But some may say: *I do not wish to rule, it suffices for me that I be not damned.* This cannot be. Either you will be a king and have a kingdom, or you will be damned."¹¹¹

The "possession" mentioned here ("enter into possession") "is fitting and proper to him who has the right. Thus, we have this right by divine order,

¹⁰³ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1749.

¹⁰⁴ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1751.

¹⁰⁵ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2092.

¹⁰⁶ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2092.

¹⁰⁷ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2093. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.9, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew 25*, lec. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2094.

¹⁰⁹ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2094.

¹¹⁰ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2095.

¹¹¹ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2095. Cf. Augustine, Sermon 351, no. 8, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew 25*, lec. 3.

namely from its acquisition by Christ, who earned it for us, and by His grace.”¹¹² It also contains the sense of fullness and security, “‘what is had peacefully’; . . . We have God in a way now, but not quietly, because man is disturbed in multiple ways, but then one will possess it in peace.”¹¹³ And again, we see the Kingdom is the possession of and participation in God himself. This provides the unity of the Christological and eschatological dimensions we have been looking for, and this can be brought into further clarity by moving to another one of Aquinas’s commentary on First Corinthians and his treatment of the famous eschatological passage in 1 Corinthians 15. “The final end [of the resurrected faithful] will not be to live a life of bodily pleasures [*vita corporis et voluptatibus*], as the Jews and Saracens imagine, but that they will join themselves [*inhaeraent*] to God by an immediate vision and happy enjoyment: and this is *to hand over the kingdom to God the Father*.”¹¹⁴

The Kingdom is here identified first with the faithful, whom Christ will bring “before the sight of God, that is of His Creator insofar as He is man, and the Father, insofar as He is God. . . . But He will hand this over so that He will not take this from Himself, for indeed, He will reign, one God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁵ This hearkens back to both the interior and ecclesiological dimensions of the division in Matthew 3. A second explanation is that the delivery of the Kingdom is associated with the public manifestation of the Father’s reign, “for in Scripture something is said to be done when it first becomes known, and in this way it is made known by Christ.”¹¹⁶

In either case, the manifestation of the Kingdom “shall have brought to naught all principality and power and virtue” (1 Cor 15:24b), which Aquinas says means that “all dominion, whether human or angelic, will have ceased, then we will be immediately under God.”¹¹⁷

How does this work with the following verse, that Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”? “It must that said that in some way the enemies of Christ are under his power, but in a twofold way”¹¹⁸—either by conversion, as in the case of Paul, or “insofar as Christ does his will, even concerning those who do their will against the will of

¹¹² *Super Matt 25*, lec. 3, no. 2095.

¹¹³ *Super Matt 25*, lec. 3, no. 2095. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.9, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew 25*, lec. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 937.

¹¹⁵ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 937.

¹¹⁶ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 937.

¹¹⁷ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 938.

¹¹⁸ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 941.

Christ."¹¹⁹ The future tense, by contrast, refers to when "he will put them under his feet, that is, under the humanity of Christ."¹²⁰ The contrast appears to be that the faithful—human and angelic alike—will be directly under God, while the enemies of Christ—probably the fallen angels as well as sinful men—will be subordinate to the humanity of Christ. Given the strong identification of Head and members in Aquinas's Christology and ecclesiology, it may imply the subordination of all enemies to the whole Body of Christ, which makes it, in another sense, a Kingdom.

The "until" is understood in two ways. First, "as if he says: It is true, that Christ has a kingdom, and although there are some enemies, while they do not do his will, nonetheless he reigns *until he places*, etc."¹²¹ The other reading takes the "until" as a cessation—"truly afterwards he will not reign"¹²²—but reads it as saying that:

"To reign" [*regnare*] does not mean to have a kingdom, but to advance in reigning and to spread the kingdom, and this, to that degree, is the perfect manifestation of the kingdom of Chris. It is as though he said: the reign of Christ is accomplished by degrees, namely, insofar as it is manifested and made known, *until he has put all his enemies under his feet*, that is, until all enemies acknowledge him to reign.¹²³

Thus, once Christ has fully manifested the Kingdom, all his enemies will be submitted to him and acknowledge him as Lord. "So, therefore, the subjection of all adversaries is clear, which will be a most perfect subjugation, because even that which is most opposed will be subjected to him."¹²⁴

The general resurrection demonstrates this victory by the ultimate defeat of death, "which is most contrary to life."¹²⁵ However, "the end of this resurrection is not in the humanity of Christ, but rather that rational creatures are guided further to the contemplation of divinity, and in this is our beatitude, and our end is God Himself."¹²⁶ He concludes that "the reason for this subjection is *that God may be all in all*, that is that the soul of man rest fully in God, and God alone will be his beatitude. For in a

¹¹⁹ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 941.

¹²⁰ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 941.

¹²¹ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 941, no. 942.

¹²² *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 943.

¹²³ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 943.

¹²⁴ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 944.

¹²⁵ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 944.

¹²⁶ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 950.

sense, in one there is life, in another virtue and in another glory, but then God will be life and salvation and power, and glory and all things.”¹²⁷ Thus, the eschatological Kingdom is the perfection of contemplation; the ways to contemplation—both earthly contemplation and the handing on of its fruits—are the ways to that perfect Kingdom when God will be all in all. Thus, 1 Corinthians’ treatment of the Kingdom, according to Thomas, reflects the famous statement in 1 Corinthians 13:13 about “three things which abide”: the faith that grounds the Kingdom, the charity that makes one a true participant, and the hope that is fulfilled in it.

Conclusions

As we can see from these texts, Aquinas has a strong sense of how the four dimensions of the Kingdom relate to one another. The “interior” Kingdom, of grace within the believer, is informed by Scripture and both is nourished by and participates in the life of the Church, while also being subject to her authority. That same Church is constituted primarily by those living in that state of grace, fosters them in it, and teaches and governs them, relying on Scripture to do so while having the authority to interpret that same Scripture. Scripture, as mentioned, enlightens the believer regarding the New Law and is intimately tied up with the Church’s teaching role. All three of these also point to and are illuminated by the eschatological Kingdom—the life of holiness leads to it and is promised it as a reward, Scripture speaks of it, and the Church foreshadows and participates in it.

Additionally, throughout his work, in both theology and political philosophy, Saint Thomas holds a strong identification of king and kingdom. Furthermore, the three derivative senses mentioned earlier in the lecture could be applied to Christ as well as the eschatological Kingdom. Grace is the indwelling of Christ, after all, according to the theology of grace and of the Divine Missions expressed in the *Summa theologiae*.¹²⁸ In addition, both Christ and Scripture are, in analogical senses, the Word of God, a tradition that we see even today in texts such as *Dei Verbum* §13. The identification of Christ with the Church is so well-known as barely to need comment. Finally, when Thomas dives deeply in eschatological

¹²⁷ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 950.

¹²⁸ See *ST* I, q. 43, where Aquinas makes explicit that the indwelling associated with sanctifying grace is common to the Trinity, and that both the Son and Spirit can be spoken of as sent invisibly. Ad 1 makes it clear that certain elements of grace can be appropriated to the indwelling of the Son, namely intellectual graces, which provides a link to the emphasis on contemplation seen in the commentaries on Matt 8 and John 3.

Scripture passages, such as Matthew 25 and 1 Corinthians 15, we see that eschatological fulfillment also meets its end in God who is Christ.

Thus, as Levering pointed out, the Kingdom is fundamentally eschatological and *also* fundamentally Christocentric. The individual dimension involves the indwelling of Christ and the union of the soul with Christ in preparation for eternity.¹²⁹ The scriptural dimension points to, flows from, and reveals him. The ecclesiological dimension derives all its authority, knowledge, and power from Christ, and the eschatological dimension begins with Christ as Judge and will end with him turning over the Kingdom to the Father. This may be why Thomas has no patience with the Joachite concept of an “Age of the Holy Spirit,” to the point that he refers to such a position as *stultissimus* in the *Summa*, grounding his condemnation in the proclamation of the Kingdom by Christ in the Gospels.¹³⁰ For Aquinas, everything is grounded in Christ, and the only transition will be from imperfect union with Christ who rules in his humanity and through the Church, to the perfect union when Christ as God rules us “in himself” and all the elect share in the divine vision and rulership.¹³¹

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¹²⁹ See Levering, *Exploring*, 234, on how the indwelling of grace leads to divinization and is thus “an eschatologically oriented reality.”

¹³⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 106, a. 4

¹³¹ This paper started life as part of my doctoral dissertation in historical theology at the Catholic University of America; an earlier version was presented at a conference on “Aquinas the Biblical Theologian” at Ave Maria University in February 2019. Special thanks to Dr. Joshua C. Benson and Dr. John F. Boyle for their unflagging support and guidance.

Secunda Operatio Respicit Ipsum Esse Rei: An Evaluation of Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, and Ralph McInerny on the Relation of *Esse* to the Intellect’s Two Operations

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Status Quaestionis

IN HIS *PREFACE TO METAPHYSICS* (1939), Jacques Maritain warns that “it is a radical error to restrict the object of the intellect to the object of the first operation of the mind.”¹ Thanks to texts such as q. 5, a. 3 of St. Thomas’s commentary on Boethius’s *De Trinitate*, the seventh reply in d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 of book I of the *Scriptum* on the *Sentences* (hereafter simply *Scriptum*), and the corpus of *Scriptum* I, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, it is the common opinion of the twentieth century’s great existential Thomists that, whereas the object of the intellect’s first activity (or operation) is the essences of things, the object of the second operation of the intellect is the act of existence or to-be (*esse*).² In the texts just cited, Aquinas distinguishes two operations of the intellect, which correspond to two distinct aspects in things: their nature, quiddity, or essence, on the one hand, and their existence

¹ Jacques Maritain, *A A A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 20.

² Citations from Aquinas, when not from the Leonine edition, *Opera Omnia* (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1882–), are thus: *In I sent.* citations from *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, ed. R. P. Mandonnet, vol. 1 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929); *In I–XII metaphys.* citations from *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. M. R. Cathala and Raymundi Spiazzi, 3rd ed. (Italy: Marietti, 1977); *ST* citations from *Summa Theologiae*, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, 8 vols. (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). All translations from Latin are my own.

or to-be (*esse*), on the other. The first operation, says Thomas, “pertains to [*respicit*] the nature of a thing,” or put differently, “apprehends [*apprehendit*] the quiddities of things.” The second, however, “pertains to [*respicit*] the being [*esse*] of a thing,” or put differently, “comprehends [*comprehendit*] the being [*esse*] of a thing.” These two operations have traditionally been named “simple apprehension” and “judgment,” respectively.

The principal authors espousing this existentialist thesis are Maritain³ and Étienne Gilson,⁴ for whom the cognition of *esse* in judgment plays an essential role in both epistemology and metaphysics. This paper restricts itself to considering the metaphysical thesis itself that *esse* is cognized in judgment—that is, that the object of the second operation of the intellect is *esse*.

The standard response to existential Thomism in regard to the cognition of *esse* was given first by Father Louis-Marie Régis in his 1951 review of Gilson’s *Being and Some Philosophers*.⁵ It was subsequently developed at considerable length by Ralph McInerny in various places.⁶ The heart of the

³ Maritain, *Preface*; Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015); Maritain, “Reflections on Wounded Nature,” in *Untrammelled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain 20 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

⁴ Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949); Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959). Besides Maritain and Gilson, the thesis that *esse* is the object of judgment can also be found in the leading second- and third-generation existential Thomists such as Joseph Owens and John Knasas, whose opinions will not be discussed in detail in this paper. See, e.g.: John Knasas, “*Esse* as the Target of Judgment in Rahner and Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 51, no. 2 (1987): 222–45, at 231; Joseph Owens, “Aquinas on Knowing Existence,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 29, no. 4 (1976): 670–90, at 675 and 678–80; Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 47.

⁵ Louis-Marie Régis, “Gilson’s *Being and Some Philosophers*,” *The Modern Schoolman* 28, no. 2 (1951): 111–25. This article along with Gilson’s reply was reprinted in the appendix to Gilson’s own *Being and Some Philosophers*, 216–32.

⁶ Ralph McInerny, “Some Notes on Being and Predication,” *The Thomist* 22, no. 3 (1959): 315–35; McInerny, “Notes on Being and Predication,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 15, no. 2 (1959): 236–74. These McInerny articles were combined and republished in a later collection: *Being and Predication* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 173–228. (These later-edited versions are those we cite here.) McInerny’s arguments were then abbreviated and restated as part of a historical study of Gilson’s impact on Catholic intellectual life in: *Preambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC:

argument made by these two authors against existential Thomism consists in pointing to a text in lecture 5 of Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Peryermenias* (*De interpretatione*) in which Aquinas appears to say quite plainly that "is" signifies *esse*, that "is" is a verb, and that verbs signify concepts in the first operation of the intellect, not the second.

In response to this objection, existential Thomists could either, as Gilson does, call into question the value of Aquinas's Aristotelian commentaries for revealing Aquinas's own thoughts⁷ or, more plausibly, point out that none of the existential Thomists deny a concept of existence in the first operation.⁸ Rather, all they deny is that our understanding of existence *originates* in the first, rather than the second, operation. So, even if Father Régis and McInerney are right to see in *In peryermenias* a simple concept of *esse*, this need not contradict the existential Thomist thesis that *esse* is properly cognized only in judgment.

It is the contention of the present paper that both sides of this dispute are mistaken. For reasons that have not been previously explored, we must deny the existentialist thesis that the object of the second operation is *esse*. Moreover, we must reject the Régis-McInerney interpretation of *In peryermenias* in which that text is taken as describing a particular concept of existence cognized in the first operation of the intellect. To reach these two conclusions, we proceed as follows. First, we present a chronological sketch of Maritain's understanding of the relation of *esse* to judgment, using him as the chief representative of the existential school and only citing Gilson afterward to confirm our previous interpretation of Maritain and to suggest that his view is generally representative of the existential school. Second, using texts in which Aquinas distinguishes the two operations of the intellect, we consider whether it is correct to interpret Aquinas's phrase "secunda operatio respicit ipsum esse rei" ("the second operation pertains to the being of a thing") as indicating that *esse* is the object of the second operation of the intellect or even properly cognized in that operation. Our

The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁷ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 224: "In his commentaries on Aristotle does Saint Thomas always express his deepest personal thought on a given question?"

⁸ See, e.g.: Maritain, *Preface*, 20; Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 19 and 36; Maritain, "Reflections," 220–21; Maritain, *Peasant*, 138; Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 57–65. Gilson is somewhat less clear than the other two existential Thomists just cited, but he does seem to admit a concept of existence in the first operation (*Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark Wauck [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], 198). In any case, Gilson certainly allows a concept of *ens* in simple apprehension, and this presumably includes a concept of existence (*Elements*, 135).

conclusion is negative. Having rejected the thesis of the existential Thomists, we consider whether the standard alternative—here represented by McInerney—is any better. Although both Father Régis and McInerney are somewhat unclear in their interpretation of *In peryermenias*, both seem to view existence as falling under the proper object of the intellect's first operation in a way co-equal with that in which the quiddities of things do so. They interpret Aquinas as describing "is" as signifying a particular concept in the first operation of the intellect—namely, the concept of existence. I argue, in contrast, that the text in question does not give us reason to think that there is a particular concept of existence signified by "is" falling in any direct way under the proper object of the intellect's first operation. Rather, the text only specifies the *mode* in which the copula "is" signifies when used without qualification. Although this paper interprets the *esse* of *In peryermenias* as merely an idiomatic Latin technique for referring to the copula in indirect speech rather than, as Father Régis and McInerney suppose, the predicate in so-called "existential propositions," we suggest (but do not develop the idea) that this text may yet be relevant to how we understand *esse* in Aquinas's metaphysics.

Esse and Judgment in Existential Thomism

Jacques Maritain

Although Maritain and Gilson differed on the epistemological role of *esse* and judgment in answering Cartesian doubt and idealism,⁹ the two authors

⁹ For the epistemological views of the existential Thomists, see Gilson, *Thomist Realism*; Jacques Maritain, "Critical Realism," in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Joseph Owens, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1992). The secondary literature on the epistemological debate among the existential Thomists is actually more developed than that on the metaphysical interpretation of the existential judgment. For a defense of Gilson and (especially) Owens, see John Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), esp. 71–128. For a critical evaluation of Gilson's epistemological project, see Brian Kemple, "Evaluating the Metaphysical Realism of Étienne Gilson," *Studia Gilsoniana* 4, no. 4 (2015): 363–80. Gilson and Maritain's epistemological differences are suggested by Gerald McCool in *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989). For a critical evaluation of Maritain in favor of Gilson, see John Knasas, "Transcendental Thomist Methodology and Maritain's 'Critical Realism,'" in *Jacques Maritain and the Many Ways of Knowing*, ed. Douglass Ollivant (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002). For a reply to Knasas in favor of Maritain, see Stephen Chamberlain, "The Dispute between Gilson and

were often mutually illuminating concerning the metaphysical relation of *esse* to judgment. Maritain's initial explanation of the two operations of the intellect in *A Preface to Metaphysics* is helpful for framing the nuances of how both authors understand the relation of *esse* to judgment.

Observe that being presents two aspects. One of these is its aspect as essence which corresponds particularly to the first operation of the mind. . . . The other is the aspect existence, the *esse* in the strict sense, which is the end in which things attain their achievement, their act, their "energy" par excellence, the supreme actuality of whatever is. Nor must we suppose that this second aspect, this aspect which crowns and perfects being, escapes the grasp of the intellect. . . . It is the second operation of the mind, in the judgment, by composition and division, that the speculative intellect grasps being, not only from the standpoint of essence but from that of existence itself, actual or possible. Existence is here apprehended *ut exercita*, that is as actualized by a subject: not merely as presented to the mind, as is the case with the simple concept of existence, but as possessed potentially or actually by a subject.¹⁰

Maritain does not cite from where, in Aquinas, he derives this distinction, but he seems to be following the mode of presentation of *Scriptum* I, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, where Aquinas introduces the two operations of the intellect by noting that, "in a thing [*res*], there are two [aspects]: the quiddity of the thing and the to-be of it."¹¹ Simple apprehension "apprehends" (*apprehendit*) the quiddity of things, but judgment "comprehends" (*comprehendit*) the *esse rei*. From what I can tell, this is a unique case in which Aquinas connects the second operation to the grammatical direct object, *esse*, by means of a distinctly cognitive verb, like *comprehendit*. In q. 5, a. 3, of the commentary on Boetius and *Scriptum* I, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7, Aquinas uses "respicit ipsum esse rei" and "respicit esse ipsius" instead. These formulas could still be interpreted in a cognitive way so that the object cognized in judgment is *esse*, but they are less determinately so. In any case, Maritain interprets Aquinas to mean that *esse* is the object cognized by judgment. After telling us that existence is posited in judgment by the verb, "which expresses judgment," and that it is judgment that "completes and perfects knowledge," Maritain declares:

Maritain over Thomist Realism," *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no. 2 (2017): 177–95.

¹⁰ Maritain, *Preface*, 19–20.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Scriptum*, 1:903–4.

It is a radical error to restrict the object of the intellect to the object of the first operation of the mind. Unfortunately a number of popular expositions of scholasticism seem to represent the matter in this false light. They speak as though the object of the first operation constitutes the object of intellection as such. This is quite untrue. It is merely a preparation for the second, which achieves knowledge.

When we affirm that the object of the intellect is being, an affirmation which displays the profound realism of Thomist philosophy, we do not stop short at essences. It is to existence itself that the intellect proceeds when it formulates within itself a judgment corresponding to what a thing is or is not outside the mind.¹²

To be precise, Maritain does not, here, explicitly affirm that *esse* is the object of the second operation. But that is clearly what he intends us to understand when he denies that the object of the intellect is reducible to the object of the first operation and affirms that judgment goes beyond essences to existence. Having presented *esse* as the object of the intellect's operation of judgment, Maritain shifts abruptly to the topic of how acts of will differs from judgment. Maritain does not cite any text or problem justifying this rather unexpected digression. But he presumably has passages in mind, like the corpus of *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1. Texts such as these present a formidable obstacle to what Maritain has just concluded about judgment.

In every being, there are two [aspects] to consider—namely, the notion [*ratio*] of the species and the being itself [*esse ipsum*] by which something subsists in that species. And so any being [*ens*] can be perfective in two ways: In one way, according to the notion [*ratio*] of the species only, and thus by being [*ens*] the intellect, which perceives the notion of being [*ratio entis*], is perfected—nor indeed is being [*ens*] in [the intellect] according to natural being [*esse naturale*]. And for this reason, this mode of perfecting adds “truth” onto “being.” . . . For the truth is in the mind. . . . In another way, being [*ens*] is perfective of another not only according to the notion [*ratio*] of the species, but also according to the being [*esse*] which it has in the nature of things. And by this mode is the good perfective. For the good is in things.¹³

¹² Maritain, *Preface*, 20–21.

¹³ *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1: “In quolibet autem ente est duo considerare, scilicet ipsam rationem speciei et esse ipsum quo aliquid subsistit in specie illa. Et sic aliquod

This passage has the same structure as Maritain's division of the two operations of the intellect except, rather than distinguishing two intellectual operations by the two aspects of being (*ens*), Aquinas uses these two aspects to distinguish the intellect from the will. The intellect, which "percipit rationem entis," is perfected by a being (*ens*) according to the *ratio* of its species *tantum*. In contrast, the will is perfected not only (*non solum*) by the *ratio speciei*, but also by the *esse* that a being has in the nature of things. This text seems to positively exclude Maritain's whole thesis—namely, that the object of the intellect is more than essences (species), but also existence (*esse*). If Maritain is to maintain that the object of the intellect is *esse* as well as essence, then how does the intellect differ from the will? Here we have the presumed motive underlying Maritain's decision to close a section on the two operations of the intellect by distinguishing the will from judgment. Immediately following our last quotation from Maritain, he writes:

From this point of view the intellect and the will are on the same footing, though there is also a fundamental difference between the two cases. The goal of the will is existence precisely as outside the mind, as actualised or *possessed* by reality external to the mind, outside the spiritual act of the will. But the intellect and its act are fulfilled by existence affirmed or denied by a judgment, by existence attained—as it is lived or *possessed* by a subject—within the mind, within the mind's intellectual act itself.¹⁴

To some extent, this parallels Aquinas's distinction between intellect and will in *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1. What the intellect attains (truth) is in the mind, but what the will attains (good) is in things outside the mind. Like Aquinas, Maritain says that what the intellect attains is in the mind, but

ens potest esse perfectivum dupliciter: uno modo secundum rationem speciei tantum, et sic ab ente perficitur intellectus qui percipit rationem entis, nece tamen ens est in eo secundum esse naturale . . . verum enim est in mente. . . . Alio modo ens est perfectivum alterius non solum secundum rationem speciei sed etiam secundum esse quod habet in rerum natura, et per hunc modum est perfectivum bonum; bonum enim in rebus" (Leonine ed., 22:593 [lns. 179–97]). See also, *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 3, corp.: "Verum est prius bono secundum rationem cum verum sit perfectivum alicuius secundum rationem speciei, bonum autem non solum secundum rationem speciei sed etiam secundum esse quod habet in re" ("Truth is prior to good according to reason, since truth is perfective of something according to the nature [*ratio*] of the species, but good is [perfective of a thing] not merely according to the nature [*ratio*] of the species, but also according to the being [*esse*] that it has in the thing"; Leonine ed., 22:598 [lns. 47–51]).

¹⁴ Maritain, *Preface*, 21.

what the will attains is outside of it. Unlike Aquinas, however, Maritain is not talking about truth and goodness, but about *esse* as attained by the intellect and will, respectively. This has a rather shocking consequence. Although Maritain has just told us that the intellect's being perfected by existence as its object "displays the profound realism of Thomist philosophy," Maritain now says that the existence attained by the intellect is in the mind, not outside it. Does this mean that we cannot know existence outside the mind? How is this strategy for distinguishing will from intellect compatible with Maritain's own professed realism? Maritain's *A Preface to Metaphysics* does not provide answers to these troubling questions. But a somewhat plausible answer is implied by Maritain's later work *Existence and the Existent* (1947). Maritain's success as an epistemologist in answering these questions is irrelevant to the present paper. What is relevant is the metaphysical implication of this answer for how Maritain understands *esse* in relation to judgment.

In *Existence and the Existent*, Maritain still maintains that "essences are the object of the first operation of the intellect, or *simple apprehension*."¹⁵ Now, however, Maritain somewhat artificially restricts the words "object" and "intelligible" to essences, abstracted in the intellect's first operation.¹⁶ But, says Maritain, the function of judgment is to restore essence, abstracted from existence by the mind's first operation, back to existence.¹⁷

¹⁵ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 19 (see also 11–13).

¹⁶ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 13: "In abstractive perception, what the intellect lays hold of is the natures or essences which are in existent things or subjects (but not in the state of universality or intelligibility in act), which themselves are not things, and which the intellect strips of existence by immaterializing them. These are what, from the very beginning, we call intelligibles, or objects of thought." See also: "The object is the term of the first operation of the intellect (simple perception, or 'simple apprehension'); what is it therefore if not, under a given specific aspect determined and cut out by abstraction, the intelligible density of an existent subject, rendered transparent in act by the mind and identified with the mind's vital activity by and in a concept? Briefly, the object as present in the mind is the intelligible objectization of a trans-objective subject" (11).

¹⁷ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 10: "The intellect, laying hold of the intelligibles, disengaging them by its own strength from sense experience, reaches, at the heart of its own inner vitality, those natures or essences which, by abstracting them, it has detached from their material existence at a given point in space and time. But to what end? Merely in order to contemplate the picture of the essences in its ideas? Certainly not! Rather in order to restore them to existence by the act in which intellection is completed and consummated, I mean judgment pronounced in the words *ita est*, thus it is. When, for example, I say: 'In every Euclidean triangle the sum of the angles is equal to two right angles,' or, 'The earth revolves round the sun,' what I am really saying is that every Euclidean triangle *exists* in mathematical

For instance, when we say, “the earth revolves round the sun,” for Maritain, what we are really doing is restoring the abstract concept “earth” to existence, by judging that “the earth *exists* in physical existence as revolving round the sun.”¹⁸ That judgment has this existential restorative function, rather than an abstractive one, makes Maritain now call into question whether existence can be said to be the “object” of judgment.

And yet existence is not an essence. It belongs to another order, an order which is other than the whole order of essences. It is therefore not an intelligible nor an object of thought in the sense given these words (which is synonymous with essence). What are we to conclude if not that existence goes beyond the object strictly so called, beyond

existence as possessing the property described; that the earth *exists* in physical existence as characterized by the movement described. The function of judgment is an existential function.” See also 15.

¹⁸ Maritain does not say what motivates this attempt to reinterpret all attributive judgments into existential ones. It is likely that he has in mind *In V metaphys.*, lec. 9, no. 890, where Aquinas says: “Unde oportet, quod ens contrahatur ad diversa genera secundum diversum modum praedicandi, qui consequitur diversum modum essendi; quia ‘quoties ens dicitur,’ idest quot modis aliquid praedicatur, ‘toties esse significatur,’ idest tot modis significatur aliquid esse” (“Whence it is right that being [*ens*] is contracted into diverse genera according to a diverse mode of predicating, which follow upon a diverse mode of being [*modus essendi*]. [That is] because ‘in as many ways as *being* [*ens*] is said [*dicitur*],’—that is, in as many ways as something is predicated—‘in that many ways is to be [*esse*] signified’—that is, in that many ways is something signified to be”). Other authors, although differing from Maritain in detail, have also taken this to mean that every judgment is somehow existential: Gyula Klima, “Aquinas’ Theory of the Copula and the Analogy of Being,” *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2002): 159–76; Turner Nevitt, “Aquinas on Essence and Existence” (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2015), 152–55. Such an interpretation is undermined, by Aquinas, when, a few lines later, he reveals that, by *esse*, he just means us to understand whatever essence is signified by the predicate: “Oportet quod unicuique modo praedicandi, esse significet idem; ut cum dicitur homo est animal, esse significat substantiam.” See Elliot Polsky, “‘In as Many Ways as Something is Predicated . . . in that Many Ways is Something Signified to Be’: The Logic behind Thomas Aquinas’s Predication Thesis, *Esse Substantiale*, and *Esse in Rerum Natura*,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 95 (forthcoming, 2021). Alternatively, Maritain may not be attempting an interpretation of *In V Metaphysicorum*, lec. 9, but instead Aquinas’s frequent remark that *esse* results from the coming-together of the principles of things, such as matter and form. See, for instance: *In IV metaphys.*, lec. 2, no. 558; *In Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, corp. Such texts inspire Owens, like Maritain, to reinterpret all attributive judgments as somehow existential (*Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 49–50).

the intelligible strictly so called, because it is an act exercised by a subject, whose eminent intelligibility, we may say super-intelligibility, objectivizes itself in us in the very act of judgment? In this sense we could call it a trans-objective act.¹⁹

Superficially, this passage seems to contradict what Maritain said earlier in *Preface to Metaphysics*. Since Maritain now restricts the word “object” to abstracted essences, he now denies that existence is the object of the intellect. But only a few pages later, Maritain will clarify that we can still call existence the “object” of the intellect and that which judgment “confronts” so long as we keep in mind that existence is an object in a “higher and analogical sense” compared to essences as objects of simple apprehension.²⁰ Thus, just as in *A Preface to Metaphysics*, Maritain faces the unstated specter of *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1. If existence is the object of not only the will, but also the intellect, how does the intellect differ from the will? In *A Preface to Metaphysics*, as we saw, Maritain’s solution to this unstated problem was to say that the existence attained by the intellect was in the mind whereas the existence attained by the will was outside the mind. In *Existence and the Existent*, Maritain does not seem to abandon his view that the existence attained in judgment is in the mind, not outside of it. Quoting his own earlier *Degrees of Knowledge* (1932), and commenting thereon, Maritain writes:

“Judgment is not content with the representation or apprehension of existence. It affirms existence, it projects into it, as effected or effectible outside the mind, the objects of concept apprehended by the mind. In other words, when the intellect judges, it lives intentionally, by an act proper to itself, this same act of existing which the thing exercises or is able to exercise outside the mind.” Existence thus affirmed and intentionally experienced by and in the mind is the consummation or completion, in the mind, of intelligibility in act. It corresponds to the act of existing exercised by things.²¹

Here, as in *A Preface to Metaphysics*, there are clearly two existences—one in things, one in the mind. The one experienced and affirmed in the mind “corresponds” to the one outside the mind. Unlike *A Preface to Metaphysics*, however, we now have some indication how this doctrine could

¹⁹ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 15.

²⁰ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 18–9.

²¹ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 15.

be reconciled with Maritain's professed realism. If truth is, as classically understood, the correspondence of the mind to things, and moreover the existence in the mind attained in judgment corresponds to existence in things, then, plausibly, we can know existence outside the mind by experiencing existence within the mind. But as Maritain warns here, existence in the mind should not be seen as a mere abstract representation. So, how *should* we understand the existence obtained in the mind? As Maritain says a few lines later, quoting *Degrees of Knowledge*: "The intelligibility with which judgment deals is more mysterious than that which notions or ideas convey to us; it is not expressed in a concept but in the very act of affirming or denying."²² What Maritain seems to mean is that, whereas what is cognized in simple apprehension is a concept—that is, the abstract or static term of an intellectual operation—what is cognized in judgment is the very act of affirming or denying, the intellectual operation itself. The object of judgment is not an abstracted form, but the concrete vital operation of an immaterial form—the intellectual knower himself. The object known in judgment is itself the vital operation of judgment by which, with the abstracted essences in the mind, the knower performatively imitates (or "lives intentionally") through judgment the act of existing exercised by unabstracted essences outside the mind.

Admittedly, in explaining how Maritain understands judgment in relation to *esse*, we have had to interpret Maritain rather than merely quote his own plainly formulated opinions. Still, as we turn from Maritain to Gilson, we find further evidence that our interpretation of Maritain has been faithful. Gilson's understanding of judgment in relation to *esse*, as expressed in *Being and Some Philosophers* (1949), is strikingly similar to Maritain's understanding. For the purposes of this paper, we need not review Gilson's views in the same detail we gave to Maritain. Rather, we will merely highlight some points of similarity to confirm the faithfulness of our interpretation of Maritain to that author and his school.

Étienne Gilson

Like Maritain, before distinguishing the two operations of the intellect, Gilson distinguishes two aspects in being: essence and existence.²³ After a lengthy discussion of how these relate to one another, Gilson turns to the two operations of the intellect: "The first operation of the mind is to form such concepts as express what things are."²⁴ Gilson, then, goes on to distinguish

²² Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 15.

²³ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 179.

²⁴ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 187.

two kinds of judgment.²⁵ One applies abstract concepts to their objects. The truth of such judgments depends only on essences, which in themselves are merely possible. Thus, such judgments do not give us knowledge of actually existing things. In contrast, there is a second kind of judgment.

In order to go further, another class of judgments is required, namely, those by which we state that what the thing is, actually is, or exists. Such is the composite operation which we call a judgment of existence. By saying that *x is*, we mean to say that *x* is a certain *esse* (to be), and our judgment must needs be a composite operation precisely because, in such cases, reality itself is composite. Existence is synthetically united with essence in reality, owing to the efficient causality of its cause, and the synthetic nature of their actual relation entails the synthetic nature of the mental act whereby we express it. If our existential judgment is true, however, it is so because that to which we ascribe existence actually is, or exists. In short, it is true when the data of abstract, intellectual knowledge and those of sensible intuition fully agree.²⁶

After using the phrase “first operation of the mind” to describe our knowledge of essences, Gilson only re-introduces the word “operation” when speaking of existential judgments. This suggests that he is uncomfortable including the first class of judgments (so-called “attributive judgments”) within the second operation of the intellect. If so, this would be a slight departure from Maritain, who, as we saw, reduced attributive judgments (e.g., “the earth revolves round the sun”) to existential judgments (e.g., “the earth *exists* in physical existence as revolving round the sun”). In any case, Gilson—even more clearly than Maritain—takes existence to be the object of the intellect’s second operation. He says:

That the human mind is naturally able to grasp it [the existential act] is a fact, and, if so many philosophers doubt it, it is because they fail to grasp the cognitive power of judgment. Because it lies beyond essence, existence lies beyond abstract representation, but not beyond the scope of intellectual knowledge; for judgment itself is the most perfect form of intellectual knowledge, and existence is its proper object.²⁷

²⁵ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 187.

²⁶ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 187–88.

²⁷ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 202.

Like Maritain, Gilson sees essences in the first operation of the intellect as abstracted from existence and in need of being “restored” thereto for the knower to obtain perfect knowledge.

Essences should never be conceived as final objects of intellectual knowledge, because their very nature is engaged in the concreteness of actual being. Abstracted from being, they claim to be reintegrated being. In other words, the proper end of intellectual abstraction is not to posit essences in the mind as pure and self-sufficient presentations. Even when we abstract essences, we do not do so with a view to knowing essences, but with a view to knowing the very beings to which they belong, and this is why, if philosophical knowledge is not to remain abstract speculation, but to be real knowledge, it must use judgment to restore essences to actual being.²⁸

Gilson goes on to explain how this restoring occurs. As we saw, for Maritain, the restoration of abstract essences to existence consisted in the intellect, by judgment, making the essences in the mind exercise an act corresponding to the act of existence those same essences exercised outside the mind. In our own words, Maritain saw judgment as a self-conscious performative imitation of existence outside the mind. In Gilson, we find an almost identical account of how judgment restores essences to existence.

Judgments always affirm that certain conceived essences are in a state of union with, or of separation from, existence. Judgments unite in the mind what is united in reality, or they separate in the mind what is separated in reality. And what is thus united or separated is always existence, either *how* it is, or *that* it is. In this last case, which is that of the judgment of existence, my mental act exactly answers the existential act of the known thing. Let us, rather, say that such a judgment intellectually reiterates an actual act of existing. If I say that *x is*, the essence of *x* exercises through my judgment the same act of existing which it exercises in *x*.²⁹

To perceive is to experience existence, and to say through judgment that such an experience is true is to know existence. An intellectual knowledge of existence is therefore possible for an intellect whose operations presuppose its vital experience, as an existent, of

²⁸ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 202–3 (cf. Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 10 [quoted in note 17 above]).

²⁹ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 203.

another existent. In other words, intellectual knowledge conceives existence, but the fruit of its conception then is not the representation of some essence; it is an act which answers an act. Exactly, it is the act of an operation which answers an act of existing, and such an operation is itself an act because it directly flows from an act of existing. An epistemology in which judgment, not abstraction, reigns supreme, is necessarily required by a metaphysics in which “to be” reigns supreme in the order of actuality.³⁰

Some aspects of these quotations are unclear. For instance, whereas Gilson earlier seemed to exclude attributive judgments from the second operation of the intellect inasmuch as they had nothing to do with existence, now he seems to say—more in line with Maritain—that all judgments, attributive or existential, have to do with existence. This ambiguity is irrelevant to the present paper. What *is* relevant is that, like Maritain, Gilson sees the act of judgment itself as what corresponds to existence outside the mind, grounding the truth of that existential judgment. Maritain distinguished between existence exercised by essences outside the mind and existence in the mind exercised by abstracted essences in the act of judgment, and he said the latter corresponded to the former. Gilson, in a similar way, says that there are two acts—the act of existing outside the mind and the act of judgment. The latter “exactly answers” to the former. For both authors, it would seem, that which is cognized in the intellect’s second operation is nothing other than the operation itself, which operation is a similitude of the act of existing outside the mind. Gilson closes his paragraph concerning the existential judgment by quoting Aquinas on Boethius’s *De Trinitate* (q. 5, a. 3): “The first operation pertains to the nature of a thing. . . . The second operation pertains to the being of a thing.”³¹

In sum, both Maritain and Gilson interpret Aquinas’s division of the two operations of the intellect as meaning that the first operation has a distinct (proper) object from the second operation. Whereas the first operation cognizes essences, the second cognizes existence. Both authors, however, seem to say the way the second operation cognizes existence outside the mind is by cognizing itself as a vital activity corresponding to (i.e., exactly answering) the existential activity of the existent outside the mind. Having reviewed the opinions of the two most prominent existen-

³⁰ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 207–208. The beginning of this quotation closely parallels what Gilson says in *Thomist Realism*, esp. 186–87.

³¹ “Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei . . . secunda operatio respicit ipsum esse rei” (Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 203).

tial Thomists concerning how to interpret Aquinas on the relation of judgment to *esse*, two things remain for this paper. First, we must evaluate the faithfulness of the existential Thomist interpretation of Aquinas's saying, "*secunda operatio respicit ipsum esse rei.*" Second, we must decide whether the Régis-McInerny alternative account of *esse* as cognized in the intellect's first operation fares any better than the existentialist theory in which *esse* is cognized in the second operation.

"Secunda Operatio Respicit Ipsum Esse Rei"

Minimally, there is a difference in emphasis between Saint Thomas's way of distinguishing the two operations of the intellect and Maritain and Gilson's way of doing so. Maritain and Gilson focus almost exclusively on the relation between *esse* and the second operation of the intellect.³² For Aquinas, this relation often goes unmentioned. In contrast, Aquinas almost always mentions a relation between the second operation and the vocal sound, enunciation (*enuntiatio*), which signifies the mind's second operation.³³ But Maritain seems to have almost entirely omitted mention of *enuntiatio*. Perhaps, in some cases, Maritain's "judgment" can be taken as a translation of Aquinas's *enuntiatio*. But certainly, the primary meaning of Maritain's word seems to be the second operation of the intellect itself, not the vocal sound signifying that operation. Gilson seems to deny that the logic of propositions (*enunciatio*) is helpful at all for showing how we know *esse*.³⁴ It is conceivable that Maritain and Gilson's different emphasis stems from a substantive misinterpretation of Aquinas. To see whether this is so, let us consider a few passages in which Aquinas distinguishes the second operation of the intellect from the first.

³² See Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 47: "It has to be a different act from conceptualization [that is the means of perceiving that sensible things exist]. It can be described and defined only in terms of its object, existence. Things are known to exist. The intellectual act by which existence is directly known is the proper way to define this cognition. Technically it may be called judgment."

³³ For instance, Aquinas mentions composition and division, as well as enunciation, in his division of the intellectual operations in *In I peryermenias*, lec. 1 (Leonine ed., 1*/1: 6 [lns. 1–32]); *Quodlibet* V, q. 5, a. 2, corp. (Leonine ed. 25/1:375 [lns. 15–30]); *ST* I, q. 85, a. 5, corp. In none of these passages does he mention a relation of judgment to *esse*. In *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 3 (Leonine ed. 22: 11 [lns. 44–6]), Thomas mentions that judgment joins and divides and that it "*dicit aliquid esse vel non esse*," but does not mention *enunciatio* by that name.

³⁴ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 190–92. See also "Attributive propositions are everywhere related to existence, except, precisely, in logic. . . . Existential propositions, which deal with nothing else than actual existence, are no fitting objects of consideration for the logician" (201).

First, we will consider q. 5, a. 3 in the *De Trinitate* commentary. Here, Aquinas distinguishes the two operations in order to explain the different ways in which the objects of the three most general speculative sciences are abstracted or separated from matter. This text is a paradigmatic instance of Aquinas's distinction between the two operations of the intellect because it gives, in one place, most of the details to be found in other texts.

It should be known therefore that, according to the Philosopher in *De anima* III, there is a twofold operation of the intellect: one, which is called “the understanding of indivisibles,” in which it cognizes about anything, what it is [*quid est*]; the other, however, in which it composes and divides—forming an affirmative or negative enunciation [*enunciatio*]. And these two operations correspond to two [aspects], which are in things. On the one hand, the first operation pertains to [*respicit*] the nature itself of a thing, according to which the understood thing obtains some grade among beings—whether it is a complete thing, as a certain whole, or an incomplete thing, like a part or accident. The second operation, on the other hand, pertains to [*respicit*] the being [*esse*] itself of a thing, which either results from the coming-together of the principles of the thing in a composite or which is concomitant upon the simple nature of the thing, as in simple substances.³⁵

The first operation is described here as cognizing something—namely, the *quid est* (i.e., the nature, quiddity, or essence) of a thing. The second operation is not described as cognizing anything (although that it cognizes something is not denied either). Rather, the second operation is described as doing something—composing or dividing. It is also described by its effect: the second operation of the intellect forms an affirmative or negative enunciation. Aquinas goes on to explain that something can be mentally

³⁵ *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, corp.: “Sciendum est igitur quod secundum Philosophum in III De anima duplex est operatio intellectus: una que dicitur intelligentia indiuisibilium, qua cognoscit de unoquoque quid est, alia uero qua componit et diuidit, scilicet enuntiationem affirmatiuam uel negatiuam formando. Et hec quidem due operationes duobus que sunt in rebus respondent. Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei, secundum quam res intellecta aliquem gradum in entibus obtinet, siue sit res completa, ut totum aliquod, siue res incompleta, ut pars uel accidens. Secunda uero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei; quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis, uel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus” (Leonine ed., 50:147 [lns. 89–105]).

abstracted or separated from something to which it is joined outside the mind either in the first operation or in the second. Doing so in the first operation need not involve falsehood, since by abstracting in this way we merely ignore something about a thing. Doing so in the second operation, in contrast, would involve falsely understanding a thing not to be in another when, outside the mind, it is.

The second operation, which composes and divides, distinguishes one from another by this—that it understands [*intelligit*] one not to be in [*non inesse*] the other. But in the operation that understands [*intelligit*] the *quid est* of anything, [the intellect] distinguishes one from another when it understands what one thing is, while understanding [*intelligendo*] nothing about the other—neither that it is with the other nor that it is separated from it.³⁶

Here, if *intelligit* is taken as synonymous with *cognoscit*, we have an indication that something is in fact cognized in the second operation after all. But what is cognized does not seem to be something distinct from what is cognized in the first operation. Rather, it seems to be nothing else than what is signified by the predicate of an enunciation. And what is signified by the predicate of an enunciation is a something (a whole, an accident, or a part). For instance, in the judgment that gives us the subject of metaphysics, we either separate substance (being, act, potency, etc.) from matter, or, conversely, separate matter from substance (being, act, potency, etc.). Either way, it seems the thing signified by the predicate of this separative enunciation is something understood in the first operation of the intellect. So q. 5, a. 3 gives no indication that the second operation of the intellect cognizes anything apart from what is cognized in the first operation of the intellect.

Aquinas's *In peryermenias* division of simple enunciation supports this conclusion. There, he defines affirmative enunciation as *enunciatio alicuius de aliquo* (an enunciation of something *about* something) and negative enunciation as *enunciatio alicuius ab aliquo* (an enunciation of something *from* something).³⁷ What is understood or cognized in judgment—that is,

³⁶ *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, corp.: “Secundum operationem qua componit et diuidit distinguit unum ab alio per hoc quod intelligit unum alii non inesse, in operatione uero qua intelligit quid est unumquodque, distinguit unum ab alio dum intelligit quid est hoc, nichil intelligendo de alio, neque quod sit cum eo, neque quod sit ab eo separatum.” (Leonine ed., 50:148 [lms. 161–67]).

³⁷ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 8: “Set contrarium apparet ex hoc quod Philosophus consequenter utitur nomine enunciationis ut genere: diffiniens affirmationem et negationem subdit quod ‘affirmatio est enunciatio alicuius de aliquod,’ scilicet per

what is signified by an enunciation—is principally that which is signified by the predicate, an *aliquid*, cognized in the intellect’s first operation. Judgment differs from simple apprehension not in what is cognized but in the way in which it cognizes. Whereas simple apprehension considers whiteness in isolation, for instance, judgment considers whiteness as in or not in Socrates. Aquinas, here, gives no indication that the object cognized by judgment is either *esse* or the operation of judgment itself.

But if *esse* is not what judgment cognizes, then what are we to make of the word *respicit*? Each of the two operations is said to *respicit* a distinct aspect in things. This language is not unique to the *De Trinitate* commentary, but is also found in *Scriptum* I, d. 19.³⁸ From what I can tell, this formulation does seem to be confined to Aquinas’s early works. We have translated *respicit* as “pertains to,” but it could be more literally translated as “sees” or “considers.” Translated in this way, it would be easy to conclude that the two aspects in things that the two operations severally *respicit* are the respective objects of those two operations. As color is to the eye, so quiddities are to the first operation and *esse* is to the second operation. This conclusion seemingly finds further support from the fact that Aquinas, in multiple places, explicitly draws an analogy between quiddities and color. Concerning the text in *De anima* III from which Aquinas originates the distinction between the two intellectual operations, he notes that the intellect is always true insofar as it understands the *quid est* of a thing but is not always true insofar as it understands *aliquid de aliquo*. Explaining this distinction, Aquinas says:

Aristotle assigns to this the following reason: Because that which it is [*quod quid est*] is the proper object of the intellect. Whence as vision is never deceived in its proper object, so neither is intellect [deceived] in cognizing *quod quid est*. Whence the intellect is never deceived in knowing that which man is. But as vision is not always true in judging of those which are adjoined to its proper object (e.g.,

modum compositionis, ‘negatio uero est enunciatio alicuius ab aliquo,’ per modum scilicet diuisionis” (“But the contrary appears to be the case from the fact that the Philosopher subsequently uses the name of ‘enunciation’ as a genus: defining affirmation and negation, he adds that ‘*affirmation* is an enunciation of something about something,’ namely, in the mode of composition, ‘but *negation* is an enunciation of something from something,’ namely, in the mode of division”; Leonine ed., 1*/1: 44 [lns. 388–96]).

³⁸ *In I sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7: “Prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit esse ipsius” (“The first operation pertains to the quiddity of a thing; the second pertains to its being.”).

if “the white” is “man” or “not”), so neither is the intellect always true in composing something of something [*aliquid alicui*].³⁹

Aquinas makes essentially the same point in *Scriptum* I, d. 19, q. 5, but instead of saying *quod quid est*, he substitutes the synonym *quidditas rei*; and instead of using the particular color “white” as a stand-in for the proper object of vision, he simply says “color.”⁴⁰ Likewise, he replaces the unwieldy phrase *aliquid de aliquo* with the more manageable concepts of “composition,” “enunciation,” “affirmation or negation,” and *esse*. Aquinas again makes the same argument in *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] I, q. 85, a. 6. As color is the proper object of vision, so the proper object of the intellect is *quidditas rei*. Accordingly, as the sight cannot err with respect to color (unless the eye is damaged), so the intellect does not err in perceiving simple quiddities. Rather, falsehood only enters the intellect when it begins to compose or divide things with the quiddities it perceives. From these three texts—the commentary on *De anima* III; *Scriptum* I, d. 19; *ST* I, q. 85—there is perhaps good reason to think that, when Aquinas says the first operation *respicit* the quiddity of a thing, whereas the second *respicit* the *esse* of a thing, he has in mind the respective objects of the two operations. As color is to sight, so the quiddity is to the first operation and *esse* is to the second.

This conclusion—although a plausible interpretation of q. 5, a. 3, of the *De Trinitate* commentary read in isolation—should not be accepted too hastily. First of all, the grammatical direct object of the verb *respicit* is not always the object of either a power or an operation. Sometimes it is merely that to which a thing (even an abstract thing) is related. For instance, when Aquinas elsewhere says, “For truth pertains to being [*esse*] simply and immediately,”⁴¹ he obviously does not intend *esse* to be the object of

³⁹ *In III de anima*, ch. 5: “Et huius rationem assignat quia quod quid est huius proprium obiectum intellectus, unde, sicut uisus nunquam decipitur in proprio obiecto, ita nec intellectus in cognoscendo quod quid est, unde intellectus nunquam decipitur in cognoscendo quod quid est homo set, sicut uisus non semper uerus est in iudicando de hiis que sunt adiuncta proprio obiecto, puta *si album est homo uel non*, sic nec intellectus semper est uerus in componendo aliquid alicui” (Leonine ed., 45:227 [Ins. 233–42]).

⁴⁰ *In I sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7 (Aquinas, *Scriptum*, 489–50).

⁴¹ See *ST* I, q. 16, a. 4, corp.: “Nam verum respicit ipsum esse simpliciter et immediate.” See also *ST* I, q. 26, a. 2, obj. 1 (“Sed bonum dicitur in Deo secundum essentiam, quia bonum respicit esse” [“But good is predicated of God according to essence because good pertains to being”]); q. 10, a. 1, obj. 2 (“Duratio autem magis respicit esse quam vitam” [“But duration pertains more to being than to life”]).

truth. Surely, truth is neither a power nor an operation to which *esse* can be related as object. Likewise, Aquinas may not want us to think that quiddities and *esse* are the respective objects of the two intellectual operations or powers.

Secondly, these texts—*In III de anima*; *Scriptum* I, d. 19; *ST* I, q. 85—each call quiddity (or *quod quid est*) the proper object of the intellect and color (or white) the proper object of vision. But these are two powers. In contrast, the subjects of the verb *respicit* in q. 5, a. 3 of the *De Trinitate* commentary are two operations, not two powers. Of course, the object of a power will also be the object of its operation.⁴² For instance, as the object of vision is color, so too, *this* act of seeing has for its object *this* color (e.g., red or blue). So conceivably, although *respicit* is predicated of two operations, not two powers, it may yet relate the two subjects to the proper objects of two separate powers—the power of cognizing quiddity and the power of cognizing *esse*. Perhaps, when Aquinas speaks of the power called “intellect” in these three passages, he is imprecisely designating the power from which the first operation of the intellect results, but not the power from which the second results.

The problem with such a reading is that the reasoning in the *In de anima*, *Scriptum*, and *ST* passages prevents us from understanding the two intellectual operations from the *De Trinitate* commentary as stemming from two separate powers with distinct proper objects. If the second operation stemmed from a separate power with its own distinctive object, then—per the logic of the three texts—not only would the intellect never be deceived in apprehending the quiddity of a thing, it would also never be deceived in the second operation. It is precisely in virtue of the fact that the second operation somehow goes beyond the intellect’s proper object (i.e., *quod quid est*) that this second operation can err. Thus, the two operations to which *respicit* is attributed cannot stem from distinct powers with distinct proper objects.

But if simple apprehension and judgment cannot arise from distinct powers, can they have distinct objects? After all, charity and hatred come from the same power of will but have different objects, right? It depends what is meant by “object,” *obiectum*. This word comes from the Latin preposition *ob* and verb *iacio*.⁴³ Thus, its etymology suggests something

⁴² See *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 5, corp. See also *ST* I, q. 77, a. 3; *De malo*, q. 2, a. 4; and Steven Jensen, “When Evil Actions Become Good,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5, no. 4 (2007): 747–64, who both cites and comments on these texts from St. Thomas (755–56).

⁴³ Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford:

thrown in front of something else so as to block it.⁴⁴ In general, “object” designates nothing else than the term of a relation. Obviously, there is no problem saying that simple apprehension and judgment have distinct “objects” in this vague and general sense. But what does this difference in objects amount to?

To explain how the intellect relates to quiddities and *esse* respectively, we must take a brief digression into Aquinas's distinction among the objects of sense, since Aquinas uses this distinction in sense to explain the characteristics of the operations of the intellect. Concerning the sense-apprehensive powers, Aquinas identifies three kinds of object: the proper object, the common object, and the accidental object.⁴⁵ Sensation is a kind of being-altered, so anything that of itself causes a difference in the alteration of a sense power is called a “sensible” *per se*.⁴⁶ In contrast, what makes no difference in the alteration of a sense power is only called “sensible” accidentally. But there are two ways in which something can differentiate the way a sense power is altered. Proper objects (e.g., color, sound, odor) determine which sense power is altered. For instance, color only affects sight, and sound only affects hearing. Common objects (e.g., quantity, motion, etc.) also, of themselves, alter the sense powers, but in a different way. These affect the mode in which the proper objects affect the sense power. For instance, they determine that the color being seen is great or small. Such objects are called “common” because they affect multiple senses, not just one. In contrast to *per se* sensibles, both common and proper, what is sensible accidentally does not in any way alter the sense to which it is accidental. Aquinas gives two conditions for something being called “sensible” accidentally (*per accidens*).⁴⁷ First, it must be accidental to

Oxford University Press, 2006), 73.

⁴⁴ Pilsner, *Specification*, 73.

⁴⁵ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 2, ad 2: “Magnitudo et figura et huiusmodi, quae dicuntur communia sensibilia, sunt media inter sensibilia per accidens et sensibilia propria, quae sunt obiecta sensuum. Nam sensibilia propria primo et per se immutant sensum” (“Magnitude, figure, and suchlike, which are called *common sensibles*, are a middle between *accidental sensibles* and *proper sensibles*, which are objects of sense. For the proper sensibles move the sense primarily and *per se*”).

⁴⁶ For the mode of division of proper, common, and *per accidens* sensibles, I follow *In II de anima*, ch. 13 (Leonine ed. 45:120–22). Cf. *ST I*, q. 78, a. 2, ad 2.

⁴⁷ See *In II de anima*, ch. 13: “Viso igitur quomodo dicantur per se sensibilia et communia et propria, restat uidendum qua ratione dicatur aliquid sensibilia per accidens. Sciendum est igitur quod ad hoc quod aliquid sit sensibile per accidens primo requiritur quod accidat ei quod est per se sensibile, sicut accidit albo esse hominem et accidit ei esse dulce, secundo requiritur quod sit apprehensum a sciencie: si enim aliquid accideret sensibili quod lateret scienciam, non diceretur per

the thing sensed *per se*, as sweetness is accidental to the whiteness seen in the apple. Second, if a thing is to be called “sensible” at all, even accidentally, *something* must perceive it. Although sweetness is not sensed by the eye, except accidentally, if we are to say it is sensed at all, it must at least be perceived by something—such as taste, the intellect, or the inner sense powers. Thus, nothing is, universally speaking, a *per accidens* sensible. Rather, things are only *per accidens* sensibles with respect to some particular cognitive power. With respect to some other power, they must be *per se* sensibles.

In *ST* I, q. 85, a. 6, Aquinas uses this division of sensible objects to explain how error is found in the intellect. Except for a defect in the sense organ, the senses never err with respect to their proper object. Sometimes they err with respect to the common sensibles. For instance, we might mistakenly think that the sun is only the width of our extended thumb when, in fact, it is larger than the whole Earth. Even more so, we may err by a comparison of the proper object of sense with some *per accidens* object. For instance, someone could see a dark shape (cognized by the eyes) and judge that it was a dog (cognized by the intellect), or dangerous (cognized by instinct),⁴⁸ or making the noise being heard (cognized by the ears). Any of these three judgments could be true or false, unlike the simple apprehension of a dark shape or a dog or danger or barking in isolation. When we err in judging about common or *per accidens* sensibles, the possibility

accidens sentiri. Oportet igitur quod per se cognoscatur ab aliqua alia potencia cognoscitiua sencietis, et hec quidem uel est alius sensus, uel est intellectus, uel uis cogitatiua aut uis estimatiua. Dico autem quod est alius sensus, sicut si dicamus quod dulce est uisibile per accidens in quantum dulce <accidit albo quod apprehenditur uisu, per se autem dulce> apprehenditur gustu. Set, ut proprie loquamur, hoc non est universaliter sensible per accidens, set per accidens uisibile, sensibile autem per se” (“I see therefore how they talk about *per se* sensibles, whether common or proper, but it must be seen for what reason something is called an accidental sensible. It should be known, then, that for something to be sensible by accident, first, it must belong accidentally to what is a *per se* sensible. For example, it befalls the white to be a human and it befalls it [also] to be sweet. Second, it must be apprehended by some sense. For if something occurs to a sensible without being sensed [at all], it is not said to be sensed accidentally. It is necessary therefore that it is cognized *per se* by some other cognitive potency of the sensing one—be that another sense, the intellect, the cogitative power, or the estimative [power]. But I say that it is another sense, as [for example] if we say that the sweet is visible by accident insofar as the sweet befalls white, which is apprehended by sight, whereas sweet is apprehended *per se* by taste. Properly speaking, however, this is not universally an accidental sensible, but a *per se* sensible and an accidental visible”; Leonine ed. 45:120–21 [Ins. 162–81]).

⁴⁸ See *ST* I, q. 78, a. 4, corp.

for error is evidently occasioned by the plurality of things perceived, one of which is accidental to the other. Turning from the objects of sense to those of intellect, Aquinas says, as we have already seen, that the intellect cannot err concerning its proper object, which is the quiddity of things.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the intellect *can* err concerning things that surround (*circumstant*) the essence of a thing. Error only occurs when one thing is ordered to another by the intellect composing or dividing or reasoning. Aquinas's examples of this are when the intellect applies the definition of a circle to a triangle and when the intellect composes from simple quiddities a definition that is impossible to instantiate (e.g., a rational winged animal).⁵⁰

From this discussion, it is evident that quiddities are the proper object not only of one operation of the intellect, but of the whole intellectual power.⁵¹ They compare to the intellect as color compares to vision. Noth-

⁴⁹ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 6, corp.: "Obiectum autem proprium intellectus est quidditas rei. Unde circa quidditatem rei, per se loquendo, intellectus non fallitur. Sed circa ea quae circumstant rei essentiam vel quidditatem, intellectus potest falli, dum unum ordinat ad aliud, vel componendo vel dividendo vel etiam ratiocinando" ("The proper object of the intellect is the quiddity of a thing. Whence concerning the quiddity of a thing, speaking *per se*, the intellect does not fail. But concerning those which stand around the essence or quiddity of a thing, the intellect can fail while it orders one to another: composing, dividing, or reasoning").

⁵⁰ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 6, corp.: "Per accidens tamen contingit intellectum decipi circa quod quid est in rebus compositis; non ex parte organi, quia intellectus non est virtus utens organo; sed ex parte compositionis intervenientis circa definitionem, dum vel definitio unius rei est falsa de alia, sicut definitio circuli de triangulo, vel dum aliqua definitio in seipsa est falsa, implicans compositionem impossibilium, ut si accipiatur hoc ut definitio alicuius rei, animal rationale alatum. Unde in rebus simplicibus, in quarum definitionibus compositio intervenire non potest, non possumus decipi" ("By accident, it occurs to the intellect to be deceived concerning that which is in composite things, not on account of the organ, because the intellect is not a power using an organ, but on account of a composition occurring to the definition either [1] when the definition of one thing is falsely [said] of another, e.g., the definition of a circle [said] of a triangle, or [2] when some definition in itself is false, as implying an impossible composition, e.g., winged rational animal. Whence in simple things, in which no composition comes to the definitions, it is not possible to be deceived").

⁵¹ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5, corp. ("And similarly the human intellect does not at once in the first apprehension attain perfect cognition of a thing, but first apprehends something about it, as the quiddity of the thing, which is the first and proper object of the intellect" [Et similiter intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus]); a. 6, corp. ("But the proper object of the intellect is the quiddity of a thing" [Obiectum autem proprium intellectus est quidditas rei]); *In III de anima*, ch. 5

ing in Aquinas's discussion of the intellect seems to correspond to the common sensible objects.⁵² On the other hand, the intellect does have

("That which it is [*quod quid est*] is the proper object of the intellect" [Quod quid est est proprium obiectum intellectus]; Leonine ed. 45:227 [Ins. 233–42]); *In I sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7 ("The intellect has true judgment of its proper object into which it naturally tends, which is the quiddity of a thing, even as sight is of color" [Intellectus habet verum iudicium de proprio objecto, in quod naturaliter tendit, quod est quidditas rei, sicut et visus de colore]); *In peryermenias*, lec. 10 ("But note that the intellect apprehends a thing according to the proper notion [*ratio*] or definition; whence in *De anima* III it is said that the proper object of the intellect is that which it is" [Est autem considerandum quod intellectus apprehendit rem intellectam secundum propriam rationem seu diffinitionem; unde et in III *De anima* dicitur quod obiectum proprium intellectus est quod quid est]; Leonine ed. 1*/1.50 [Ins. 71–75]). Cf. *De ente et essentia*: "Being and essence are what is first conceived by the intellect" [Ens autem et essentia sunt que primo intellectu concipiuntur] (Leonine ed., 43:369 [Ins. 3–4]). It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain how this oft-repeated formula is compatible with the other oft-repeated formula that the intellect's first and proper object is universal *ens*. See, e.g.: *ST I*, q. 78, a. 1, corp.; q. 79, a. 2, corp.; q. 87, a. 3, ad 1; *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, corp. Given the comparative frequency, context, and clarity in which these two formulations of the intellect's object are given, particularly in the mature *ST* treatise on man, it seems that to call *ens* the proper object of the intellect is less proper than to call quiddity that object. Nevertheless, it would be surprising if these formulations were incompatible since they often occur side by side. A standard, but not unproblematic, attempt to maintain that both quiddity and *ens* are what the intellect first and properly knows was given by John of St. Thomas (Poinso): *Cursus philosophicus Thomisticus*, q. 1, a. 3, ed. Beatus Reiser, vol. 2 (New York: Georg Olms, 2008). In order to resolve the tension between *ens* and quiddity as the intellect's proper object, it may be relevant that, as Aquinas says, what *ens* primarily signifies is the essence or nature of things, which is divided into ten categories: *De malo*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 19; *In II sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3; *In V metaphys.*, lec. 9. Cf. *De ente et essentia*, ch. 1 (Leonine ed., 45:369 [Ins. 2–18]); *ST I*, q. 48, a. 2, ad 2. Or even more precisely it could be said that "being" first signifies substance (*In VII metaphys.*, lec. 1, no. 1246). But "substance" means either an individual or its quiddity (no. 1247), and the reason an individual is a being is because it has a quiddity (no. 1251). Thus, if our intellect is naturally constituted to apprehend things under the aspect of being, what this amounts to is a natural aptitude to apprehend things in the manner of the quiddity of substance. For an overview of Thomistic opinions (Cajetan, Poinso, Gilson, and Maritain) on being as first known in Aquinas's thought, see Brian Kemple, *Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition: The Philosophy of Being as First Known* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁵² Arguably, it is the syncategoremata, which signify the relation between concepts or the mode of signifying concepts, that are analogous to the common sensibles for the intellect. But Aquinas does not discuss this. If "*esse*" is taken as a syncategorematic term, then perhaps "*esse*" is among the objects of the intellect analogous to the common sensibles. William of Sherwood, whose writings St. Thomas could

something analogous to *per accidens* objects. But there is a difference between the sense and the intellect in this regard. Error can occur in the senses when a sense (presumably the common sense) compares the proper objects of two different senses, which are with respect to each other accidental sense objects. For instance, the common sense judges that the white thing is also sweet. In contrast, error occurs in the intellect through a comparison of two things, both *properly* apprehended in the intellect, such as the definition of a circle and the concept of a triangle.⁵³ Unlike with error in the senses, there are not two (or three) apprehensive powers involved, but only one.⁵⁴ In the sense, both objects compared in judgment are *per accidens* objects with respect to different senses. So, what should we call the *per accidens* object of the intellect? Should we identify the *per accidens* object of the intellect with the composite that results from its activity of composing and dividing (e.g., “the rational winged animal” or “the triangle with a term everywhere equidistant from the center”), or, alternatively, should we identify the *per accidens* object with one or both of the simple quiddities entering into this composite? Aquinas is not clear about this. It is safe to say that, if there is any possibility of error in the intellect's composing or dividing, the objects compared must be accidental with respect to each other. On the other hand, we can also safely conclude that the objects compared *must* be (1) *per se* with respect to the intellect itself, or (2) composed of objects ultimately proper to the intellect itself, or

have accessed, says that “*est*” is not a syncategorematic term because it consignifies composition with a subject and consignification is not the same as signification (Reginald O'Donnell ed., “The Syncategoremata of William of Sherwood,” *Medieval Studies* 3 [1941], 70–71). But this very reasoning implies that “*esse*” (unlike “*est*”) is a syncategorematic term since, as Aquinas says, infinitives signify directly the inherence in a subject consignified by (indicative) verbs (Leonine ed., 1*/1:26 [Ins. 49–72]).

- ⁵³ This statement is true so long as we add the qualification (not relevant to the present paper) that the comparison itself of two intellectual objects does not seem to be possible without importing, via the copula, the notion of time, which notion is proper to the inner senses but accidental to the intellect. See: *ST* I, q. 85, a. 5, ad 2; *In X metaphys.*, lec. 3, no. 1982. Such a reflection on the inner senses seems to be what accounts for the evident difference between “a winged rational animal” (which is an atemporal and accidental compound of *per se* intellectual objects) and “a rational animal is winged” (which is a present-tense enunciation).
- ⁵⁴ Aquinas does hint that the inner senses may be involved in judgment and that the necessity of introducing reference to time in judgment is the effect of this reliance on phantasms (*ST* I, q. 85, a. 5, ad 2). We should not underestimate the role that this might play in the possibility of erroneous judgments. Nevertheless, to avoid unneeded complication, we will overlook it here.

(3) reducible to objects *per se* with respect to some lower cognitive power. For instance, (1) is exemplified when I say, “man is risible.” But (2) is exemplified when I say, “the rational winged animal has three sides.” And (3) is exemplified by “Socrates is white,” inasmuch as “Socrates” brings in not only the intellectual notion of humanity, but also the inner sense cognition of individual matter.⁵⁵ Thus, if we are to speak of the second operation of the intellect having any object, it will be nothing else than the *per accidens* object of the intellect, which itself is either cognized *per se* by some power or reducible to such *per se* objects. If *esse*, then, were the object of the second operation of the intellect, it would be the *per accidens* object of the intellectual power. But if that were the case, it would have to be a composite of the intellect’s proper objects or it would have to be cognized *per se* by some other power. Neither of these consequences is true, however. The *ratio* of *esse* is supremely simple⁵⁶ and *esse* is certainly not the object of any bodily sense. It is not a color, a sound, or a past time, for instance. So, although the intellect, in its second operation, *respicit ipsum esse rei*, nevertheless, *esse* is not the object of the intellect—either *per se* or *per accidens*. Nor indeed is *esse* the object of any other cognitive power in man. Evidently, we must interpret *respicit* in the *De Trinitate* commentary as indicating something other than the relation of a power or operation to its object.

We may think that the conclusion just drawn goes too far. Surely, “*esse*” must be cognized somehow; otherwise, we cannot use *esse* in sentences or know it at all. But if it is cognized at all, it must be the object of some knowing power. Obviously, we do not deny that *esse* is cognized *somehow*, just as we would not deny that nothingness, blindness, and logical genera are also cognized *somehow*. All that our conclusion above proves is that it is not the proper object of the intellect (or any other cognitive power). Rather, when the intellect knows it at all, it knows it by reduction to its proper object—just as it knows non-beings by reduction to being and in the manner of being.⁵⁷ Aquinas’s psychology requires that we know *esse* only in the manner of quiddity and by reference to quiddity. *Esse* is not a distinct proper object of any human cognitive power.

So, how should we interpret the thesis that judgment “*respicit ipsum*

⁵⁵ *In I per yhermeneias*, lec. 10: “Nomen Sortis uel Platonis significat naturam humanam secundum quod est in hac materia” (Leonine ed., 1*/1: 51 [Ins. 115–17]).

⁵⁶ Since *esse* is supremely common, it cannot participate anything in the manner of a genus; and since it is abstract, it cannot participate anything in the manner of an accident. See *In de ebdomadibus*, ch. 2 (Leonine ed., 50: 271 [Ins. 68–13]). Thus, *esse* is supremely simple (Leonine ed., 50:272–73 [Ins. 196–258]).

⁵⁷ *In IV metaphys.*, lec. 1, no. 539–40.

esse rei"? Evidently, this uses *respicit* in the very broad sense in which even abstract objects, like *verum*, can be said to *respicit esse*. Judgment has some special relation to *esse* missing in the first operation of the intellect. What this relation is has already been suggested. As we saw earlier, what is cognized in the second operation of the intellect is the signification of the predicate in enunciation. But this is cognized in a new way. Whereas the first operation cognizes this signification absolutely, the second operation cognizes it in relation to a subject. For instance, we no longer cognize whiteness alone, but now cognize that whiteness is in Socrates. This comparison of the objects of the first operation is signified in the complex pronunciation "Socrates is white." What consignifies the composition of any form (accidental or substantial) to a subject is the verb "is."⁵⁸ Thus, when Aquinas employs a shorthand similar to indirect speech and uses *esse* to refer to the signification of *est*, he says judgment "*respicit ipsum esse rei*." This means nothing more esoteric than that, whereas simple apprehension cognizes quiddities simply, judgment cognizes them precisely *as* compared with one another via the word "is" (*est*). This comparison of the intellect's proper objects through the verb "is," moreover, is why the second operation (unlike the first) can be true or err. It is also why not only judgment but also truth itself is said to "*respicit esse*." *Esse* is nothing else than an abstract word for the relation of predicate to subject, which it is the distinctive role of the verb *est* to consignify. This much suffices to show that the second operation of the intellect does not cognize *esse* and that no cognitive power has *esse* for its proper object. Moreover, the existential Thomists seemed to think that we know *esse* by performing the activity of judgment, which somehow corresponds to (or exactly answers) the act of existing exercised by essences outside the mind. Aquinas, in dividing the two operations, has not only given us no indication that *esse* is what is properly cognized in judgment, but has also not given us any sense that, in judgment itself, our intellect is somehow reflexively aware of its own operation and correspondence with extramental activity. What judgment knows is principally a quiddity signified by a predicate, but it knows it *as* joined to or separated from a subject via the verb "is." This is the only sense in which judgment "*respicit esse*."

In I Peryermenias, Lecture 5.

To confirm this reading of Aquinas, let us comment on a passage in Aquinas's *In peryermenias* much invoked in the twentieth-century debate concerning whether *esse* is grasped in the first or the second operation of

⁵⁸ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1: 31 [Ins. 391–407]).

the intellect. In commenting on this passage, it is my contention that both parties to the dispute are guilty of misreading the text. Because McNerny faithfully develops the argument of Father Régis against Gilson but also says far more, we will only refer to McNerny when our interpretation differs from his.

The context of the passage is a lecture designed to explain Aristotle's definition of "verb" (*uerbum*). Amid defining the verb, Aristotle remarks: "Set si est aut non est, nondum significat. Neque enim esse signum est rei uel non esse. Nec si hoc ipsum 'est' purum dixeris: ipsum quidem nichil est. Consignificat autem quandam compositionem quam sine compositis non est intelligere."⁵⁹ Any English translation that attempts to make this terse and obscure passage easily readable will impose an interpretation upon it, but the passage can be literally (if awkwardly) translated as follows: "But if 'is' or 'is not,' it does not yet signify. For it is a sign neither of a thing 'to be' nor 'not to be.' Nor if you purely say 'is' itself; this indeed is nothing. It consignifies, however, a certain composition, which, without the components, is not understood." Before presenting his own interpretation of this text, Aquinas first rejects a few false or inadequate interpretations. Due to an imprecise translation of which Aquinas was aware, the past interpreters evaluated by Aquinas explain why "being" (*ens*) signifies nothing, whereas the Latin of Aristotle says that "is" (*est*) signifies nothing.⁶⁰ This discrepancy has little substantive import.

Alexander said that "being" (*ens*) signifies nothing because "being" is equivocal and divided into ten categories.⁶¹ Aquinas objects that "being" is not equivocal but analogical, and even if it were equivocal, it would signify many things, not nothing. Porphyry's interpretation is given next.⁶² He said that "being" signifies nothing because it does not signify the nature of anything (*natura alicuius rei*), but only a certain conjunction. Here, Porphyry evidently has in mind the etymological relation between τὸ ὄν and the copula "is" by which subject and predicate are conjoined. Gilson makes a similar point, not about "being" (*ens*), but the copula "is": "As to the 'copula,' it is not really a term, because it designates, not a concept, but the determinate relation which obtains between two terms. For this

⁵⁹ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:25 [Ins. 16b21–25]). For Gilson's interpretation of this, see *Being and Some Philosophers*, 229. For McNerny's, see McNerny, *Being and Predication*, 185–87.

⁶⁰ See McNerny, *Being and Predication*, 185: "The Latin translation St. Thomas had did not translate τὸ ὄν as *being*, but as *is*. St. Thomas is aware of this and comments on both readings, i.e. *ipsum est* and *ipsum ens*."

⁶¹ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:30 [Ins. 314–30]).

⁶² *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:30 [Ins. 331–40]).

reason the copula cannot be a noun; it is a verb. In point of fact, it is the verb *is*.⁶³ The only difference between Gilson and Porphyry is that Gilson speaks of the copula but Porphyry speaks of “being.” Nevertheless, their contentions amount to the same thing, since Porphyry’s statement only makes sense in light of the close association between “being” and the copula. Aquinas rejects this interpretation because *ens* is a name and *est* a verb. But what signifies nothing can be classed as neither a name nor verb.⁶⁴ As Aquinas said earlier in the lecture—although there is a special sense of “name” (*nomen*) in which names and verbs are distinguished by their mode of signifying—both names and verbs can be called “names” broadly inasmuch as what both signify is *aliquam rem*⁶⁵ and inasmuch as they both set the intellect at rest in its first operation.⁶⁶ Gilson interprets

⁶³ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 190.

⁶⁴ What merely signifies the relation of two other words is neither a verb nor a name (*In I peryermenias*, lec. 5, in Leonine ed., 1*/1:32: [lns. 32–34]; 1*/1:6 [lns. 35–40]).

⁶⁵ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5: “Et ideo aliter dicendum est quod nomen hic sumitur prout communiter significat quamlibet dictionem impositam ad significandum aliquam rem; et, quia etiam agere uel pati est quedam res, inde est quod ipsa uerba in quantum nominant, id est significant, agere et pati, sub nominibus comprehenduntur communiter acceptis. Nomen autem, prout a uerbo distinguitur, significat rem sub determinato modo, prout scilicet potest intelligi ut in se existens; unde nomina possunt subici et predicari” (“Thus, it should instead be said that *name* here is taken as it commonly signifies any word that is imposed to signify some *thing*; and because even *to do* or *to suffer* is a certain *thing*, it follows that verbs themselves insofar as they name, i.e., signify, to do and to suffer, are comprehended under ‘name’ taken commonly. ‘Name,’ however, as distinguished from ‘verb,’ signifies a thing under a determinate mode—namely, as it can be understood in itself existing. Whence a name can be subjected or predicated”; Leonine ed., 1*/1:29 [lns. 244–54]).

⁶⁶ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5: “Dicit ergo primo quod in tantum dictum est quod uerba sint nomina in quantum significant aliquid. Et hoc probat, quia supra dictum est quod uoces significantiue significant intellectus, unde proprium uocis significantiue est quod generet aliquem intellectum in animo audientis; et ideo, ad ostendendum quod uerbum sit uox significantiua, assumit quod ille *qui dicit* uerbum *constituit intellectum* in animo audientis, et ad hoc manifestandum inducit quod ille *qui audit quiescit*” (“He first says therefore that it was said that verbs are names only inasmuch as they signify something. And this is proved because above it was said that significant vocal sounds signify the intellect. Whence it is proper to significant vocal sound that it generate some intellection in the soul of the hearer. And for this reason to show that a verb is a significant vocal sound, he assumes that ‘that which he says’ [the verb] ‘constitutes the intellection’ in the soul of the hearer. To manifest this fact, he points out that ‘those who hear rest’”; Leonine ed., 1*/1:29 [lns. 261–70]); “Set dicendum est quod duplex est operatio intellectus . . . ille qui

Aristotle's remark that verbs, by themselves, are names very differently from Aquinas. For Gilson, this seems to mean that verbs are names in the special sense and that verbs signify the abstract nature of action—that “to depart” means “departure.”⁶⁷ For Aquinas, in contrast, the fact that verbs, like names, signify *aliquam rem* and set the first operation at rest, need not entail that verbs signify an *abstract* nature. Whereas names (e.g., “departure”) signify the nature of an action as if existing in itself, verbs (e.g., “departs”) signify the same nature, but as issuing from an agent or inhering in a subject.⁶⁸ Verbs (*pace* Gilson) signify a thing and set the intellect at rest in its first operation. So, when Aristotle says that “being” or “is” signifies nothing, he (as interpreted by Aquinas) cannot mean to deny that these words (a name and a verb, respectively) fail to signify *aliquid* or *aliquam rem* in the first operation of the intellect. He must mean something else. Aquinas finds Ammonius's interpretation more promising than Porphyry's and Alexander's.⁶⁹ Ammonius says that *ens* signifies nothing because it does not signify truth or falsehood unless something else is added, thereby, constituting a true or false composition. Aquinas thinks that this too, however, strays from the obvious sense of Aristotle's text since the same interpretation could be given had Aristotle chosen any random name or verb, but Aristotle seems to have picked “being” or “is” as a special case. There is a special reason why Aristotle chooses to say that “being” or “is” signifies nothing rather than that “running” or “runs” signifies nothing.

So Aquinas gives an alternative interpretation—explaining in what sense both *ens* and *est* signify nothing.⁷⁰ According to this new interpretation, *ens* signifies nothing in the sense that it does not signify a thing to be or not to be (“non significat rem esse uel non esse”). We could mistakenly

dicit nomen uel uerbum secundum se, constituit intellectum quantum ad primam operationem, que est conceptio alicuius, et secundum hoc quiescit animus audientis, qui suspensus erat ante quam nomen uel uerbum proferretur et eius prolatio terminaretur; non autem constituit intellectum quantum ad secundam operationem, que est intellectus componentis et diuidentis” (“But it must be said that the operation of the intellect is twofold. . . . He who says a name or verb by itself establishes the intellect with regard to the first operation, which is the conception of something; and according to this, the soul of the hearer rests, which previously was in suspense before the name or verb was given and its expression terminated. But it [i.e., the name or verb] does not constitute the intellect with regard to the second operation, which is the intellect composing and dividing”; Leonine ed., 1*/1:29 [lns. 277–86]).

⁶⁷ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 199.

⁶⁸ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:26 [lns. 49–72]).

⁶⁹ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:30 [lns. 341–64]).

⁷⁰ *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:30 [lns. 355–76]).

think that *ens* did signify something to be, since *ens* means *quod est*, and we may take *quod* as referring to some thing (*res*) while *est* refers to *esse*. Aquinas does not cite any particular philosophers who have made this mistake, but Maritain has since offered himself for citation. It is Maritain's view in *Existence and the Existent* that, although concepts of simple apprehension usually precede judgment, the first activity of the intellect finds concept and judgment arising simultaneously.⁷¹ This is because, according to Maritain, the judgment "something exists" provides the very content for the concept "being" or "that-which is."⁷² As a result, the concept of being and essence and the judgment of existence are inseparable.⁷³

As McInerny has already recited in detail (without citing Maritain), Aquinas unequivocally rejects such highly unintuitive, existentialist readings of the word *ens*.⁷⁴ Against such views, Aquinas argues that if *ens* principally signified *esse*, then it would signify something to be (*aliquid esse*). But, says Aquinas, *ens* does not principally signify the composition imported by the word *est*; it only consignifies this composition inasmuch as it signifies a thing (*res*) having *esse*. Here, we may take Aquinas to mean something profound and metaphysical by *esse*, but a closer consideration will reveal that he is merely using *esse* in indirect speech to refer to the signification of the verb "is," the proper function of which, as we will see, is to consignify a predicate's composition with a subject. By denying that *ens* signifies *aliquid esse*, Aquinas is just denying that the word "being," said alone, actually unites *aliquid* (or *quod*) to any other concept via the verb "is." In other words, *ens* does not signify a judgment.

Aquinas's reason for agreeing with Aristotle's aphorism that *esse* and *est* signify nothing is similar to his reason concerning *ens*. We will quote Aquinas at length here because his argument is pregnant with detail.

⁷¹ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 21.

⁷² Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 19–20: "But this concept of existence, of *to-exist* (*esse*) is not and cannot be *cut off* from the absolutely primary concept of being (*ens*, that-which is, that-which exists, that whose act is to exist). This is so because the affirmation of existence, or the judgment, which provides the content of such a concept, is itself the 'composition' of a subject with existence, i.e., the affirmation that *something exists* (actually or possibly, simply or with such-and-such a predicate). It is the concept of being (that-which exists or is able to exist) which, in the order of ideative perception, corresponds adequately to this affirmation in the order of judgment."

⁷³ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 20–21. Cf. Maritain, *Preface*, 64–65.

⁷⁴ See *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5 (Leonine ed., 1*/1:30–31 [lns. 355–76]). See McInerny, *Being and Predication*, esp. 186.

No verb signifies a thing to be or not to be. This is proved through the verb “is,” which according to itself does not signify something to be, although it signifies to-be. And—because this “to be” itself seems [to be] a certain composition, and so this verb “is,” which signifies to-be, can seem to signify the composition in which is truth or falsehood—to exclude this, it is added that such composition, which the verb “is” signifies, cannot be understood without the components. Since the understanding of it [i.e., composition] depends on the extremes, if they are not put forth, understanding of the composition is not perfect such that in it could be truth or falsehood. For this reason, [Aristotle] says that this verb “is” consignifies composition because it does not principally signify this, but by implication [*ex consequenti*]. For it signifies that which first falls in the intellect by mode [*per modum*] of actuality absolutely. For “is” said simply signifies to be in act, and to this extent, it signifies by the mode of a verb [*per modum uerbi*]. Because the actuality, which the verb “is” principally signifies, is commonly the actuality of every form or act (whether substantial or accidental), it follows that, when we wish to signify that any form or act actually is in [*in esse*] any subject, we signify that by this verb “is”—simply according to present time or qualifiedly according to some other time. And for this reason, this verb “is” signifies composition by implication [*ex consequenti*].⁷⁵

McInerny’s interpretation of this passage is the most famous, and thus must

⁷⁵ *In I peryrmenias*, lec. 5: “Quod enim nullum uerbum significet rem esse uel non esse, probat per hoc uerbum ‘est,’ quod secundum se dictum non significat aliquid esse, licet significet esse. Et, quia hoc ipsum ‘esse uidetur compositio quedam, et ita hoc uerbum ‘est,’ quod significat esse, potest uideri significare compositionem in qua sit uerum uel falsum, ad hoc excludendum subdit quod ista compositio, quam significat hoc uerbum ‘est,’ non potest intelligi sine componentibus, quia dependet dicitur intellectus ex extremis, que si non apponantur, non est perfectus intellectus compositionis, ut possit in ea esse uerum uel falsum. Ideo autem dicit quod hoc uerbum ‘est’ consignificat compositionem, quia non principaliter earn significat, set ex consequenti: significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam ‘est’ simpliciter dictum significat esse actu, et ideo significat per modum uerbi. Quia uero actualitas, quam principaliter significat hoc uerbum ‘est,’ est communiter actualitas omnis forme uel actus, substantialis uel accidentalis, inde est quod, cum uolumus significare quamcunque formam uel actum actualiter inesse alicui subiecto, significamus illud per hoc uerbum ‘est,’ simpliciter quidem secundum presens tempus, secundum quid autem secundum alia tempora; et ideo ex consequenti hoc uerbum ‘est’ significat compositionem” (Leonine ed., 1*/1:31 [lns. 378–407]).

be presented first before attempting to offer corrections. McNerny seems to take this passage as showing that the verb “is” in existential propositions—that is, propositions of the form “Socrates is”—signifies the concept of existence in the first operation of the intellect. He writes:

In the case of the existential judgment, if existence were not first conceived, grasped as the term of the first operation of the mind as to what it is, no existential judgment would be possible. What is composed in the affirmative enunciation which signifies the existential judgment “Socrates is,” is precisely Socrates and existence.⁷⁶

A few important qualifications must be made. McNerny interprets “quod primo cadit in intellectu,” here referred to by Aquinas, as something under the aspect of existence—where “existence” is understood not as the act really composed with essence late in the science of metaphysics, but merely a nominal concept of existence equivalent to “presence to sense.”⁷⁷ Thus, we are given to understand that the proposition “Socrates is” means nothing else than that Socrates is present to my senses. When Aquinas

⁷⁶ McNerny, *Being and Predication*, 188. See also 189: “Against this [position of Gilson] we argued that existence can be conceived, that it can be the predicate and that the concept of being does not include a judgment. When it is recognized that existence is the predicate in such propositions as ‘Socrates is,’ difficulties still remain for the student of the texts of St. Thomas.”

⁷⁷ See McNerny, *Being and Predication*, 181–84 (esp. 184). For McNerny’s criticism of the view that the distinction between essence and existence at the start of metaphysics is a “real distinction,” involving anything more than a nominal concept of existence and essence, see 169–71. As McNerny interprets our first concept of existence as “presence to sense,” so Fr. Brian Davies similarly interprets existence (*esse*) as the capacity of a thing to receive a real rather than nominal definition (“The Action of God,” In *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny*, ed. John Cottingham and Peter Hacker [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 165–84, at 171–72). Unlike McNerny, Davies does not distinguish a first (logical) and subsequent (metaphysical) concept of existence. A common problem besets the views of both Davies and McNerny. They have in effect collapsed Aquinas’s *ratio entis* into his *ratio veritatis*. As is well known, Aquinas considers the relation from sensible to sense and the relation of known (or defined) to knower as a relation of reason, not a real relation (see *In V metaphys.*, lec. 17). It is just this relation of reason from thing to apprehensive power that constitutes the transcendental concept of truth (*De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, corp.; q. 21, a. 1, corp.). So, it is unclear how McNerny’s account of our first concept of being and Davies’s account of real being (rather than imaginary being) do not fall under Aquinas’s account of transcendental truth, which Aquinas says is logically posterior to the first concept of being.

says “is” principally signifies commonly the actuality of every form or act, McNerny glosses this as follows: “The actuality principally signified by this verb *is* or *exists* is generally the act of any form, whether it be substantial or accidental act.”⁷⁸ Thus, McNerny takes the “is” being described by Aquinas as equivalent to the verb “exists,” and he thinks that it signifies an “act” or “actuality” over and above form. Such an actuality, called “existence,” is what “is” principally signifies.

There are several problems with McNerny’s interpretation of this text. The first thing to note is that, if Aquinas’s account of “is” has any relevance for a hypothesized existential sense of that word, it certainly does not exclude the copulative sense of “is.” Indeed, Aquinas seems to have the copulative sense foremost in his mind. This is why he can reason from the fact, on the one hand, that “is” signifies the actuality of every form to, on the other hand, the conclusion that whenever we want to signify the inherence of any form in a subject, we do so through the verb “is.” Aquinas links these two propositions by the logical connector *inde*.

Another problem with McNerny’s interpretation is how he reads Aquinas’s statement that what “is” signifies is *esse*. This statement is ambiguous and can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, we could take it to mean that “is” relates to *esse* as the word “man” relates to human nature. According to this reading, the concept signified by “is” is a particular concept—the concept of existence (*esse*)—predicated of a subject either directly or denominatively. Thus, a judgment of the form “Socrates is” would function to conjoin what is understood by “Socrates” with existence itself, which is what is signified by “is.” This seems to be McNerny’s reading of this passage. But cautioning against such a reading is the fact that Aquinas has been using *esse* in indirect speech to refer to the judgment (or part of the judgment) *that something is*. Moreover, we know that “is,” here, includes the copulative sense of that word—regardless of whether or not it excludes any hypothesized existential sense. Thus, when Aquinas says that “is” signifies *esse*, he is not picking out some particular concept signified by “is.” Rather, he is saying that “is” does not signify the whole enunciation *aliquid esse aliquid* (or *aliquid esse*), but only whatever the *esse* part of that enunciation signifies.⁷⁹ We have yet to be told *what* particular concept is signified

⁷⁸ McNerny, *Being and Predication*, 187.

⁷⁹ This is also why Aquinas can jump from saying that “is” signifies *esse* to the theory that “is” signifies composition. After all, the role of *esse* in the judgment *aliquid esse* is nothing else but to relate *aliquid* to some unspecified predicate. We should add that it is hardly a stretch to see an implied predicate, such as *aliquid*, in Aquinas’s sentence “aliquid esse,” when Aquinas himself does much the same thing while

by “is” or “to be.” All we know from the assertion that “is” signifies *esse* is that “is” does not signify a whole enunciation.⁸⁰

A similar confusion could occur concerning Aquinas’s use of the words, “actuality” and “in act.” In the passage under discussion, Aquinas asserts that “is” principally signifies: (1) *quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute*; (2) *esse actu*; and (3) *communiter actualitas omnis forme uel actus, substancialis uel accidentalis*. These seem to be different formulations of the same contention. In each case, we must ask whether the notion of *actualitas* or *actu* enters into the very content of what is signified by “is” in an enunciation. Once again McInerny—who seems to answer this question affirmatively—must serve as a foil to our own interpretation. As we saw, McInerny says: “The actuality principally signified by this verb *is* or *exists* is generally the act of any form, whether it be substantial or accidental act.”⁸¹ Superficially, this seems to be a close paraphrase of what Aquinas himself said in the quotation under discussion. But McInerny, here, makes several important changes to what Aquinas has said. First, he adds the verb “exists” to “is” as if these are the same. This implies that, in this passage, Aquinas is not talking about “is” as the copula, but as the primary predicate of an existential proposition. We have already suggested why this assumption should be rejected. Second, whereas Aquinas said “is” signifies the actuality of every form or act, McInerny says that the actuality signified by “is” is itself the act of any form. This interpretive move implies

interpreting Aristotle in another place. *In I peryermenias*, lec. 5: “Non est autem intelligendum quod per hoc quod dixit: ‘quod est’ et ‘quod non est’ sit referendum ad solam existenciam uel non existentiam subiecti, set ad hoc quod res significata per predicatum insit uel non insit rei significate per subiectum; nam, cum dico: ‘Coruus est albus,’ significatur ‘quod non est esse,’ quamuis ipse coruus sit res existens” (“It should not be understood that, when he says ‘what is’ and ‘what is not,’ he is referring only to the existence or non-existence of the subject, but to the fact that the thing signified by the predicate ‘is in’ or ‘is not in’ the thing signified by the subject; for when I say, ‘the raven is white,’ this signifies ‘what-is-not to be’ although the raven itself is an existing thing”; Leonine ed., 1*/1:47 [Ins. 63–70]).

⁸⁰ If this passage has relevance not only for the copulative sense of “is” but also for “is” as a principal predicate, then our interpretation of how Aquinas uses *esse* excludes not only McInerny’s interpretation of *esse*, but Patrick Lee’s as well. For Lee, sentences with “is” as the principal predicate, use “is” as a second-order way of referring to a complete sentence, such as “Socrates is a man” (Lee, “Existential Propositions in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 52, no. 4 [1988]: 605–26, at 613–14). For Aquinas, however, as we have just seen, neither “is” nor *esse* signifies a complete sentence. This, as we just saw, is precisely the reason why Aquinas asserts “is” signifies “to be.”

⁸¹ McInerny, *Being and Predication*, 187.

that what is signified by “is” is some act over and above form. It also implies that, by the abstract word “actuality,” Aquinas intends us to understand some concrete act—presumably, the act of existence or presence to sense logically contrasted with essence earlier in McInerny’s essay. The alternative to McInerny’s interpretive suggestions here is that when Aquinas says “is” signifies the actuality of form or act, he is using the abstract word “actuality” quite precisely to signify not some concrete act, but rather that whereby the “form or act” being predicated of a subject has the character of an act. I think this latter reading is more plausible. Third, in (1), Aquinas says what the intellect signifies is *per modum actualitas*. In (3), however, he says that what it signifies is *actualitas*. It cannot be the case that both of these mutually exclusive formulations are equally proper. McInerny follows the second formulation. Thus, whereas Aquinas seems to take actuality not as itself what is signified, but as the determinate mode in which “is” signifies something besides actuality, McInerny implies that what “is” signifies is itself actuality. Again, McInerny presumably has in mind that “is” signifies the act (or actuality) of existence or presence to sense.

Several things serve to undercut this last aspect of McInerny’s reading. First, the fact that Aquinas even once says that what “is” signifies is *per modum actualitas*, as opposed to *actualitas* itself, makes it clear that *actualitas* does not enter into the content of what “is” signifies. The same conclusion can be reached from the fact that Aquinas, in (2), says that what “is” signifies is *esse actu*. The ablative form of *actu* here forces us to deny that actuality itself is what “is” principally signifies. Rather, “in act” determines the mode in which “is” signifies whatever it is that it signifies. This can be shown by an example. When we say, “Socrates is literate,” this can mean either that Socrates is actually literate or potentially so. What “is” signifies simply is literacy in Socrates *per modum actualitas*, not *per modum potentialitas*. If we switched “is” to past or future tense or added some modal qualifier, such as “possibly,” then “is” would no longer signify literacy *per modum actualitas*, but only *per modum potentialitas*.

In sum, this remarkable text from *In peryermenias* has historically been taken as a dividing line between so-called existential and Aristotelian Thomists. Existential Thomists assert that *esse* is apprehended first in judgment, not the first operation of the intellect. Against such a theory stands lecture 5 of *In peryermenias*, a text well-beloved by Father Régis and McInerny, in which Aquinas says in the clearest language that verbs signify concepts in the first operation of the intellect, and that “is” is a verb, and that “is” signifies *esse*. Apparently, this is proof positive that the existentialists are wrong. Our contention in this section has not been to show that the existentialists are correct, but only that McInerny’s school is also incor-

rect. It is incorrect inasmuch as it imagines Aquinas to be asserting that “is” signifies a particular concept of “actuality” or “existence” in the first operation. The truth of the matter is much less philosophically momentous. When Aquinas says “is” signifies *esse*, he merely intends to deny that it signifies the whole enunciation *aliquid esse*. What “is” signifies is nothing more than what the *esse* portion of *aliquid esse* signifies, whatever that unspecified signification is. Likewise, when Aquinas says “is” signifies *actualitas*, he does not mean that “is” signifies some act of form. Again, Aquinas has not told us the content of what “is” signifies. Rather, what he means is that, whatever it is that “is” signifies directly, “is” principally signifies this something *per modum actualitas*. Throughout this famous passage, Aquinas seems to have in mind the copula “is” and he seems to use the word “is” alone to stand for the whole predicate. Thus, what Aquinas presumably means by saying that “is” signifies *per modum actualitas* or *esse actu* is nothing else than that “is” (or “is white”) signifies the predicated form (e.g., “white,” “man”) as joined to the subject *per modum actualitas* unless some temporal or modal qualifier is added.

Conclusion

Thus far, then, we have shown first, against the existential Thomists—Maritain and Gilson—that *esse* is not, for Aquinas, the object of the second operation of the intellect. It cannot be said to be what that operation properly cognizes. Rather, what the second operation properly and principally cognizes seems to be whatever is signified in the first operation of the intellect by the predicate of an enunciation. In the enunciation “man is risible,” for instance, the second operation cognizes risibility principally. It differs from the first operation not by cognizing something new, but by cognizing something old in a new way. Now risibility is not cognized alone, but precisely as in a subject—namely, humanity. The traditional answer to existential Thomism, embodied in the writings of Father Régis and Ralph McInerny, has been to say that *esse* is cognized not in the second operation, but in the first. The implicit or unstated suggestion of Father Régis and McInerny in asserting this is that existence or *esse* (at least as nominally defined) falls within the proper object of the first operation of the intellect. While we do not dispute that the word “*esse*” must have some meaning in the first operation if it is to enter into sentences as a subject or predicate, we have merely argued that the text from Aquinas’s *In peryermenias* supposedly describing what this existential meaning is, does not in fact do so. The intent of that text is not to tell us that “is” signifies the concept of existence or actuality in the first operation of the intellect. Rather, the intent of that text is merely to say that, whatever the copula “is” signifies, it does not

signify a complete enunciation, but rather some concept connected to a subject *per modum actualitas* unless some qualification is added. Thus, although, in agreement with McInerney, it must be granted that the word “*esse*” as used for something contrasted with essence signifies *some* conception of the first operation; nevertheless, given that Aquinas says that the proper object of the intellect is *quidditas rei*, it is doubtful that the concept signified by *esse* falls within the proper object of the intellect and its first operation any more directly than the concepts signified by “blindness” and “genus” fall within that proper object.

Given our rather deflationary reading of *esse* in Aquinas’s *In peryermenias*, we may wonder whether the *esse* used there can have any connection with the *esse* contrasted with essence in Aquinas’s metaphysics. Against Maritain, Monsignor John Wippel famously distinguishes between an “act” sense of *esse* and a “fact” sense.⁸² Certainly, our reading of *esse* in *In peryermenias* would locate Aquinas’s usage there squarely within what Wippel calls the “fact” sense of *esse*, not the metaphysical “act” sense. Yet, the striking similarity between, on the one hand, *In peryermenias*, in which Aquinas says “is” signifies *esse* and the actuality of every form, and, on the other hand, Aquinas’s metaphysical treatments of *esse* elsewhere as the actuality of all acts, even of forms,⁸³ should make us wonder whether, in the thought of Aquinas, there is anything besides the “fact” sense of *esse* at all. This question—as well as a clarification of what precisely is meant by the “fact” sense of *esse*—must be left to future research. N.V.

⁸² John Wippel, “Maritain and Aquinas on Our Discovery of Being,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3 (2014): 415–43. For an excellent summary of the historical development of the act–fact distinction in the debate among Wippel, Owens, and Cornelio Fabro, see Kevin White, “Act and Fact: On a Disputed Question in Recent Thomistic Metaphysics,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 68, no. 2 (2014): 287–312. Concerning Wippel’s contribution to this debate, White focuses on “Truth in Thomas Aquinas, Part II,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 43, no. 3 (1990): 543–67, which expresses essentially the same doctrine as his “Maritain and Aquinas on Our Discovery of Being.”

⁸³ *ST* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

***De Natura*: The Church Fathers on Creation’s Fallenness**

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Introduction

“WHO GAVE THE MOSQUITO its stinger for sucking blood? How narrow is the tube by which it sucks! Who has arranged this? Who has made this?”¹ These modern-seeming questions were in fact those of Augustine’s fifth-century congregation. Augustine plied his usual rhetorical vigor to dismiss the “the problem of natural evil”—as we call it today—and yet his hearers’ doubts have persisted down to our own times. Indeed, pace Augustine, it would seem the problem of natural evil has become only more vexing to Christians in the post-Darwinian era. If the animal kingdom was made through a cruel, evolutionary process, and if the wrath of God fails to justify (at least in modern minds) the woes of—say—pandemics, then, should we not suppose that *lower creation is fallen*? But if it is, *how* did it happen? Or, if it is not, why does it so often *seem* fallen?²

Many conservative Christians today, when pressed on such questions, will suppose that lower creation was somehow soiled by the Fall of man. In addition to ostensibly reifying the literal sense of Genesis 3:17–19 (or Romans 8:19–22), this “negative” view of lower creation carries the advantage of a winsome theodicy. For, if all creation was vitiated by Adam’s sin,

¹ Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 148.8; “Quis dedit aculeum culici, quo sanguinem sugat? Quam tenuis fistula est qua sorbet! Quis disposuit ista? Quis fecit ista?” (translation mine).

² Here and throughout, “lower creation” refers to all the non-human occupants of the material universe, animate or otherwise: fish, trees, rocks, planets, etc. For our purposes it suffices to define an “unfallen lower creation” as a lower creation which was not directly affected by the fall of man. We assume throughout that, at minimum, man has fallen.

then God is not to be blamed for natural disasters, mass extinctions, or animal suffering—though presently “thorns infest the ground,” the whole world was originally free from pain and death.³ In pastoral settings of all denominations, this tends to be the “received view,” not usually requiring explication nor apology.

Attractive as this theodicy may be, however, it flies in the face of an evolutionary reckoning of natural history. According to modern biology, life on earth predated man’s existence by some four billion years. The fossil record, in addition to revealing that prehistoric creatures regularly died, also suggests that almost every species that ever existed is now extinct. Lest the Fall of man be pushed back into some preembodied epoch, animal death would not seem to be a consequence of the Fall at all. Indeed, some evolutionary theists would go further, holding that man’s Fall had *no* direct effects on nature. According to this “positive” view, both before the Fall and after, animals persisted in their natural behaviors: killing, dying, and gradually evolving.

Thus, only the former view offers a happy theodicy, and only the latter harmonizes with modern science. But what is the *Catholic* view? Although the fallen version is sometimes presumed in modern Catholic theology,⁴ the magisterium has never authoritatively addressed the question. Thus, and since the meaning of the Bible is often contested on this point, it becomes important to establish the opinions of the Church Fathers.⁵

Unfortunately, recent decades have seen the publication of only a few, partial surveys of patristic eco-theology with respect to the Fall,⁶ most of which have been all-too-obviously prejudiced, whether by creationist,⁷

³ Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World” (1719).

⁴ For example, in the well-balanced Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture series, Jesuit Dennis Hamm has this to say about Col 1:20: “As the whole created world shares in estrangement and disorder caused by human sin, so will it share in Christ’s redemption and be restored to its full beauty, harmony, and magnificence (see Rom 8:20–21)” (*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013], 179).

⁵ In a forthcoming work, however, I will examine the biblical theology of lower creation’s postlapsarian integrity.

⁶ For general studies of patristic views on nature (considered apart from the fall), see: David Sutherland Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1968); Chris Fritter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape: Toward a New Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 84–155; Robert M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁷ Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000). Rose argues that “the

evolutionary,⁸ or conservationist⁹ ideals. Admittedly, an incomplete and prejudiced survey is one of the few ways to make sense of the data: the Fathers had a surprising amount to say on this question, and their opinions, which varied considerably, are scattered haphazardly throughout their writings. To make matters worse, in the patristic age, the subject rarely received a sustained treatment, and even more rarely did the Fathers comment on each other's views. While I have attempted to set my own biases aside (let the reader be the judge), I can hardly boast, in light of such difficulties, to have produced an exhaustive study of the Fathers. Nevertheless, I do believe this essay constitutes the most comprehensive such study to date, and I do believe my conclusions, though not exceptionless, are adequately representative.

In the course of my analysis there emerged two predominant opinions, opinions it seemed right to title by their most influential exponents: Irenaeus and Augustine. Irenaeus took the negative stance (i.e., that Adam's Fall had certain immediate and negative effect upon lower creation), and Augustine the positive (i.e., that lower creation retained the fullness of its original goodness despite Adam's Fall). I have thus attempted to classify the position of every Christian writer up to the ninth century according to these two schools. Of course, many patristic voices who, in my estimation, were either insufficiently clear or entirely silent on the matter were omitted. The first part of the paper deals with the Irenaean view, canvassing its proponents chronologically. After similarly treating the Augustinian view, I present my conclusions.

Before setting out, however, two preliminary remarks are in order. First, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Jon Garvey and his book *God's Good Earth*. Following a chapter on biblical interpretation, Garvey surveys the Fathers, determining that Theophilus of Antioch held the negative view, with all of the following opposing him: Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and John of Damascus. Having added Anselm and Thomas Aquinas to the latter school, Garvey surmises that "for three quarters of the church's history the doctrine of a fallen creation

[Eastern] Holy Fathers believed that the whole creation fell with Adam" (409).

⁸ Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

⁹ Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Christina Nellist, "Saints and Sinners," in *Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Animal Suffering: Ancient Voices in Modern Theology* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2018).

was either unknown, or very much a minority view.”¹⁰ While his assessment is on the whole correct, the present paper will render a conclusion which is much more precise and founded on considerably more evidence.

Secondly, I ought to address the problem of terminology. Unfortunately, there are not yet any clear terms for the question I wish to study, so I am forced to invent my own, or repeat *ad nauseam* “the question of lower creation’s fallenness.” For the sake of variation, I will frequently take “integrity” or “original goodness” to be the inverse of “fallenness.” These two terms are, in fact, more precise, for, in this study, by “fallenness” I do not mean to suggest that lower creation is necessarily (or even could be) *complicit* in its Fall, but only that it *has* (or could have) fallen from some better condition. Similarly, I will refer to the positive/Augustinian and negative/Irenaean views of lower creation as the “unvitiating” and “vitiating” views, respectively.

The Irenaean View: Vitiating Lower Creation

In this part we shall explore those Church Fathers who most likely held the vitiating view of lower creation. These Fathers taught that, up until the Fall of Adam, lower creation had been irenic and deathless, and hence creation as it appears now is drastically different from its original design. Only a few proponents of the vitiating view held creation to be vitiating *morally* at the Fall (e.g., rarely was creation held responsible, or considered to be in a state of revolt), but they all agreed that creation was directly cursed. As noted above, Irenaeus’s treatment of the subject, though cursory, was probably the most influential.

Ante-Nicene Fathers

Irenaeus was not himself the progenitor of the vitiating view, for it appears occasionally in ancient nonbiblical Jewish literature, including two Jewish apocalypses.¹¹ The first apocalypse endorsing the vitiating view is the *Reve-*

¹⁰ Jon Garvey, *God’s Good Earth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 71.

¹¹ The case has been made that *4 Ezra* 7:11 and *2 Baruch* 56:6 imply that lower creation was affected by man’s fall (see, e.g., Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8:19–22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* [London: T&T Clark, 2006], 113–14, 129–32; Jonathan Moo, “Romans 8:19–22 and Isaiah’s Cosmic Covenant,” *New Testament Studies* 54 [2008]: 74–89, at 78–79). In my reading of the text, these passages only have in mind the inauguration of human suffering, and do not say anything certain about a change to lower creation itself. It should also be noted that other Jewish apocalypses sometimes support the unvitiating view. For details, see Hahne, *Corruption and Redemption*, 153–59.

lation of Moses (ca. first century AD), where, in an important passage, the nature of animals is said to have changed as a consequence of the Fall.

Seth and Eve went into the regions of paradise. And as they were going along, Eve saw her son, and a wild beast fighting with him. . . . Eve cried out to the wild beast, saying, "O you evil wild beast, will you not be afraid to fight with the image of God? How has your mouth been opened? How have your teeth been strengthened? How have you not been mindful of your subjection, that you were formerly subject to the image of God?" Then the wild beast cried out, saying, "O Eve, not against us your upbraiding nor your weeping, but against yourself, *since the beginning of the wild beasts was from you*. How was your mouth opened to eat of the tree about which God had commanded you not to eat of it? *For this reason also our nature has been changed.*"¹²

The second Jewish apocalypse clearly favoring the vitiated view is the *Book of Jubilees*. According to its second-century-BC author, the Fall caused the luminaries to lose their refulgence and the animals to lose their speaking ability.¹³ Man's antediluvian wickedness had such power over nature that, during the era of the Nephilim (Gen 6:4), "lawlessness increased on the earth and all flesh corrupted its way, alike men and cattle and beasts and birds and everything that walk on the earth . . . began to devour each other."¹⁴ How the beasts had survived before devouring each other is unclear. Outside of the apocalyptic genre, ancient Jewish witnesses to the vitiated view survive in a few passages from the *Genesis Rabbah*. On account of the Fall the luminaries were darkened,¹⁵ the trees became less fruitful,¹⁶

¹² *Revelation of Moses* 10.1–11.2; trans. found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), which will henceforth be given as *ANF*. The first and second series of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* from the same publication set of volumes will likewise be given simply as *NPNF* (meaning simply whichever volume of the two series contains the work cited). *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948–) will be cited as *FC*, and *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1946–) will be cited as *ACW*. Translators and editors are understood to be those stated in those collections.

¹³ *Book of Jubilees* 1: 29, 3:28.

¹⁴ *Book of Jubilees* 5:2 (trans. R. H. Charles [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902], 43).

¹⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* 11:2.

¹⁶ *Genesis Rabbah* 12:6.

and the curse on the ground produced “gnats, midges, and fleas.”¹⁷

Irenaeus was also not the *Christian* progenitor of the vitiated view, which can be described in works as early as the *Epistle of Barnabas*.¹⁸ But Theophilus of Antioch († ca. 184), in addition to being the earliest Church Father to set forth a theology of lower creation, was the first to expressly develop the negative position. His outlook, which was advanced in a single chapter of his only extant treatise *To Autolytus*, seems to be the *most* negative stance toward nature that can be found within the patristic corpus. Theophilus not only held that creation was cursed, but also deserving of its curse:

The animals are named wild beasts, from their being hunted, not as if they had been made evil or venomous from the first—for nothing was made evil by God, but all things good, yea, very good—but *the sin in which man was concerned brought evil upon them. For when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him.* For as, if the master of the house himself acts rightly, the domestics also of necessity conduct themselves well; but if the master sins, the servants also sin with him; so in like manner it came to pass, that in the case of man’s sin, he being master, all that was subject to him sinned with him.¹⁹

Just as later theologians would explain the propagation of original sin by seeing the whole human race in Adam “as one body of one man,”²⁰ so Theophilus saw Adam’s guilt imputed to the whole animal kingdom. Nevertheless, the animals—or at least “the fish and the fowls”—are personally guilty, for while some “abide in their natural state, and do no harm to those weaker than themselves, but keep the law of God, and eat of the seeds of the earth,” yet others “transgress the law of God, and eat flesh, and injure those weaker than themselves.”²¹ For Theophilus, then, carnivorous

¹⁷ *Genesis Rabbah* 20:8 (*Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. H. Freedman, Midrash Rabbah [London: Soncino Press, 1939], 167).

¹⁸ The author calls predatory birds “nothing more than pests in their wickedness”; he describes certain sea creatures as “cursed . . . in the mud beneath the depths”; and he claims that Moses “also hated the weasel, and with good reason . . . for this animal conceives through its mouth” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 10; cited in *The Apostolic Fathers in English*; ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006], 188).

¹⁹ Theophilus of Antioch, *Autolytus* 2.17 (*ANF*; emphasis added).

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §404, quoting Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 4, a. 1.

²¹ Theophilus of Antioch, *Autolytus* 2.16.

was clearly a consequence of the Fall. Nevertheless, when “man again shall have made his way back to his natural condition, and no longer does evil, [the wild animals] also shall be restored to their original gentleness.”²² Indeed, since Theophilus believed that the eschatological Paradise would be a *return* to Adam’s Paradise, Eden must have been devoid of animal pain and death.

Irenaeus of Lyons († ca. 202), like Theophilus, envisioned a strong parallelism between Eden and Heaven. While on at least one occasion Irenaeus recognized the beauty of creation,²³ the Eden–Heaven equivalence ultimately demands the fallen view. In his *Against Heresies* he writes: “When the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth.”²⁴ Although most (or all) animals still obey God, they no longer obey man.²⁵ And yet, for Irenaeus, their disobedience did not merely change animals’ relation to humanity; it also changed the natures of animals themselves, if indeed vegetarians became carnivores. Obviously this requires one to maintain a rather fantastic vision of Eden,²⁶ which Irenaeus calls “better than this earth.”²⁷ Unlike Theophilus, however, Irenaeus proposed that the earth was cursed, not because of man, but *instead* of man. Commenting on Genesis 3:17–18, he writes:

²² Theophilus of Antioch, *Autolytus* 2.17.

²³ The animals are “all adorned with beauty” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.30.3 [ANF]). More frequently, however, Irenaeus expresses contempt for animals. Consider, for example, *Demonstration* 61, where Irenaeus compares fallen man to the present, discordant state of the animal kingdom, bearing “the likeness of wolves and lions, ravaging the weaker and waging war on their kind, [or the likeness of] leopards and vipers, who used deadly poison to kill perhaps even loved ones because of desire” (cited in Matthew C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* [Koninklijke, Netherlands: Brill, 2008], 95).

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33.4.

²⁵ Most (or all?) animals “persevered, and do still persevere, in [willing] subjection to Him who formed them” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.7).

²⁶ He writes, for example: “In like manner [the Lord declared] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear should have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour; and that all other fruit-bearing trees, and seeds and grass, would produce in similar proportions; and that all animals feeding [only] on the productions of the earth, should [in those days] become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man” (*Against Heresies* 5.33.3). While he speaks here of heaven, one may apply it to Eden in light of *Against Heresies* 5.32.1.

²⁷ Irenaeus, *Demonstration* 61, cited in Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 139.

Immediately after Adam had transgressed, as the Scripture relates, [God] pronounced no curse against Adam personally, but against the ground, in reference to his works, as a certain person among the ancients has observed: “God did indeed transfer the curse to the earth, that it might not remain in man.”²⁸

Man does not go entirely unpunished, as Irenaeus goes on to explain, but the “curse in all its fullness” was redirected toward the serpent, so that humanity might be salvaged.²⁹ In fact, according to Irenaeus’s theodicy, the curse upon the earth was not a pointless display of wrath; rather, God allowed for evil’s existence in order that man might be “disciplined beforehand for incorruption and prepared for salvation.”³⁰ Adam sinned because he was spiritually immature;³¹ now the cursed earth was to render remedial education. Accordingly, Irenaeus interprets creation’s “bondage to corruption” (Rom 8:19–22) as applying to the whole created order.³² In sum, if “the creation itself” will one day be “restored to its primeval condition,”³³ as Irenaeus supposed, then creation’s present condition must not only be worse than what it will someday become, but also worse than what it originally was.

Origen († ca. 253) also had a relatively low view of lower creation, although he did not (to my knowledge) expressly ascribe carnivorousness to the Fall. Origen’s interpretations of Genesis 1–3 were generally allegorical, and he attributed evil to two preterrestrial events: the fall of the angels and the negligence of rational minds.³⁴ This twofold origin of evil gradually led to the embodiment of human souls, and thus, for Origen, corporeality was part and parcel of man’s curse.³⁵ Nevertheless, in his apologetic *Against*

²⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.23.3.

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.23.3.

³⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.35.2.

³¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1. Adam and Eve’s spiritual infantilism also has implications for moral theodicy in an evolutionary setting. See John Schneider, “The Fall of ‘Augustinian Adam’: Original Fragility and Supralapsarian Purpose,” *Zygon* 47, no. 4 (2012): 949–69.

³² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.32.1.

³³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.32.1.

³⁴ See Mark S. M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61–66.

³⁵ “All rational creatures who are incorporeal and invisible, if they become negligent, gradually sink to a lower level and take to themselves bodies suitable to the regions into which they descend” (Origen, *On the First Principles* 1.4.1, quoted in Scott, *Journey Back to God*, 64). Consider also Origen’s exegesis of Rom 8:22: “The whole of creation . . . groans along with [mankind], and patiently suffers with them,

Celsus, Origen interpreted Genesis 3:17–18 quite literally, suggesting that the earth was condemned *on top of* the curse of corporeality:

However good it may be, [Judea] still forms part of the earth, which was originally cursed for the transgression of Adam. For these words, “Cursed shall the ground be for what you have done; with grief, that is, with labor, shall you eat of the fruit of it all the days of your life,” were spoken of the whole earth, the fruit of which every man who died in Adam eats with sorrow or labor all the days of his life. *And as all the earth has been cursed, it brings forth thorns and briars all the days of the life of those who in Adam were driven out of paradise. . . .* If, then, the whole earth has been cursed in the deeds of Adam and of those who died in him, it is plain that all parts of the earth share in the curse, and among others the land of Judea.³⁶

For Origen, “however good” the earth might seem at present, it was to some extent vitiated by the Fall of man. In his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Origen followed Theophilus, speculating that the earth itself was culpable,³⁷ and, as such, “on the day of judgment not only man but also all creation will be judged.”³⁸ Origen, however, seemed unwilling to specify creation’s faults, and he typically held that all animals have some good purpose: each species

hoping for the fulfilment of the promises. . . . For I think that the sun might say [like Paul], ‘I would desire to be dissolved,’ or ‘to return and be with Christ, which is far better.’ Paul indeed adds, ‘Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you;’ while the sun may say, ‘To abide in this bright and heavenly body is more necessary, on account of the manifestation of the sons of God.’ The same views are to be believed and expressed regarding the moon and stars” (*On the First Principles* 1.7.5 [ANF]). Cf. Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 7.4, and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 47, a. 2. The view that sees embodiment as a curse or “fall” was not Origen’s own invention; it was taught, for example, by Numenius the Pythagorean, as well as by Plotinus (Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 [New York: Image, 1985], 448, 468).

³⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.28–29 (ANF; emphasis added). Cf. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.3 (FC): only Christ can remove “the curse which the Lord had placed on the earth.”

³⁷ See Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4.1, especially 4.1.7 (ACW), where Origen suggested that the earth “is capable, I say, as a living being, in accordance with the characteristic of its portions, of both good and evil actions for which it earns either praise or punishment. . . . Why is the heaven passing away, why is the earth passing away, unless they committed certain acts that made them worthy of passing away? And in another passage it says: ‘The whole earth is corrupt.’ [Gen 6:11] When did it become corrupt? Before the flood.”

³⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4.1.5.

is either man's servant or his teacher,³⁹ for God "created all things for the sake of rational beings."⁴⁰ In at least one place, Origen even blamed demons for natural disasters.⁴¹ Nevertheless, in Origen's mind, the unseemly "diversity" of the once-uniform cosmos derives "its origin not from the will or judgment of the Creator, but from the freedom of the individual will,"⁴² and, notwithstanding demonic activity, the earth is not to be excupated, for it is "scourged by God for its sins."⁴³

Other early Fathers might also be associated with the fallen view. According to certain modern authors, Clement of Alexandria († ca. 215) believed the Fall to have had deleterious effects on lower creation, but in my estimation there seems to be insufficient direct evidence.⁴⁴ At best, one could *presume* that Clement took the Irenaean view, either on the basis of his predilection for Gnosticism, or because his own stance was reflected by Origen. The evidence is also scant for Tertullian († ca. 240), whose interpretation of Genesis 3:18 hardly went beyond the text.⁴⁵ Likewise for Cyprian († 258), although he was certainly aware of cruelty in the natural

³⁹ See, for example, Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.78 and 4.81.

⁴⁰ Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.81. Elsewhere, however, Origen was at a loss to justify "the creation of scorpions or other venomous beasts" (Origen, *Philokalia* 2; cited in Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View of Nature*, 114).

⁴¹ "And if we might speak boldly, we would say that if demons have any share at all in these things, to them belong famine, blasting of the vine and fruit trees, pestilence among men and beasts: all these are the proper occupations of demons" (Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.31). Cf. Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 10.6.

⁴² Origen, *On the First Principles* 2.9.6.

⁴³ Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4.3.

⁴⁴ For example, William E. G. Floyd sees Clement as believing that, "on the cosmic level, the original harmony was dissolved [by the fall]" (*Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* [London: Oxford University Press, 1971], 53). Peter Karavites, writes that "war, many diseases, famine, and similar disasters Clement perceives as man-induced" (*Evil, Freedom, and the Road to Perfection in Clement of Alexandria* [Koninklijke, Netherlands: Brill, 1998], 85). In both cases, however, the claims are made without suitable justification from Clement's own writing. Floyd relies heavily on Clement's *Stromata* 6, which, although mentioning natural disasters, fails to associate those disasters with the fall, and Garvey too cites *Stromata* 6.16, which presents insufficient evidence (*God's Good Earth*, 75).

⁴⁵ See Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.11 (ANF): "[After Adam's sin,] immediately spring up briars and thorns, where once had grown grass, and herbs, and fruitful trees." For Tertullian, even the microscopic organs of ants and gnats are a testament to God's wisdom: "If, however, you suppose that God's wisdom has no capacity for forming such infinitesimal corpuscles, you can still recognize His greatness, in that He has furnished even to the smallest animals the functions of life" (*Treatise on the Soul* 10 [ANF]).

order.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, these early Fathers had a relative disinterest in this subject, and thus we are prevented from assessing their views with greater confidence.

Post-Nicene Fathers

Ephrem the Syrian († 373), the great Eastern hymnographer, was an important of the Irenaeus view in the fourth century. Though Ephrem never systemically catalogued the effects of the Fall on lower creation, he was clear that lower creation had been literally cursed.⁴⁷ At minimum, the earth's cursing made thorns and thistles appear,⁴⁸ inaugurated animal predation,⁴⁹ and caused the wild beasts to rebel from beneath man's rule.⁵⁰ With respect to Irenaeus, however, Ephrem's protology included two significant developments. First, although Ephrem shared Irenaeus's belief that the earth had been cursed for the sake of man, Ephrem was quick to add that the earth's cursing did not entail the earth's suffering:

Although the earth, which had committed no folly, was struck on account of Adam, [God] still made Adam, who could suffer, suffer by the curse of [the earth], *which could not suffer*. For it was in that earth, which received the curse, that he, who did not receive the curse, was, in fact, cursed.⁵¹

In other words, in Ephrem's reckoning, since the earth could not sin, it could not suffer. Secondly, Ephrem's prelapsarian cosmology suggests that

⁴⁶ See Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church* 9 (*ANF*): "What does the fierceness of wolves do in the Christian breast? What the savageness of dogs, and the deadly venom of serpents, and the sanguinary cruelty of wild beasts? However, when Cyprian addressed Gen 3:17–19 directly, he hardly went beyond the text itself (*On the Unity of the Church* 9.11).

⁴⁷ See Ephrem, Hymn 9, no. 1: "At our resurrection, both earth and heaven will God renew / liberating all creatures, granting them paschal joy, along with us. / Upon our mother Earth, along with us, did he lay disgrace / when he placed on her, with the sinner, the curse; / so, together with the just, he will bless her too" (trans. Sebastian Brock in *Hymns on Paradise* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990], 136; quoted in Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation*, 38). See also Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 1, and Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 11.10–13. At the same time, Ephrem did not regard lower creation to be entirely depraved; see, for example, his esteem for creation in *Letter to Publius* 6.

⁴⁸ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.31.2 (*FC*).

⁴⁹ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.9.3.

⁵⁰ Ephrem, *Letter to Publius* 17 (cf. *Commentary on Genesis* 2.29.2).

⁵¹ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.31.1 (emphasis added).

the earth (as distinct from the Garden of Eden) was designed in anticipation of man's Fall, *even before the earth was cursed*.⁵² For example, in order to prepare for Adam's expulsion, God had planted corn external to Eden,⁵³ and had placed cattle "along the border of Paradise."⁵⁴ Ephrem may have even held that prelapsarian animals were mortal prior to earth's cursing.⁵⁵ For, in Ephrem's estimation, the dying of animals was not a punishment, but a postlapsarian consolation: namely that, by animal flesh, "Adam and Eve might nourish their own persons, and that with the skins they might cover their nakedness, and also so that by the death [of animals] Adam and Eve might see the death of their own bodies."⁵⁶ Thus, in Ephrem's worldview, when Adam and Eve stepped out of Paradise, they stepped onto an earth which was already primed for death and decay,⁵⁷ irrespective of earth's cursing. As we shall see, these two ideas, in the hands of other writers, would become lynchpins for the positive view of lower creation.

Like Ephrem, John Chrysostom († 407) adopted the Irenaean view in an attenuated form, or rather, he adopted a kind of centrist position. Nevertheless, I shall treat him in this section because of the emphasis he puts on the earth's cursing. According to Chrysostom, God "made the earth also to share in the curse" which was applied to the serpent.⁵⁸ In fact, for Chrysostom, the earth was directly cursed a second time, because of Abel's murder: God rebuked "the earth with the murderer, turning His wrath off to it, and saying, 'Cursed be the earth.'"⁵⁹ As with Irenaeus, the curse on the earth was considered a mercy toward man,⁶⁰ and its ultimate

⁵² See Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation*, 87.

⁵³ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.22.2.

⁵⁴ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.27.1.

⁵⁵ Since Ephrem held that man's mortality or immortality was to be a consequence of his decisions (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.17.3), it seems unlikely that he would have believed animals to have been created immortal. Nevertheless, Ephrem did not expressly admit to animal death before the fall, and he seemed unwilling to comment on the issue directly. He did, at minimum, allow the possibility of prelapsarian animal procreation (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.4). Cf. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 13.5.

⁵⁶ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.33.

⁵⁷ See Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 13.5.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 23.10 (NPNF). See also John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 19.11 (FC). Elsewhere, in a patristically rare discussion of Gen 5:28–29, he describes the curse as causing "the condition of distress and difficulty affecting the earth" (*Homilies on Genesis* 21.17).

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 23.10.

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 19.11.

purpose was to discipline man (by making nature uncooperative).⁶¹ Unlike Irenaeus, however, Chrysostom limited the scope of the curse to the soil: although thorns sprouted forth,⁶² the animals were sent to *alleviate* man's punishment.⁶³ This allowed Chrysostom to maintain a strong sense of creation's goodness.⁶⁴ He writes: "Through the creation the wise and the ignorant, the Scythians and the barbarians, are able to climb up to God, learning of God through the beauty of visible things."⁶⁵ The golden-mouthed archbishop extolled the glory of God in animals, plants, and "other things," even when the creature's utility escaped comprehension.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Chrysostom granted that wild beasts were no less dreadful before the Fall than after, although they were once subservient to Adam.⁶⁷ In his exegesis of Romans 8:22, he denies that lower creation groans on account of its present condition.⁶⁸ And for Chrysostom, natural disasters were not the works of Satan, but of God, and in fact were the "greatest form of his providence."⁶⁹ Thus, although Chrysostom consistently held that the earth was literally and directly cursed by God, he retained a remarkably exalted view of nature.

⁶¹ See John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 17.39: "The curse on [the soil] impairs in turn the human being's relaxation and tranquility." Later, speaking as God: "I curse the ground so that it will not in future yield its harvest as before without tilling and ploughing; instead, I invest you with great labor, toil and difficulty, and with unremitting pain and despair . . . so that under pressure from these you may have continual guidance in keeping to limits and recognizing your own make-up" (17.41). See also John Chrysostom, *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* 8.2.5.

⁶² John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving* 5.2.3.

⁶³ See John Chrysostom, *Sermons on Genesis* 3: God "lightened the weight and the burden of the sweat with the great number of animals that take part with us in this toil" (quoted in Hanneke Reuling, *After Eden: Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16–21* [Leiden: Brill, 2006]), 130). Cf. *Homilies on Genesis* 22.17.

⁶⁴ See Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 5.14: "If created things are of such a kind that they overwhelm human beings, and no one could adequately praise them, what could anyone say about the Creator himself?" (see also 4.12).

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 3.19 (here as found in *Romans: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, ed. J. Patout Burns Jr. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012], 29).

⁶⁶ See John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statutes* 12.7 (NPNF): "Although you see many of the animals, and of the herbs, and plants, and other things, of which you know not the use, admire the variety of these; and feel astonishment for this reason at the perfect workmanship of God." See also John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 7.13–15.

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 14.19–21, 16.4.

⁶⁸ See John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statutes* 5.5: "And [Paul] spoke thus, not as condemning the things present, but longing for the things to come."

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Devil* 1.4 (NPNF).

The challenge for Chrysostom was, of course, to explain in what sense the practically unvitiated creation was literally cursed. His solution was to borrow from the eschatology of Methodius of Olympus († ca. 311):

The creation, then, after being restored to a better and more seemly state, remains, rejoicing and exulting over the children of God at the resurrection; . . . when we have risen and shaken off the mortality of the flesh, . . . *it also shall be freed from corruption and be subject no longer to vanity*. . . . Its earlier form is lost in the change of all things to a state of greater splendor. . . . For in reality God did not establish the universe in vain, or to no purpose but destruction, as those weak-minded men say, but to exist, and be inhabited, and continue.⁷⁰

What was the effect of creation's curse, according to Methodius? Corruptibility. Impermanence. Creation groans, not because it is defective, but because it is deficient—because it will one day attain to an existence of even greater splendor. And “if the creation [groans], much more ought you,” added Chrysostom, “not as finding fault with the present system, but through a desire of those *greater things*.”⁷¹ Just as the Christian waits for his final adoption, so does creation await the coming Kingdom, according to Chrysostom.⁷²

Nevertheless, was not creation wronged, for having been made corruptible? And if God caused creation to become corruptible, is not God to be faulted? Chrysostom answers in the negative, following the reasoning of Ephrem the Syrian: even if creation was once incorruptible and had its incorruptibility taken away, creation *qua* creation cannot be wronged.⁷³

⁷⁰ Methodius of Olympus, *Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.8–9 (*ANF*; emphasis added).

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.8.22–23 (*NPNF*; emphasis added). The passage is worth quoting more completely: “For if the creation [groans], much more ought thou to do so, honored with reason as you are. . . . And if the creation, devoid as it is of mind and reason, and though in ignorance of these things, yet groans, much more should we. Next, that he may give the heretics no handle, or seem to be disparaging our present world, we groan, he says, not as finding fault with the present system, but through a desire of those *greater things*.”

⁷² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.21.

⁷³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.20. In the succeeding paragraph (14.21), Chrysostom explains the mechanism by which corruptibility and incorruptibility are conferred upon creation: “For ‘it shall be freed,’ [Paul] says, ‘from the bondage of corruption,’ that is, it shall no longer be corruptible, but shall go along with the beauty given to your body; just as when this became corruptible,

Having handled this objection, Chrysostom rounds out his theology of creation, which we find magnificently captured in his exegesis of Romans 8:19–20:

What is the meaning of, “the creation was made subject to vanity?” Why *that it became corruptible*. For what cause, and on what account? On account of you, O man. For since you have taken a body mortal and liable to suffering, the earth too has received a curse, and brought forth thorns and thistles. . . . Now you see in what sense the creation is “in bondage to vanity,” and how it is to be freed from the ruined state. . . . They are [to be] changed into an incorruptible state, and so therefore will the creature be. . . . At present, however, [Paul] speaks about the bondage itself, and shows for what reason it became such, and gives ourselves as the cause of it. What then? Was it harshly treated on another’s account? By no means, for *it was on my account that it was made*. What wrong then is done it, which was made for my sake, when it suffers these things for my correction? Or, indeed, one has no need to moot the question of right and wrong at all in the case of things void of soul and feeling. . . . [Evil entered] for your sake, and [creation] became corruptible; yet it has had no wrong done it. *For incorruptible will it be for your sake again.*⁷⁴

This is likely Chrysostom’s most developed articulation of creation’s moral status, suggesting how lower creation might be simultaneously accursed and yet unharmed. Chrysostom seems to have been the only Church Father to unequivocally interpret Genesis 3:17 as the conferring of impermanence (although Methodius is a possible exception⁷⁵). Origen had seen

that became corruptible also; so now it is made incorruptible, that also shall follow it too. . . . For as a nurse who is bringing up a king’s child, when he has come to his Father’s power, does herself enjoy the good things along with him, thus also is the creation . . . In all respects man takes the lead, and that it is for his sake that all things are made.”

⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.19–20 (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Beyond the association of cursing with corruptibility, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Methodius would have shared Chrysostom’s protology. At minimum, it should be noted that Methodius had a generally high view of lower creation. In his dialogue *Concerning Free Will (ANF)*, one of the parties says, “I began to praise the Creator, as I saw the earth fast fixed, and living creatures in such variety, and the blossoms of plants with their many hues.” See also Methodius, *Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.1–2.

the bestowal of materiality as an evil, but an evil which antedated the Fall. And while Ephrem's protology did not exclude the possibility that the earth's cursing conferred animal impermanence, Chrysostom alone interpreted the curse in such a way as to keep creation's original goodness mostly intact.⁷⁶

As the following section will make clear, the Irenaean view had lost its currency by the height of the patristic era. Nevertheless, the vestiges of Irenaeus's theology can be detected in writers as late as Jerome († 420). According to Jerome, we live on an earth "over which hangs a curse *which brings forth for us thistles and thorns.*"⁷⁷ Like Origen, Jerome restricted the goodness of creation either to its utility for man (whether alimentary or medicinal⁷⁸) or to its moralizing value (whether by positive or negative example⁷⁹). Though the Psalms frequently praise God for the works of creation, Jerome's extant homilies on the Psalms seem to eschew honoring creation except in connection to man.⁸⁰ In one homily, Jerome argued that

⁷⁶ Ambrose and Augustine identified creation's "futility" (Rom 8:20) with its impermanence, but associated this impermanence with the curse of Genesis 3, as we shall see.

⁷⁷ Jerome, Homily 16 (*FC*; emphasis added). Jerome uses a very similar expression in his *Commentary on Matthew 5.4*. Compare, however, his homily 17 (*FC*): "Even though [the land] has brought forth thistles and thorns, it is, nevertheless, Your creature and for that reason has been restored." Only what was once cursed is in need of restoration. (All citations from Jerome's homilies will be from *FC*).

⁷⁸ See Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 2.6 (*NPNF*): "And as the ox was created for ploughing, the horse for riding, dogs for watching, goats for milk, sheep for their wool: so it was with swine and stags, and roes and hares, and other animals: but the immediate purpose of their creation was not that they might serve for food, but for other uses of men. For if everything that moves and lives was made for food, and prepared for the stomach, let my opponents tell me why elephants, lions, leopards, and wolves were created; why vipers, scorpions, bugs, lice, and fleas; why the vulture, the eagle, the crow, the hawk; why whales, dolphins, seals, and small snails were created. Which of us ever eats the flesh of a lion, a viper, a vulture, a stork, a kite, or the worms that crawl upon our shores? As then these have their proper uses, so may we say that other beasts, fishes, birds, were created not for eating, but for medicine."

⁷⁹ For example, Jerome takes the poise of the deer as a symbol for saintliness (Homily 51), and he uses the macabre conduct of the hyena to illustrate the wickedness of Jesus's opponents (Homily 83).

⁸⁰ The following passage from Jerome's Homily 21 is typical: "All creatures serve God as He ordains. Heaven obeys, and earth obeys, and I, unhappy man, do not obey. . . I look at a tree and I reflect upon the bark that clothes it like a garment; I notice how the tree is ready to burst into flower just like a bud. . . . I meditate on how gradually, day by day, in every season, *nature works for me and becomes my food*" (emphasis added). Cf. Homily 58: "Blush with shame, O man, creeping things and

animals' *raison d'être* was the service of mankind: "God made them to serve you; He made you to serve Him."⁸¹ Since creation was a useful model for obedience, yet it apparently lacked intrinsic goodness, Jerome could be rather harsh in his descriptions of nature.⁸² He was not afraid to castigate celestial bodies, let alone thorns,⁸³ and the raven fared particularly poorly in Jerome's rhetoric: "I think," he said, that "the black ravens that always prey upon the carcasses of the dead, that always stir up quarrels with their raucous voice, are demons."⁸⁴ Though Jerome usually held that "all creatures keep their order," he occasionally countenanced that lower creation could sin.⁸⁵ Finally, in his translation of Genesis 3:17, Jerome opted to use *terra* ("earth") to translate the Hebrew *ādāmāh* ("ground"), though he was aware that Aquila of Sinope had used the more limited term *humus* ("soil").⁸⁶ Nevertheless, it would be too hasty, on this basis, to associate Jerome with the vitiated view in the full, Irenaean sense. Indeed, in his commentary on Isaiah 11:6–9, Jerome condemns those who believe that, in the new age, "all beasts will become gentle and the wolf will put aside its *original* ferocity and feed together with the lamb."⁸⁷ The term "original" is

depths, snow, rain, and storms obey the word of God, and you do not."

⁸¹ Jerome, Homily 58.

⁸² Even in his commentary on the Canticle of Daniel (Dan 3:57–88), which would have afforded Jerome many opportunities to endorse creation's goodness, he went no further than restating his unadorned eco-theology: "Inasmuch as the Creator is logically apprehended on the basis of His creatures . . . the grandeur of God is made manifest" (*Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009], 43).

⁸³ Jerome, Letter 125, no. 7 (*FC*; all further citations of Jerome's letters will be from *FC*).

⁸⁴ Jerome, Homily 56.

⁸⁵ See Jerome, Homily 58: "All creatures keep their order, except man alone to whom all are subject." Earlier in the same homily, he wrote: "Do not despair, O You who were a sea monster, you who were full of darkness, and did not dare to praise God; repent of your sins and be converted to God." In connection to animal culpability, it should be noted that Jerome, loathe to render undeserved praise, claimed Theophilus's *To Autolytus* to be "well fitted for the edification of the Church" (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 25; cited in Rick Rogers, "Theophilus of Antioch," in *Early Christian Thinkers*, ed. Paul Foster [London: SPCK, 2010], 53). On the other hand, Jerome also praised Basil's *Hexameron* (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 116), a work which supports the Augustinian view, as we shall see.

⁸⁶ Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on the Book of Genesis* 3.17. For speculation on the consequences of Jerome's decision, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 84–96. See also Reuling, *After Eden*, 38.

⁸⁷ Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 4.14 (*ACW*; emphasis added).

very significant here—suggesting, as it does, prelapsarian predation—but the main reason Jerome opposes their literalism is as follows:

If they respond that these things will happen in view of the blessedness of the times, so that men may enjoy all good things without harm coming to anyone, let them hear from us *that nothing is good except virtue and nothing is evil except vice*. . . . Even among worldly philosophers, wealth, the health of the body, the abundance of all things, and the things opposite to these, such as poverty, infirmity, and scarcity, are reckoned neither as “good” nor as “evil,” but they are called “indifferent matters.” And this is why the Stoics, who agree with our teaching in many particulars, call nothing good except moral uprightness and virtue. They call nothing evil but baseness.⁸⁸

In other words, on the question of lower creation’s integrity, Jerome is a Stoic. Lower creation has little value in his eyes, but unlike Irenaeus, whose view was derived from the Fall, Jerome’s was derived, at least in part, from philosophy. So much for the legend of Jerome healing a lion’s paw.

The Augustinian View: Unvitiating Lower Creation

In the Nicene and post-Nicene Church, a school of thought emerged which denied that creation had been directly cursed and which thereby often held nature in a much more positive light. The adherents of this school taught that lower creation was not affected by the Fall whatsoever, or else they strictly limited the natural effects of the fall to the creation of thorns. In either case, since *man* was affected by the Fall, these Fathers often allowed that ecological phenomena could sometimes *appear* evil from man’s perspective (e.g., animal violence, natural disasters). Though numerous Fathers developed the unfallen view of lower creation, its most complete exposition was due to Augustine. On account of Augustine’s influence, it seems right to organize this part around him. I will begin by studying Augustine’s forebears, followed by Augustine himself, and will conclude by investigating the inheritors of his theology.

Ante-Augustinian Fathers

In the age of the Fathers, a high view of lower creation finds its earliest expression in the letter of *First Clement*. In a memorable passage, the

⁸⁸ Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 4.14 (emphasis added). Jerome, likewise, takes only the allegorical meaning of Isa 65:25 (*Commentary on Isaiah* 18.17).

author proclaims the manifest harmony existing between God and the created world:

Let us note how free from anger [God] is toward all his creation. The heavens move at his direction and obey him in peace. Day and night complete the course assigned by him, neither hindering the other. The sun and the moon and the choirs of stars circle in harmony within the courses assigned to them, according to his direction, *without any deviation at all*. The earth, bearing fruit in the proper seasons in fulfillment of his will, brings forth *food in full abundance for both humans and beast and all living things that swell upon it without dissension and without altering anything he has decreed*. Moreover, the incomprehensible depths of the abysses and the indescribable judgments of the underworld are constrained by the same ordinances. The basin of the boundless sea, gathered by his creative action into its reservoirs, does not flow beyond the barriers surrounding it; instead *it behaves just as he ordered it*.⁸⁹

Here, several deviations from the Irenaeian view are immediately obvious: carnivorousness appears to be God's original intention; all living things exist in harmony; the abysses and seas, frightful as they appear, are God's obedient servants. The passage even suggests that, despite the Fall, God has not altered "*anything he has decreed*." Furthermore, later in the letter, the author took death and decay to be providential signs of the general resurrection, for the degeneration of seeds enables their sprouting, and the immolation of the phoenix leads to its rebirth.⁹⁰

Surprisingly, *First Clement's* insinuation of an unvitiated creation seem not to have resurfaced until the fourth century. Conceivably, before the Edict of Milan, the persecuted Church was simply more inclined to regard the world—including natural forces—as hostile to Christianity. Nevertheless, as early as Lactantius († ca. 325), the unvitiated view began to gain momentum. Lactantius had read Theophilus's *To Autolytus*,⁹¹ and, like Irenaeus, he held that lower creation existed for the sake of man.⁹² But Lactantius ran in a different direction. Rather than say, with Irenaeus, that lower creation had been cursed because of man, Lactantius suggested that

⁸⁹ *First Clement* 19:3–20:6 (cited in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 52; emphasis added).

⁹⁰ *First Clement* 24.2–26.1.

⁹¹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.23.

⁹² See Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 2.9 [ANF]: "It was necessary that man should be [the] last made, . . . for all things were made on his account."

evil was *originally* part of creation.⁹³ God had placed both goods and evils in the natural world so that man might acquire wisdom, and ultimately find God.⁹⁴ Had God not created evils, goods would be unrecognizable as such.⁹⁵ Furthermore, for Lactantius, natural evils were God's means of exercising divine retribution.⁹⁶ Of course, the attribution of evils to God quickly leads to heterodoxy. But, perhaps for the first time in the history of Christian thought, the so-called "evils" of lower creation were re-envisioned, albeit inadequately, as higher-order goods. Thus, though Lactantius refrained from praising creation *en masse*, he could still honor the design of animals, "in whose bodies we see nothing formed without plan, without arrangement, without utility, without beauty."⁹⁷ Furthermore, for Lactantius, God's design for creation exists now as it did in the beginning, a message central to his letter *On the Workmanship of God*. For example, he writes:

For [how could one say] that birds were not made to fly, nor wild beasts to rage, nor fishes to swim, nor men to be wise, *when it is evident that living creatures are subject to that natural disposition and office to which each was created?* . . . But since all the races of animals, and all the limbs, observe their own laws and arrangements, and the uses assigned to them, it is plain that nothing is made by chance, since *a perpetual arrangement of the divine plan is preserved*.⁹⁸

Elsewhere, Lactantius is explicit that God's divine plan included the "natural weapons" and "peculiar defense[s]" proper to predator-prey relationships.⁹⁹ But again, though Lactantius was happy to attribute the current natural order to God's original design, he did so at the expense of

⁹³ Lactantius, *On the Anger of God* 13.

⁹⁴ See Lactantius, *On the Anger of God* 13: "All things, both evils and goods, were proposed for the sake of man" (translation mine). In terms of "evils," Lactantius had in mind vipers and beetles.

⁹⁵ Joseph F. Kelly, *The Problem of Evil in the Western Tradition: From the Book of Job to Modern Genetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001), 45.

⁹⁶ Lactantius, *On the Anger of God* 17. Note, however, that Lactantius's theology also has a place for fallen angels (e.g., *Divine Institutes* 2.15), but perhaps only as a cause of moral evil.

⁹⁷ Lactantius, *On the Anger of God* 10. Lactantius goes on to conclude "that the most skillful and careful marking out of all the parts and members repels the idea of accident and chance."

⁹⁸ Lactantius, *On the Workmanship of God* 6 (*ANF*; emphasis added). See also Garvey, *God's Good Earth*, 77.

⁹⁹ Lactantius, *On the Workmanship of God* 2.

an orthodox doctrine of the Fall.¹⁰⁰ For Lactantius, good and evil somehow predated Adam's sin, and thus nothing in creation, not even evils, "ought to have been otherwise."¹⁰¹

By the end of the fourth century, it became clear that Lactantius's stance could be theologically legitimized. For one, the Fathers began to argue that the "evils" of lower creation were strictly *apparent* evils. Athanasius of Alexandria († 373) was among the first to adopt this approach. Like Lactantius, however, Athanasius did not connect his theology of lower creation to the doctrine of the Fall. This task devolved upon Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine. In particular, these Fathers, with increasing lucidity, began to defend the existence of prelapsarian animal predation and hence the unconditional praiseworthiness of lower creation. We shall study each Father in turn.

The Christology of Athanasius lent itself to a high view of creation. By emphasizing Christ's divinity, Athanasius understood him as the ordering principle of the universe. Since Christ sustains all things in existence, "the nature of created things, inasmuch as [they are] brought into being out of nothing, is of a fleeting sort, and weak and mortal."¹⁰² In this way Athanasius argued that creation's corruptibility long predated the sin of Adam: the universe was corruptible *by nature*. But this corruptibility made creation no less praiseworthy, no less ordered, as Athanasius was at great pains to attest in his *Against the Heathen*:

For by a nod and by the power of the Divine Word of the Father that governs and presides over all, the heaven revolves [*sic*], the stars move, the sun shines, the moon goes her circuit, and the air receives the sun's light and the ether his heat, and the winds blow: the mountains are reared on high, the sea is rough with waves, and the living things in it grow, the earth abides fixed, and bears fruit, and man is formed and lives and dies again, and all things whatever have their life and movement; fire burns, water cools, fountains spring forth, rivers flow, seasons and hours come round, rains descend, clouds are filled, hail is formed, snow and ice congeal, birds fly, creeping things

¹⁰⁰ See Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.5.

¹⁰¹ Lactantius, *On the Workmanship of God* 3. This passage deserves a fuller quotation: "[Some] complain that man is born in a more feeble and frail condition than that in which the other animals are born. . . . [But] when I consider the condition of things, I understand that nothing ought to have been otherwise than it is—not to say could have been otherwise, for God is able to do all things: but it must be, that that most provident majesty made that which was better and more right."

¹⁰² Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 41 (NPNF).

go along, water-animals swim, the sea is navigated, the earth is sown and grows crops in due season, plants grow, and some are young, some ripening, others in their growth become old and decay, and while some things are vanishing others are being engendered and are coming to light. But all these things, and more, which for their number we cannot mention, the worker of wonders and marvels, the Word of God, giving light and life, moves and orders by His own nod, making the universe one.¹⁰³

In this remarkably wide-ranging litany, Athanasius explicitly included death and decay as part of God's original plan. Hence he seems to have allowed that animal death occurred alongside Paradise: for, if Adam and Eve had sinned, they were to come under "the corruption of death *according to nature*, and [to] no longer live in paradise, but thereafter dying outside of it, would remain in death and in corruption."¹⁰⁴

Such a claim corresponds with Athanasius's insistence that man, and only man, was changed by the Fall. After all, why did Christ not appear as something more noble than a man? Because

*nothing in creation had gone astray in its notions of God, save the human being only. Why, neither sun nor moon nor heaven nor stars nor water nor air altered their course; but knowing their Creator and King, the Word, they remained as they were made. But human beings alone, having rejected the good, henceforth . . . ascribed the honor due to God, and the knowledge of him, to demons and human beings fabricated in stone.*¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, Athanasius held that the production of thorns in Genesis 3:18 should be understood spiritually, for, indeed, it had already been reversed through Christ.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, lower creation's "bondage" (Romans

¹⁰³ Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 44.

¹⁰⁴ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 3.4 (cited in *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr [Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011], 52; emphasis added). Earlier in the same paragraph, Athanasius wrote that, "of all things upon the earth [God] had mercy upon the human race, and seeing that by the principle of its own coming into being it would not be able to endure eternally, he granted them a further gift, creating human beings not simply like all the irrational animals upon the earth but making them according to his own image." It would have been strange for him to think that man had once been impermanent, and yet that the animals had not.

¹⁰⁵ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 43.3 (p. 95; emphasis added).

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius, *On Luke 10:22 and Matthew 11:27* 2 (NPNF): "Since then all things

8:22) is merely its distinctiveness from the Father.¹⁰⁷ In summary, for Athanasius, all creation “points to God as its Maker and Artificer . . . by *the unbroken law* of [its] obedience to Him.”¹⁰⁸

Basil of Caesarea († 379), like Athanasius, was eager to acknowledge the goodness of nature. In his famous series of Lenten homilies on the six days of creation, the *Hexameron*, he wrote: “I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator.”¹⁰⁹ Basil taught that “nature, receiving the impulse of this first command,” would remain obedient “without interruption . . . until the consummation of all things.”¹¹⁰ Did Basil then admit the existence of prelapsarian pain and death? He did, though he refused to call pain and death “evil.” “Recognize that evil, rightly so called,” he explained, “has no other origin than our voluntary falls. . . . Sickness, poverty, obscurity, death, finally all human afflictions, *ought not to be ranked as evils*. . . . [And] among these afflictions, some are the effect of nature.”¹¹¹ Therefore, in Basil’s theodicy, God could not be faulted for making poisonous plants, even *prelapsarian* poisonous plants:

[God said,] “Let the earth bring forth grass;” and instantly, with useful plants, appear noxious plants; with corn, hemlock; with the other nutritious plants, hellebore, monkshood, mandrake and the juice of the poppy. What then? Shall we show no gratitude for so many beneficial gifts, and reproach the Creator for those which may be harmful to our life? And shall we not reflect that not all has been created in view of the wants of our bellies? . . . [In] creation, nothing exists without a reason [and] all this was before the sin which condemned us.¹¹²

‘were delivered’ to Him, and He is made Man, straightway all things were set right and perfected. Earth receives blessing instead of a curse.”

¹⁰⁷ See Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.64 (NPNF): “Creation is all in bondage, [simply] since it is external to the Oneness of the Father, and, whereas it once was not [in existence], [it] was brought to be.” Therefore, Athanasius argued, our Savior could never have been a non-human creature, not because such creatures are sinful, but “since every creature is liable to change” (Athanasius, Letter 61, no. 3 [NPNF]).

¹⁰⁸ Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 27.3–4 (NPNF; emphasis added).

¹⁰⁹ Basil, *Hexameron* 5.2 (NPNF).

¹¹⁰ Basil, *Hexameron* 5.10. He makes this claim with respect to the fruit-bearing trees.

¹¹¹ Basil, *Hexameron* 2.5 (emphasis added).

¹¹² Basil, *Hexameron* 5.4–5.

Basil likewise seemed to grant the existence of prelapsarian animal death and carnivorousness.¹¹³ But even then, according to Basil, there could be nothing evil in nature, simply because lower creation was not “endowed with the power of choice.”¹¹⁴

The other Cappadocian Fathers shared Basil’s opinions on lower creation, and were only slightly less preoccupied by the subject. In a eulogy of the late Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus († 390) praised the *Hexameron*, saying: “Whenever I handle [it] I am brought into the presence of the Creator, and understand the words of creation, and admire the Creator more than before.”¹¹⁵ Although Gregory did not produce a *Hexameron* of his own, his preaching was often punctuated by protracted ecological encomiums.¹¹⁶ On one particular occasion, his florid excursus on the “luxuriant gifts” of lower creation exceeded three thousand words.¹¹⁷ Elsewhere he explains, “All creation sings the glory of God in wordless strain, for it is through me that God is thanked for all his works.”¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, admiration for creation’s parts typically led Gregory to admiration of the whole:

[We have] an admirable creation indeed, when we look at the fair form of every part, but yet [it is even] *more worthy of admiration when we consider the harmony and the unison of the whole*, and how each part fits in with every other, in fair order, and all with the whole, tending to the perfect completion of the world as a Unit.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ See Basil, *Hexameron* 9.2 (*NPNF*): “Nature, once put in motion by the Divine command, traverses creation with an equal step, through birth and death, and keeps up the succession of kinds through resemblance, to the last. Nature always makes a horse succeed to a horse, a lion to a lion, an eagle to an eagle, and preserving each animal by these uninterrupted successions she transmits it to the end of all things. . . . [An animal’s] nature, as though it had been just constituted, follows the course of ages, for ever young.” Then later, “Bears, lions, tigers, all animals of this sort, have short necks buried in their shoulders; it is because they do not live upon grass and have no need to bend down to the earth; they are carnivorous and eat the animals upon whom they prey.”

¹¹⁴ Basil, *Hexameron* 6.7.

¹¹⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 43, no. 67 (unless otherwise noted, all orations by Gregory of Nazianzus are cited from *NPNF*).

¹¹⁶ E.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 6, nos. 14–16 and Oration 44, nos. 10–12.

¹¹⁷ E.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 28, nos. 23–30, here at no. 27.

¹¹⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 44, no. 11 (*FC*). He continues: “In this way their hymn becomes our own, since it is from them that I take my song. Now the whole of the animal kingdom is smiling and all our senses are at feast.”

¹¹⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 38, no. 10 (emphasis added). In the same oration, Gregory refers to the “immortal plants” of Eden (no. 12), but this should be understood in light of his spiritualized model of paradise. He reckons that the aforemen-

In other words, the aesthetic summit of creation is not located in a particular species, but in creation's wholesale "harmony [and] unity," or its "stability and progress."¹²⁰ For Gregory, the existence of God is to be inferred from the beautiful organization of "such a great and wonderful world."¹²¹ In 373, however, after the citizens of Nazianzus had suffered a trio of natural disasters—a cattle plague, a drought, and a ruinous hailstorm—Gregory's congregation questioned whether "creation, once ordered for the enjoyment of men, [had] changed?"¹²² Gregory, however, refused to attribute the recent calamities to a defect of lower creation. Rather, he interpreted the events as a "loving-kindness and gentle reproof, and the first elements of a scourge to train our tender years," a scourge sent by God on account of the peoples' sins.¹²³ In fact, according to Gregory, God employs natural disasters "*in the excess of His goodness*" in order to awaken man to his impending judgment, the "final scourge."¹²⁴ Nature, meanwhile, remains obedient to God, despite its unseemly elements.¹²⁵ Like Basil, therefore, Gregory of Nazianzus probably would have accepted animal death before the Fall: "This world of ours . . . was established as mortal for mortal beings."¹²⁶ Indeed, for Gregory, animal behaviors (let alone seasons, celestial bodies, tides, and floods) are "guided and directed in accordance with the first causes of harmony"—and "what else could they ever be seen to be but proclamations of love and concord?"¹²⁷

Gregory of Nyssa († ca. 395), Basil's brother, was also impressed by

tioned plants were "Divine Conceptions" and that the Tree of Knowledge was "Contemplation."

¹²⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 28, no. 6.

¹²¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Arcane Poems* 5 (*Poemata Arcana*, trans. D. A. Sykes [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 23). See also Oration 28, no. 6.

¹²² Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 16, no. 5.

¹²³ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 16, no. 6, and Oration 16, no. 14.

¹²⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 16, no. 6 (emphasis added).

¹²⁵ See Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 16, no. 12: "We acknowledge Your goodness, though we are without understanding: we have been scourged for but few of our faults. You are terrible, and who will resist You? The mountains will tremble before You, and who will strive against the might of Your arm? If Thou shut the heaven, who will open it? And if Thou let loose Your torrents, who will restrain them?" (punctuation adjusted). In another oration, Gregory confirmed this teaching: the universe remains obedient even when God "disturbs a measure of the harmony in order to terrify and punish sinners" (Oration 6, no. 16).

¹²⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Arcane Poems* 4 (p. 21). In the succeeding poem, Gregory says similarly, again without mention of the fall: "To the lower world he has assigned a life of change which involves many varying forms" (*Arcane Poems* 5 [p. 25]).

¹²⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 6, no. 15.

the *Hexameron*.¹²⁸ Unlike Gregory of Nazianzus, however, Gregory of Nyssa supplemented his brother's work with an entire treatise dedicated to lower creation.¹²⁹ In his *Apology on the Hexameron*, written after Basil's death, Gregory of Nyssa reasserted the view that the inherent beauty of nature was not always outwardly perceptible. For "neither the centipede, nor the toad, nor those things that spawn from rotting matter are particularly beautiful animals."¹³⁰ But Basil's answer to the problem of natural evil—"nothing exists without a reason"—failed to satisfy his brother. Rather than take recourse to Gregory of Nazianzus's holism, Gregory of Nyssa claimed all creation to be good in all its parts, simply because "each thing in and of itself has a perfect nature [*naturam perfectam*]."¹³¹ Unlike fallen man, God fully appreciates each species' perfection—that is, the problem of natural evil is a problem of perspective. Consequently, Gregory did not need to differentiate between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian condition of nature. In fact, according to Gregory's *On the Making of Man*, prelapsarian animals must have always possessed their unsavory qualities, for those qualities, when imported into a rational being, became the basis of sin.¹³² In a similar way, Gregory elsewhere held death to be a limitation integral to prelapsarian animal life, seeing as this limitation had

¹²⁸ In the introduction of his *On the Making of Man*, Gregory of Nyssa praised his brother's theology of creation as follows: "[Basil] alone has worthily considered the creation of God . . . who by his own speculation made the sublime ordering of the universe generally intelligible, making the world as established by God in the true Wisdom known to those who by means of his understanding are led to such contemplation" (*NPNF*). Then he generously added, "but we, who fall short even of worthily admiring him [Basil], yet intend to add to the great writer's speculations that which is lacking in them."

¹²⁹ The *Apology on the Hexameron* is often regarded as Gregory's attempt to address the philosophical shortcomings of his brother's *Hexameron*. However, Doru Costache contends that Gregory's *Apology* is firstly an independent study in cosmology, intended to show Christianity's compatibility with contemporary science (Doru Costache, "Approaching *An Apology for the Hexameron*: Its Aims, Method and Discourse," *Phronema* 27, no. 2 [2012]: 53–81). In particular, Gregory expatiated on the theory of water cycles at such length that one wry commentator proposed that the second half of the treatise be entitled, "On Fire, Light, and Especially Water" (58).

¹³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Apology on the Hexameron* (translation mine from *PG*, 44:91b).

¹³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Apology on the Hexameron*, cited in Robert Louis Wilken, "The Beauty of Centipedes and Toads," in *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Cultivating a Contemporary Theology of Creation*, ed. David Vincent Meconi (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 17–26, at 24.

¹³² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 18.1–4.

been extended to man on account of Adam's sin.¹³³ Even so, from God's perspective, whatever spawns on earth fulfills the "perfection of beauty with respect to created things."¹³⁴ Furthermore, for Gregory, the goodness of creation was originally intended to be apparent to man as well: God prepared the world and "the wonders therein" specifically for man, that "by the beauty and majesty of the things he saw [he] might trace out that power of the Maker which is beyond speech and language."¹³⁵

By way of Ambrose of Milan († 397), the Cappadocian view of lower creation was enthusiastically carried to the West. Heavily influenced by Basil's *Hexameron*, Ambrose granted prelapsarian existence to plagues of locusts,¹³⁶ poisonous plants,¹³⁷ and animal brutality.¹³⁸ For Ambrose, every creature, however savage it may be, has a God-given purpose: "nothing

¹³³ See Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 8 (NPNF): "[God] invested man subsequently with that capacity of dying which had been the special attribute of the brute creation. Not that it was to last forever; for a coat is something external put on us, lending itself to the body for a time, but not indigenous to its nature. This liability to death, then, taken from the brute creation, was, provisionally, made to envelope the nature created for immortality." As another example, consider Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 8.3 (NPNF): "Before the animals there was made their food, and before man [there was made] that which was to minister to human life."

¹³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Apology on the Hexameron* (cited in Wilken, "Beauty of Centipedes and Toads," 24).

¹³⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 2.1. This is an important theme of Gregory's *Apology* as well.

¹³⁶ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 5.83–84 (FC): "Divine grace has penetrated even into the life of a locust. . . . The locust as minister of divine vengeance inflicts punishment for an offense against heaven."

¹³⁷ See Ambrose, *Hexameron* 3.38–39: "But some perhaps may say: how do you account for the fact that deadly poisonous plants grow along with those that are of use, for example, there is found along with wheat the poisonous hemlock, a plant discoverable among those that support life. Unless you are on your guard against it, this plant can injure your health But would you find fault with the earth because not all men are good? Some people act as if everything has to be created for our gourmandizing or as if there was just a trifling amount left by the kindness of God to minister to our appetites. . . . Each and every thing which is produced from the earth has its own reason for existence, which, as far as it can, fulfills the general plan of creation. . . . There is nothing without a purpose; there is nothing superfluous in what germinates from the earth."

¹³⁸ See Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.30: "The Lord formed some beasts, such as lions, tigers, and bears, with shorter necks, whereas other animals, such as elephants and camels, were created with longer necks. Do we not find clear reason for this in the fact that animals which are carnivorous do not need long necks?"

is created superfluous.”¹³⁹ Furthermore, echoing Basil, Ambrose believed that the smallest part of every creature exists to manifest God’s “admirable design,” even down to the talons of flesh-eating birds.¹⁴⁰ In fact, a clearer window into divine wisdom “is the testimony given by nature than is the proof presented by doctrine.”¹⁴¹ In a remarkable passage from Ambrose’s own *Hexameron*, he confronts Basil’s opponents directly:

I am not unaware of the fact that certain men treat of the race of beasts and cattle and crawling creatures as symbolical of the heinousness of sin, the stupidity of sinners, and the wickedness of their designs. I adhere, however, to the belief that each and every species is uncompounded by nature [*simplices naturas*].¹⁴²

Apparently Irenaeus’s theory of a corrupted creation was present in Ambrose’s church. But Ambrose rejected Irenaeus’s opinion in favor of Gregory of Nyssa’s: lower creation is, by nature, *simplices*, perhaps better translated “pure.”

To maintain this position, however, Ambrose needed to explain what was meant by Romans 8:19–22 and Genesis 3:17–18. His interpretation of the former passage plays itself out in several letters composed to a fellow priest, Horontianus. While the “futility” of rational creatures could be ascribed to sin, Ambrose had to explain the source of lower creation’s futility in some other manner. Perhaps drawing from Ambrosiaster’s contemporaneous commentary on Romans,¹⁴³ Ambrose’s solution was to identify lower creation’s futility with its transitoriness. His majestic defense of this position deserves to be reproduced at length:

Consider that the sun, the moon, and the stars, the lights of the sky which, though they shine with brilliant splendor, are yet creatures, and, whether they rise or fall in their daily performance of duty, they serve the will of the eternal Creator, bringing forth the beauty with which they are clothed and shining by day and by night. How often is the sun covered by clouds or taken from the gaze of the earth when the ray of its light is dispelled in the sky or an eclipse occurs The stars, which are engaged in service to this world’s advantage,

¹³⁹ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.35.

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 5.74.

¹⁴¹ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.21.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.4.

¹⁴³ Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 8.22.

disappear when they are covered by clouds, not willingly, surely, but in hope, because they hope for gratitude for their labor from Him who made them subject. Thus, they persevere for His sake, that is, for His will. It is not strange that they persevere with patience, since they know that their Lord and the Creator of all that is in heaven or on earth has taken upon Himself the frailty of our body, the slavery of our state. Why should they not persevere patiently in the servitude of their corruption when the Lord of all humbled Himself to death for the whole world, and took the form of a servant, and was made the sin of the world and a curse for our sakes? . . . To conclude, the sun, great as it is and such as it is, and the moon, which the shades of night do not cover, and the stars, which adorn the sky, *all now endure the slavery of corruption because every body is a corruptible thing*. Indeed, even the skies will perish and heaven and earth will pass. At length the sun and the moon and the other lights of the stars will rest in the glory of the sons of God, since God will be all in all, and will be in you and in us by His plenitude and mercy.¹⁴⁴

Hence lower creation, though perfectly good as it exists now, is destined for something even better: permanence and unity.¹⁴⁵ Lower creation is enslaved to corruption, not as a punishment, but by the very fact of its materiality. But lest Horontianus believe anything else, Ambrose sent a follow-up letter to “fulfill” his earlier answer.¹⁴⁶ Here, Ambrose conjectured that, in Romans 8, Paul was not in fact referring to *lower* creation, for “why should that be set free which is unacquainted with and free from subjection to vanity and from slavery to corruption?”¹⁴⁷ As Ambrose explained, if lower creation indeed groans, perhaps it does so out of sympathy for the human condition, rather than on account of its own experience of corruptibility.¹⁴⁸ Ambrose admitted that this exegesis was speculative (and by doing so further revealed his allegiance to the unfallen view), and hence he

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, Letter 51 (34) (*FC*; emphasis added; all further letters of Ambrose will be from *FC*).

¹⁴⁵ See Ambrose, Letter 8 (18). In fact, Ambrose held that the original order of creation could be advanced even in this age: in the beginning, “the earth did not know how to be worked for her fruits. Later, when the careful farmer began to rule the fields and to clothe the shapeless soil with vines, she put away her wild dispositions, being softened by domestic cultivation.”

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, Letter 52 (35).

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, Letter 52 (35).

¹⁴⁸ See Ambrose, Letter 52 (35): “Let [each creature] groan, not over his own labor but over ours.”

did not dismiss his former approach, which he in fact employed elsewhere to great effect.¹⁴⁹

Regardless of whether Ambrose preferred one interpretation of Romans 8:19–22 over the other, the bishop of Milan refused to locate the origin of creation’s “groaning” or “futility” at the reckoning of Adam. Contrary to John Chrysostom, Ambrose insisted that Genesis 3:17–18 was to be understood spiritually:

The earth is not cursed in itself but is “cursed in your work.” This is said in reference to the soul. The earth is cursed if your works are earthly, that is, of this world. *It is not cursed as a whole.* It will merely bring forth thorns and thistles, if it is not diligently cared for by the labor of human hands. . . . We must labor and sweat so as to chastise the body and bring it into subjection and sow the seeds of spiritual things.¹⁵⁰

In other words, for Ambrose, the repercussions recounted in Genesis 3:17–18 pertain strictly to mankind. Accordingly, before the Fall, wild beasts were no less savage than they are now,¹⁵¹ but only following the Fall did they become “scourges for those whose pronounced character is immature and infantile.”¹⁵² Indeed, potentially harmful creatures were created in anticipation of man’s Fall: “Serpents [and] all other kinds of poisons, either animal or vegetable, . . . have come into being for our correction.”¹⁵³ Lactantius would have agreed to this latter point. But Ambrose had gone much further: “Would you find fault with the earth because not all men are good?”¹⁵⁴ Creation seems fallen only to fallen man. And although it may

¹⁴⁹ To explain why man, first above all creatures, was created last of all, Ambrose argued that the transitoriness of the world was a most suitable environment for the unfolding of man’s supreme vocation: “What is the world but an arena full of fighting?... Like an athlete, then, [man] comes last into the arena; he lifts his eyes to heaven; he sees that the heavenly creation was made subject to vanity not by its own will, but by reason of Him who made it subject in hope. He sees that all creation groaned awaiting redemption. He sees that his whole task awaits him” (Letter 49 [43]).

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *On Paradise* 77 (FC; emphasis added).

¹⁵¹ See Ambrose, *On Paradise* 49 (FC): “How can we explain [that man named all the animals] other than by saying that the untamed beasts and the birds of the air were brought [near] to man by divine power?”

¹⁵² Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.38.

¹⁵³ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.38. Furthermore, “paradise cannot be considered earthly, nor planted in any particular spot” (Letter 25 [47]).

¹⁵⁴ Ambrose, *Hexameron* 3.38.

seem fallen (either according to its appearance, as Gregory of Nyssa taught, or also by lived experience of its “scourges”), in reality, lower creation is *simplices naturas*—pure by nature.

Augustine

The position which was framed by Athanasius, expanded by the Cappadocians, and defended by Ambrose, finally reached its apogee under Augustine († 430). Augustine’s conversion to Christianity was provoked, in part, by his recognition of nature’s goodness, its impermanence notwithstanding.¹⁵⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that his writings consistently support the unvitiated view of lower creation. Here we shall attempt to distinguish three aspects of Augustine’s protology: the impossibility of “natural evils,” the continuity between prelapsarian and postlapsarian biology, and the unqualified praiseworthiness of lower creation.

Ever since his conversion from Manichaeism, Augustine labored continuously to exculpate God from every imputation of evil-doing: since God’s creation was “good,” evil could not be “natural.”¹⁵⁶ Thus “natural evil” is simply a figment of humanity’s limited perspective.¹⁵⁷ Natural disasters, for example—“fire, frost, [attacks from] wild beasts, and so forth”—are “excellent in their own natures” and “beautifully adjusted to the rest of creation [i.e., lower creation].”¹⁵⁸ In other words, though natural disasters are evil to man, they are good in themselves, and man would not have experienced them “had our nature continued upright as it was created.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* 7.10–17.

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., Augustine, *On the Nature of Good* 1 (NPNF): “every nature, so far as it is nature, is good.” For a fuller account of Augustine on natural evil, see Donald X. Burt, *Augustine’s World: An Introduction to His Speculative Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 18–25.

¹⁵⁷ See, e.g.: Augustine, *Confessions* 7.19 and *City of God* 11.22. See also, Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwich, England: Canterbury, 2002), 210–211.

¹⁵⁸ Augustine, *City of God* 11.22 (NPNF). Augustine continues: “Thus divine providence admonishes us not foolishly to vituperate things, but to investigate their utility with care; and, where our mental capacity or infirmity is at fault, to believe that there is a utility, though hidden, as we have experienced that there were other things which we all but failed to discover. For this concealment of the use of things is itself either an exercise of our humility or a leveling of our pride; for no nature at all is evil, and this is a name for nothing but the want of good. But from things earthly to things heavenly, from the visible to the invisible, there are some things better than others; and for this purpose are they unequal, in order that they might all exist.”

¹⁵⁹ Augustine, *City of God* 22.23; cf. 22.22 and 22.24.

But since the destructive forces of nature obediently enact God's will, they are also good in their *effects*, whether they elicit man's conversion or, in the case of lethal phenomena, they hasten his judgment.¹⁶⁰ Augustine argued similarly with respect to irritating creatures, such as flies.¹⁶¹ But what about lower creation itself? Is it not evil that innocent creatures should themselves suffer and die? For Augustine, the death of animals and plants was, at worst, superficially evil: "It is ridiculous to condemn the faults of beasts and trees, . . . for these creatures received, at their Creator's will, an existence fitting them, by passing away and giving place to others."¹⁶² In fact, animal death and decay is proper to the "peace of the universe."¹⁶³ In

¹⁶⁰ Augustine's magnificent defense of this point deserves an extended citation: "Where God wills, there the fire spreads, there the cloud hurries, whether it carry in it rain, or snow, or hail. And why does the lightning sometimes strike the mountain, yet strikes not the robber? . . . Perhaps He yet seeks the robber's conversion, and therefore is the mountain which fears not smitten, that the man who fears may be changed. He also sometimes, when maintaining discipline, smites the ground to terrify a child. Sometimes too He smites a man, whom He will. But you say to me, 'Behold, He smites the more innocent, and passes over the more guilty.' Wonder not; *death, whenever it comes, is good to the good man*. And whence do you know what punishment is reserved in secret for that more guilty man, if he be unwilling to be converted? Would not they rather be scorched by lightning? . . . The needful thing is, that you be guileless. Why so? Is it an evil thing to die by shipwreck, and a good thing to die by fever? Whether he die in this way or in that, ask what sort of man he is who dies; ask where he will go after death, not how he is to depart from life. . . . Whatever then happens here contrary to our wish, you will know that it happens not, save by the will of God, by His providence, by His ordering, by His nod, by His laws: and if we understand not why anything is done, let us grant to His providence that it is not done without reason: so shall we not be blasphemers. For when we begin to argue concerning the works of God, 'why is this?' 'why is that?' and, 'He ought not to have done this,' 'He did this ill'; where is the praise of God? You have lost your 'Alleluia.' . . . In the shop [a foolish man] dares not to find fault with the smith, yet in the universe he dares to find fault with God. Therefore just as 'fire, hail, snow, ice, wind of storms, which do His word,' so all things in nature, which seem to foolish persons to be made at random, simply "do His word," because they are not made [except] by His command" (Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 148.9 [NPNF]; emphasis added and archaisms emended).

¹⁶¹ "On account of our pride, God appointed that tiny and contemptible creature [i.e., the fly] to torment us" (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1.14–15 [NPNF]).

¹⁶² Augustine, *City of God* 12.4. In the same paragraph, Augustine writes: "If we attentively consider even these faults of earthly things, which are neither voluntary nor penal, they seem to illustrate the excellence of the natures themselves, which are all originated and created by God."

¹⁶³ Augustine, *City of God* 19.12. Augustine continued: "Although the flesh of dead animals be eaten by others, no matter where it be carried, nor what it be brought

The City of God, Augustine explained himself as follows:

*All natures, then, inasmuch as they are, and have therefore a rank and species of their own, and a kind of internal harmony, are certainly good. And when they are in the places assigned to them by the order of their nature, they preserve such being as they have received. . . . Though the corruption of transitory and perishable things brings them to utter destruction, it does not prevent their producing that which was designed to be their result. And this being so, God . . . is not to be found fault with on account of the creature's faults, but is to be praised in view of the natures He has made.*¹⁶⁴

In other words, impermanent beings fulfill God's will by being impermanent, and the "problem of [animal] pain" is not a problem at all.¹⁶⁵ As for genuine evils, Augustine held that their origin could only be the will.¹⁶⁶ The unsavory behavior of animals, for example, is not evil, "because in them it does not war against reason, which they lack."¹⁶⁷ Rational wills can indeed be evil, but since "no substance is evil," Adam could not have been expelled

into contact with, nor what it be converted and changed into, it still is ruled by the same laws which pervade all things for the conservation of every mortal race, and which bring things that fit one another into harmony."

¹⁶⁴ Augustine, *City of God* 12.4 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *Free Choice of the Will* 3.23.69 (FC): "These carping critics, who neglect to study such questions carefully but go about airing their opinions garrulously, usually try to shake the faith of those less instructed on the problem of pain and hardships also suffered by animals. What evil have even these deserved, they ask, or what can they hope for in the way of good that they should suffer such distress? They speak or think this way because they take a very unfair view of things and, incapable as they are of understanding the nature and excellence of the highest good, they would have everything conform to their own idea of what it is. . . . Hence, without any regard for order, they make the unreasonable demand that animals should suffer neither death nor corruption in their bodies, as if they were not mortal, though they are on the lowest plane, or as if they were evil, just because the heavenly bodies are better."

¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Augustine denied that "natural evils," as opposed to moral evils, could be attributed to the will of fallen angels: "If the demons have any power in [physical] matters, they have only that power which the secret decree of the Almighty allots to them" (*City of God* 2.23; cf. 7.35 and 10.21). "Earthquakes," for example, do not take place "without the will of God" (Augustine, *On the Trinity* 3.2.7 [NPNF]). Cf. Augustine, Sermon 80, no. 8. See also G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 106.

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *Against Julian* 4.5.35 (FC).

from Paradise into a cursed world.¹⁶⁸ Accordingly, Augustine refused to interpret Genesis 3:17–18 as proof of lower creation’s vitiating. Sinfulness was the source of man’s toil (not the earth),¹⁶⁹ hence the ostensible sentencing of the earth was actually just a sentencing of man.¹⁷⁰ Thus the curse upon the earth (i.e., Adam’s Fall) disturbed man’s *relationship* to nature, not nature itself.¹⁷¹ But even the discord thereby introduced between lower creation and man somehow contributed to the “measured beauty and arrangement of all things.”¹⁷²

But rather than claim, with John Chrysostom, that lower creation had been affected by the Fall, yet was no worse for it, Augustine denied that lower creation had changed *whatsoever*. This is the second keynote of Augustine’s protology. Though man’s relationship to nature was certainly frustrated by the Fall, it was only man who had changed: nature was unaffected, not only morally, but biologically. For instance, Augustine avoided a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:28 (“have dominion . . . over every living thing”), supposing instead that the wild beasts were flesh-eating before the Fall,¹⁷³ and yet only after the Fall did man find beasts harmful.¹⁷⁴ In fact,

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *On True Religion* 20.38: “Man was expelled from paradise . . . [but he was] not expelled from substantial good to substantial evil, for no substance is evil; rather from eternal good to temporal good, from spiritual good to carnal good” (translation mine).

¹⁶⁹ In connection to Gen 3:17, Augustine writes, “we [should] not suppose that [the] tranquility and ineffable light of God brings forth from Itself the means of punishing sin” (*Expositions on the Psalms* 7.16).

¹⁷⁰ See Augustine, *On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* 2.53 (NPNF): “The primeval man and woman heard these sentences pronounced by God, and [they] deserved them.”

¹⁷¹ In his exegesis on the cursing of Cain, Augustine writes: “[The Scriptures say] not ‘Cursed is the earth,’ but, ‘Cursed *are you* from the earth,’ which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood” (Augustine, *Against Faustus* 12.11 [NPNF]; emphasis added).

¹⁷² Augustine, *The Magnitude of the Soul* 36.80 (FC). God “has judged [the soul] to be the most beautiful, so that it is the exemplar of all reality, and all reality is so arranged in a hierarchy that anyone who considers the totality of things may not be offended by the lack of conformity in any part, and that every punishment and every reward of the soul should contribute something corresponding to the measured beauty and arrangement of all things.”

¹⁷³ Augustine, *On Genesis, Against the Manichees* 1.31. However, in his *Retractions*, Augustine reopened the possibility that prelapsarian animals “could have been fed by men on the fruits of the earth” (*Retractions* 1.9.2 [FC]).

¹⁷⁴ Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.15.24. Here, Augustine did not reject the possibility that savage beasts were created after the fall, though he still preferred the contrary position.

Augustine held that the wild animals were probably no less brutish before the Fall than after.¹⁷⁵ He granted that animals experience pain in childbirth by nature (not by punishment), and he suggested that the same might be true of *human* labor pains.¹⁷⁶ Augustine even took it upon himself to address a specious objection to his stance—how could thorns and thistles, useless as they are, have been part of the original creation? He answered by locating the goodness of thorns in their beauty, rather than their utility:

Who is so foolish as to think a creature of God, especially one planted in Paradise, blameworthy; when indeed not even thorns and thistles, which the earth brought forth, according to the judiciary judgment of God, for wearing out the sinner in labor, should be blamed? For even such herbs have their measure and form and order, which whoever considers soberly will find praiseworthy; but they are evil to that nature which ought thus to be restrained as a recompense for sin.¹⁷⁷

In other words, thorns are not a hindrance to humanity per se, but only to *fallen* humanity. Elsewhere, Augustine is clearer: prior to the Fall, “these plants had a place on earth without afflicting man in any way.”¹⁷⁸ With the possible exception of the serpent, the animals also continued to “live their life in the nature that they received.”¹⁷⁹ In other words, for Augustine, lower creation had never departed from its blissful, primordial agenda.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *On Genesis, Against the Manichees* 1.29.

¹⁷⁶ See Augustine, *On Genesis, Against the Manichees* 2.29 (FC): “In animals the females bear offspring with pain, and this is in their case the condition of mortality rather than the punishment of sin. Hence, it is possible that this be the condition of mortal bodies even in the females of humans.”

¹⁷⁷ Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good* 36 (NPNF).

¹⁷⁸ Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.18.28 (ACW). Augustine goes on to explain: “The earth in producing [thistles] before the fall did not do so to afflict man but rather to provide proper nourishment for certain animals, since some animals find soft dry thistles a pleasant and nourishing food. . . . They were in the same place before and after [the fall]: formerly not for man, afterwards for man.” However, Augustine’s earliest interpretation of Gen 3:18 seemed to be that, before the fall, plants harmful to man did not yet exist (Augustine, *On Genesis, Against the Manichees* 1.19; although, in the same work [2.30], he also interprets the verse allegorically). See Karla Pollmann, “Human Sin and Natural Environment: Augustine’s Two Positions on Genesis 3:18,” *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 69–85.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine *On Genesis, Against the Manichees* 2.17.26. Aquinas invokes this passage in *ST* II–II, q. 165, a. 2.

The third mark of Augustine's eco-theology is the categorical ascription of beauty to lower creation. His compliment of thorns and thistles just mentioned is but one instance of his innumerable environmental panegyrics, which often rivaled his predecessors' exuberance.¹⁸⁰ Perhaps the most celebrated example comes from his Easter sermon on Romans 1:18–21:

How did [the pagan] philosophers know God? *From the things which He had made!* Question the beautiful earth; question the beautiful sea; question the beautiful air, diffused and spread abroad; question the beautiful heavens; question the arrangement of the constellations; . . . question the living creatures that move about in the water, those that remain on land, and those that flit through the air; . . . question all these things and all will answer: *Behold and see! We are beautiful.* Their beauty is their confession.¹⁸¹

All creation is beautiful, says Augustine, and insofar as each creature is praiseworthy, it in turn praises God. Indeed, the “whole creation ceases not, nor is it silent in Your praises—neither the spirit of man, . . . nor animal nor corporeal things.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ E.g., Augustine, *City of God* 22.24: “How can I tell of the rest of creation, with all its beauty and utility, which the divine goodness has given to man to please his eye and serve his purposes, condemned though he is, and hurled into these labors and miseries? Shall I speak of the manifold and various loveliness of sky, and earth, and sea; of the plentiful supply and wonderful qualities of the light; of sun, moon, and stars; of the shade of trees; of the colors and perfume of flowers; of the multitude of birds, all differing in plumage and in song; of the variety of animals, of which the smallest in size are often the most wonderful—the works of ants and bees astonishing us more than the huge bodies of whales? Shall I speak of the sea, which itself is so grand a spectacle, when it arrays itself as it were in vestures of various colors, now running through every shade of green, and again becoming purple or blue? Is it not delightful to look at it in storm, and experience the soothing complacency which it inspires, by suggesting that we ourselves are not tossed and shipwrecked?”

¹⁸¹ Augustine, Sermon 241, no. 2 (*FC*; emphasis added and punctuated adjusted; I have substituted the word “confession” for the translator’s term “acknowledgement” [*confessio*]).

¹⁸² Augustine, *Confessions* 5.1 (*NPNF*). Elsewhere, in more detail, Augustine explains: “Never have things on earth ceased to praise God. But it is manifest that there are certain things which have breath to praise God in that disposition wherein God pleases them. . . . And there are other things which have not breath of life and understanding to praise God, but yet, because they also are good, and duly arranged in their proper order, and form part of the beauty of the universe, which God created, though they themselves with voice and heart praise not God, yet when they are considered by those who have understanding, God is praised in

With Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine held that creation's beauty was even further magnified when considered as a whole.¹⁸³ But Augustine was not blind to creation's unseemly features. Nevertheless, he maintained that all "things are beautiful in their kind, though on account of our sins many things seem to us disadvantageous."¹⁸⁴ Indeed, whatever might *seem* disadvantageous—whether to us or to the animals themselves—ultimately discloses God's goodness:

If you reflect upon this matter reverently and carefully, you will see that all the beauty and movement of those creatures which come to man's attention speak words of instruction for us. . . . Among creatures that experience the anguish of pain or the delight of pleasure, there is none whose aversion to pain and desire for pleasure does not thereby attest to the fact that it shuns disintegration and seeks unity. . . . Accordingly, it is now evident that *whether they cause or suffer harm, whether they give or receive pleasure, they all suggest and proclaim the unity of the Creator.*¹⁸⁵

Augustine was aware, however, that one could confute his position on the basis of Romans 8:22, where Paul claimed that "every creature," far from praising its Creator, was "groaning in travail." But Augustine met this objection head-on: "We should not think that [Rom 8:22] implies a sorrowing and sighing of trees and vegetables and stones and other suchlike creatures. . . . Rather, and without any false interpretation, *we take 'every creature' to mean humanity itself.*"¹⁸⁶ Irrespective of its exegetical validity, Augustine's stance here reveals his desire to protect lower creation's goodness against Manichean dualism.¹⁸⁷ At other times, however, Augustine

them" (Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 148.3).

¹⁸³ "Individually they are good, and altogether very good" (Augustine, *Confessions* 7.12).

¹⁸⁴ Augustine, *On Genesis, Against the Manichees* 1.26.

¹⁸⁵ Augustine, *Free Choice of the Will* 3.23.70 (emphasis added). In the previous paragraph, Augustine had answered the problem of animal pain as follows: "Except for pain in the animal, we would have no evidence of the intense desire for unity in the lower living things. Without such evidence, we would not be made sufficiently aware that all these have been constituted by the supreme, sublime, and unspeakable unity of their Creator."

¹⁸⁶ Augustine, *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* 53 (cited in Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 217; emphasis added). The same approach is to be found in Augustine, *Eighty-three Diverse Questions* 67.5–6.

¹⁸⁷ For a detailed discussion of Augustine's reckoning of "every creature" in Rom 8,

adopted Ambrosiaster's approach, understanding creation's "futility" to be its mutability.¹⁸⁸ In any event, Augustine refused to imagine that lower creation was owed something more than a (perfectly good) temporal nature.¹⁸⁹ Each creature, simply by behaving "in the way suited to its kind," imitates Christ's adherence to the Father, and as such becomes a "perfect, complete creature."¹⁹⁰ Thus, "since every creature has a special beauty proper to its nature, . . . when a man ponders the matter well, these creatures are a cause of intense admiration and enthusiastic praise of their all-powerful Maker."¹⁹¹

In summary, by rejecting the possibility of natural evil, by supposing the prelapsarian biosphere to be exactly like our own, and by unconditionally attributing beauty and praiseworthiness to lower creation, Augustine cogently recapitulated the central elements of his predecessors' pro-creation *Weltanschauung*. But in addition to fortifying his precursors' positions, Augustine had effectively grounded the whole defense of lower creation's goodness, not in its utility or appearance, but in each creature's capacity to flourish according to its God-given nature. The crea-

see Mamerto Alfeche, "Groaning Creation in the Theology of Augustine," *Augustiniana* 34, no. 1 (1984): 5–52. Left wanting, however, is Alfeche's treatment of Augustine on Gen 3:17. See also Steven W. Tyra, "When Considering Creation, Simply Follow the Rule (of Faith): Patristic Exegesis of Romans 8:19–22 and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 8, no. 2 (2014): 251–73, at 263–69. Tyra summarizes Augustine's motivations as follows: "Reading Rom 8, he heard in the 'groaning' and 'liberated' creation perilous echoes of the heretical universe in which he himself had once lived. Accordingly, he headed off potential Manichee appeals to the text simply by removing it from discussions of the cosmos altogether" (269).

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, Letter 55.20. Cf. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 143.11.

¹⁸⁹ E.g., Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 148.8: "He who made the Angel in heaven, the Same also made the worm upon earth: the Angel in heaven to dwell in heaven, the worm upon earth to abide on earth. He made not the Angel to creep in the mud, nor the worm to move in heaven. He has assigned dwellers to their different abodes; incorruption He assigned to incorruptible abodes, corruptible things to corruptible abodes."

¹⁹⁰ In full: whenever each creature "turns, everything in the way suited to its kind, to that which truly and always is, to the creator that is to say of its own being, that it really imitates the form of the Word which always and unchangingly adheres to the Father, and receives its own form, and becomes a perfect, complete [*perfecta*] creature" (Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1.4.9, trans. Edmund Hill [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2002], 171; cited in David Vincent Meconi, "Establishing an I–Thou Relationship between Creator and Creature," in Meconi, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 273–94, at 283).

¹⁹¹ Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.14.22 (ACW).

turely nature which Gregory of Nyssa had predicated with *perfectam* and Ambrose with *simplicem*, Augustine simply called “nature.” He insisted that “every nature, so far as it is nature, is good.”¹⁹² And he did so as if anticipating post-Darwinian skepticism, as in this passage, which serves as a valuable synopsis of Augustine’s tripart protology:

One might ask why brute beasts inflict injury on one another, for there is no sin in them for which this could be a punishment, and they [unlike man] cannot acquire any virtue by such a trial. The answer, of course, is that one animal is the nourishment of another. To wish that it were otherwise would not be reasonable. . . . Rightly considered, they are all praiseworthy, and all the changes that occur in them, even when one passes into another, are governed by a hidden plan that rules the beauty of the world *and regulates each according to its kind*.¹⁹³

Post-Augustinian Fathers

Before the close of the patristic age, at least two additional Church Fathers explicitly approved the unfallen view of lower creation. If there are others, I could not find them, but I think it likely that the views of these three alone adequately capture the spirit of the times.

Fulgentius of Ruspe († ca. 530), the anti-Arian North African bishop, is known for his commitment to Augustine’s theology. Nevertheless, his stance on the moral status of lower creation can be established in its own right. Like Augustine, Fulgentius did not consider animal mortality evil, but rather something which God preordained.¹⁹⁴ In fact, “the diversity of corporeal natures demonstrates that each one of them is . . . what it has received from the plan and working of the omnipotent, unchangeable, and all-wise Creator.”¹⁹⁵ Far from disobeying God, “animals accomplish their life and purpose in this world according to the incomprehensible will of the Creator, [and] render no account for their deeds because they are not rational.”¹⁹⁶ The bishop of Ruspe was once asked by an acquaintance,

¹⁹² Augustine, *On the Nature of Good* 1.

¹⁹³ Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.16.25 (emphasis added).

¹⁹⁴ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Peter on the Faith* 3.31 (FC). Cf. Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.53 (FC).

¹⁹⁵ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Peter on the Faith* 3.26.

¹⁹⁶ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Peter on the Faith* 3.42. In this connection, Fulgentius explicitly rejected the possibility of animal resurrection (3.41), a possibility which, at least in modern times, is frequently granted by those who hold the fallen view of lower creation (e.g., Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolu-*

named Scarila, whether God himself made “flies, fleas, scorpions, and bedbugs, [or whether] after the fall of the angel, the unworthy Devil, all these things were made by the Devil himself.”¹⁹⁷ To answer this question, which had apparently arisen at a dinner party, Fulgentius set out what is probably the longest patristic discussion of the Fall’s connection to natural evil.¹⁹⁸ Following Augustine,¹⁹⁹ Fulgentius began by explaining how vermin are included in the biblical creation accounts, despite that flies and scorpions are not named explicitly.²⁰⁰ Then, to uphold these creatures’ goodness, he turned to an argument from sublimity, which quickly devolved into an argument from justice. He is amusingly blunt:

What, I ask you, is so displeasing about scorpions that anyone should think that they are not made by God? For there is nothing in the body of a scorpion which does not suggest the praise of the Creator. First of all, that bodily structure of members, put together and arranged harmoniously, the symmetry and equality of the parts, then the soul giving life and feeling to the body; who would dispute that these are all good things? Without question, that power of poison, which is found to be harmful to human beings, is regarded as something to be dreaded in the body of the scorpion. [But] would that from it human beings might learn to pay attention to the punishment for transgression and cease [falsely] assigning the good works of God to the Devil.²⁰¹

Thus, for Fulgentius, God had wisely designed lower creation to be both a consolation and a scourge—and nevertheless intrinsically good—since God had foreknowledge of Adam’s sin.²⁰²

But this solution raised a new question: if fleas and scorpions were in

tion, and the Problem of Evil [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008]).

¹⁹⁷ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.24.

¹⁹⁸ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.24–56. The text of the English translation in *FC* is just shy of ten thousand words. Compare Gregory of Nazianzus’s three-thousand-word excursus at note 120 above.

¹⁹⁹ Augustine answered a similar question on the basis of John 1:3 (see note 161 above).

²⁰⁰ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.25–27.

²⁰¹ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.28 (punctuation adjusted).

²⁰² See Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.52: “[God] finished all these things on the sixth day in which nothing could be missing which he made afterwards. Because God, foreknowing . . . that human beings would sin, so, of all the things which he made, he salutarly prepared not only consolations but also scourges for him” (cf. 10.30).

themselves good creatures, why were they not harmful to humans before the Fall? Unfortunately, Fulgentius's answer, though prolix, was not entirely clear. He held that the Fall, rather than generating evil natures, induced a "dysfunction [*inconvenientia*] of good natures."²⁰³ This "dysfunction" was not adequately defined by Fulgentius, but it is probably best understood circumstantially, rather than biologically.²⁰⁴ After all, "every nature-*qua*-nature is good," he says.²⁰⁵ Thus it seems that nature's deleterious effects, though originally present *in potentia*, were somehow held at bay by Adam's rule—only Adam's *relationship* to creation was vitiated at the Fall.²⁰⁶ "Whenever we are harmed it is not nature that ought to be declared evil . . . [instead, nature is] found unpleasant to us because of our weakness."²⁰⁷ Though his explanation is wanting for details, Fulgentius was clearly at pains to deny any intimation of Manichean dualism: the Christian should "praise God the Creator in the maggot [just] as he praises him in the elephant."²⁰⁸

John of Damascus († 749), the great opponent of Byzantine iconoclasm and "the last of the Greek Fathers," was generally a follower of the Cappadocians' protology. John believed that "the very harmony of creation, its preservation and governing, teach us that there is a God who has put all this together and keeps it together, ever maintaining it and providing for it."²⁰⁹ "All created things" worship God,²¹⁰ he writes, and we ourselves "must thank God for all created things, and show Him perpetual worship,

²⁰³ See Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.29: "That a flea bother a person and a scorpion kill, this is the result, not of the creation of evil beings, but of the dysfunction of good natures, which followed from the justice of the judge."

²⁰⁴ See Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.55.

²⁰⁵ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.30 (emphasis added).

²⁰⁶ See, e.g., Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.54: all "things, born either from the waters or from the earth, were established when God created them at the very beginning, by the Creator who not only knew the nature of the human being which he made but also marvelously foreknew that the same human beings would sin. Nor did he make those things in such a way that before sin, the human being would either recognize them as harmful or fear them. So no touch of an earthly creature could harm him since, by divine gift, he had been set up as lord of all things. The transgression of the human being himself, not the work of the Creator, made these things harmful and ruinous for a human being." Cf. Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Peter on the Faith* 25.68.

²⁰⁷ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.47.

²⁰⁸ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Scarila* 10.53 (cf. 10.45).

²⁰⁹ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.3 (FC).

²¹⁰ "All created things worship Him, as servants their master" (John of Damascus, *On Divine Images*; cited in *St John Damascene on Holy Images*, trans. Mary H. Allies [London, UK: Thomas Baker, 1898], 104).

as from Him and through Him all creation takes its being and subsists.”²¹¹ In light of the Incarnation, John even calls attention to the goodness which inheres in matter itself.²¹²

When it came to the problem of natural evil, John was particularly indebted to Basil’s notion of creation’s universal usefulness. John classified the animals by their utility, admitting that some were to become useful only after the fall:

At the Creator’s command there came forth every sort of animal: creeping things, and wild beasts, and cattle. *Everything was for the suitable use of man.* Of the animals, some were for food, such as deer, sheep, gazelles, and the like; some for work, such as camels, oxen, horses, asses, and the like; still others for diversion, such as monkeys and such birds as magpies, parrots, and the like. Of the plants and herbs, some were fruit-bearing and some edible, and some, such as the rose and the like, were fragrant and flowering and were given us for our enjoyment; and still others were given us for the curing of diseases. For there is no animal or plant in which the Creator has not put some virtue that is of use for the needs of man. He knew all things before they were made and He saw that man in his freedom would fall and be given over to corruption; *yet for man’s suitable use He made all the things that are in the sky and on the earth and in the water.*²¹³

In other words, there was no need for animals to change their nature at the fall—they were proleptically constituted for postlapsarian life.²¹⁴ But this raises a question: how was *prelapsarian* man supposed to find usefulness in tapeworms or mosquitoes? John does not address this difficulty directly, but he says enough for us to reconstruct two of his probably responses. In the first place, “Before the fall, all things were subject to the control of man, because God had made him ruler over all the things on the

²¹¹ John of Damascus, *On Divine Images* (p. 105).

²¹² See John of Damascus, *On Divine Images* 1.16: “I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation!” (*John of Damascus on the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980], 23; quoted in Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation*, 43).

²¹³ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10 (emphasis added).

²¹⁴ Elsewhere John clearly grants prelapsarian corruptibility: “It is impossible to find in creation any image which exactly portrays the manner of the Holy Trinity in Itself. For that which is created is also compounded, variable, changeable, circumscribed, having shape, and corruptible. . . . It is evident that all creation is subject to these several conditions and that it is of its own nature subject to corruption” (John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.8).

earth and in the water.”²¹⁵ Perhaps, then, since man had complete authority over the animals, he could have easily kept mosquitoes away. On the other hand, no irrational animals were even allowed within the bounds of the garden, “but only man.”²¹⁶ That is, prelapsarian man coexisted with natural evils simply because he remained in the garden, while the evils remained outside.

When Adam fell, however, John says that “the creation subject to him rose up against this ruler appointed by the Creator.”²¹⁷ Here we need to interpret John carefully, lest we on this basis accidentally assign him the vitiated view. While those holding the fallen view of lower creation say that creation itself was changed, John is saying that only *creation's relationship to man* had changed, and that, only because man himself had changed. After all, in John's view, the basis for creation's goodness remains just as it had before: “the usefulness of the wild beasts is not even now past, because by exciting fear they bring man to recognize the God who made them and to call upon Him for help.”²¹⁸

Admittedly, John is somewhat inconsistent on this point, for he cites two natural effects of the fall: inclement weather (“violent rains” and “wintry storms”²¹⁹) as well as the production of thorns (“thorns grew out of the earth, as the Lord had declared.”²²⁰). John grants the latter on the authority of Scripture, but then, as if to defend creation's goodness, he writes, “the thorn was joined to sweetness of the rose.”²²¹ John's attribution of inclement weather to the fall, having no Scriptural basis, is more perplexing. Two explanations present themselves. First, perhaps John judged that weather patterns were originally under Adam's rule, so that, when he fell, they returned to their natural state. Alternatively, we should note that John is here following an apocryphal homily of Basil.²²² In that homily, Pseudo-Basil does not say that the prelapsarian earth was free from inclement

²¹⁵ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10.

²¹⁶ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.11.

²¹⁷ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10 (emphasis added).

²¹⁸ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10. Elsewhere, John wrote “God provides for all creation, and through all creation He does good and instructs” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 2.29).

²¹⁹ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10.

²²⁰ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10.

²²¹ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10.

²²² “Paradise . . . was a spot where no tempest raged, where there was no confusion of seasons, no inclement hail, no desolating whirlwind . . . no wintry frost was known” (Pseudo-Basil, Homily on Paradise; cited in *The Fathers Not Papists: Or, Six Discourses by the Most Eloquent Fathers of the Church*, trans. Hugh Stuart Boyd [Sidmouth, UK: J. Harvey, 1834], 72.)

weather, but only Paradise was. So while John used “earth” instead of “Paradise,” he may have done so absentmindedly, unaware that it introduced a contradiction into his protology.

If we accept this argument, then we can confidently place John of Damascus on the side of Augustine. In sum, John seems to have held that the earth was in no way marked by the fall, except that it was “condemned to bring forth thorns and thistles *for us*.”²²³ After all, a highly positive view of lower creation was the cornerstone of John’s defense of iconography: “I do not adore creation more than the Creator,” he wrote, “but I adore the creature created as I am.”²²⁴

Conclusions

In summary, from the Church Fathers’ scattered references to the moral status of lower creation, two main schools of thought can be identified. The first, which we have called the Irenaeian view, held that lower creation was immediately marred by the Fall of man. The Fathers subscribing to this view included Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, Origen, Ephrem the Syrian, John Chrysostom, and perhaps Jerome. Although these Fathers held diverse opinions as to the extent of nature’s degradation, they all shared Irenaeus’s underlying conviction: the present structure of lower creation is, because of the Fall, not how it was meant to be.

The second school of thought held the contrary: that lower creation was not changed at the Fall, although the sentence upon Adam frustrated his *relationship* to nature. This unvitiated view of lower creation was advanced by Fathers such as Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, Fulgentius, and John of Damascus. Since this position reached its most perfect form under Augustine—including the denial of natural evil, the recognition of prelapsarian predation, and the unconditional approbation of the created order—I have called it the Augustinian view. Again, it must be noted that I have not endeavored to categorize the many Fathers whose treatment of this subject was found wanting or nonexistent.

Throughout the preceding analysis, I mentioned points at which individual Fathers seemed to have made novel contributions to the theology of lower creation. It will serve to review the most salient developments here. With respect to the Irenaeian view, Theophilus of Antioch is owed the startling explanation that lower creation *deserved* the curse of Genesis 3:17–18. Irenaeus, on the other hand, was the first to argue that the earth’s cursing

²²³ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10 (emphasis added).

²²⁴ John of Damascus, *On Divine Images* (p. 5).

was an act of mercy, a rerouting of the punishment owed to man. Ephrem, lastly, suggested that lower creation, lacking the capacity to sin, could not suffer under the curse, although that curse was nonetheless real.

On the other side, Lactantius seems to have initiated the theological movement toward the Augustinian view, claiming that natural evils were a kind of necessary, higher-order good. Athanasius went further, discounting “evil” in nature as utterly superficial. Basil, however, was the first to apply Athanasius’s theory in the concrete: for Basil, poisonous plants and savage beasts had a prelapsarian existence. While Basil’s theology was further developed by the other Cappadocian Fathers as well as Ambrose, it was under Augustine’s care that the unvitiated view received its most thoroughgoing exposition, as just mentioned.

In addition to this most basic discovery—that the Church Fathers were not unanimous as to the fallenness of lower creation—several other ancillary observations should be noted. In the first place, the Fathers’ writings betray a marked temporal development. Most of the exponents of the Irenaean view occupied the first three centuries of Christianity, while their critics flourished in the post-Nicene era. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the Augustinian view emerged during the very century that Christian persecution subsided, a period which afforded the Church greater optimism with respect to outside forces, or in which a receding paganism diminished the risk that nature-veneration would devolve into pantheism. Second, the issue of creation’s fallenness seems not to have been polarized by political or geographical divides. Subscribers of both views were to be found in the East just as well as the West. Third, it is apparent that, though the effects of the fall were understood variously, the Church Fathers unanimously upheld the historicity of an original, primeval sin. Some Fathers were willing to interpret Genesis 3:17–18 metaphorically, but none went so far as to demythologize the fall itself. Fourth, a proleptic reckoning of lower creation pervaded the patristic era. Many of the Fathers held that lower creation, whether fallen or unfallen, was *intended* to exist in the state it does now, in order to provide for fallen man both physically and spiritually, as a gift and as a punishment. In all creation, “nothing exists without a reason,” says Basil.²²⁵

Nevertheless, for our purposes, the conclusion of greatest import is as follows. Despite that the Church Fathers were not unanimous on the fallenness of lower creation, *by the end of the patristic age, a consensus had emerged in support of the unvitiated view*. Not only that, but those who supported the unvitiated view generally set out their positions with greater

²²⁵ Basil, *Hexameron* 5.5.

confidence and they defended those positions with greater cogency, arguing by way of the goodness of God, the volitional nature of evil, and the beauty of the creation.

A final, cautionary note is in order. Though many of the Fathers held a remarkably high view of lower creation, they, unlike moderns, were unabashedly anthropocentric, never equating the dignity of man with that of animals, nor even daring to study animals (let alone love them) for their own sake. Augustine warns his readers as follows: “In the study of creatures we must not exercise an empty and futile curiosity, but should make them the stepping-stone to things unperishable and everlasting.”²²⁶ Lower creation is good, but the *reason* for its goodness is that man might find his Creator. So when we ask about the problem of natural evil, say, with the words of Augustine’s congregation—“Who gave the mosquito its stinger for sucking blood?”—we should still find much wisdom in Augustine’s reply: “You are amazed at the smallest things; *praise Him that is great.*”²²⁷

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²²⁶ Augustine, *On True Religion* 29.52 (cited in Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 4).

²²⁷ Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 148.8 (emphasis added; the first part is my translation [see note 1 above]).

Book Reviews

Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics by Reinhard Hütter (*Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019*), 493 pp.

IN *BOUND FOR BEATITUDE: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics*, Reinhard Hütter undertakes to “recapitulate, from a Thomist perspective and in critical dialogue with the late-modern philosophical and theological context, the primordial human vocation to the beatific vision” (387). In this recapitulation, Hütter seeks to recover for contemporary theology both a “sound teleological orientation” and the “privileged instrumentality of metaphysics” by means of an explication and defense of Saint Thomas’s theology of beatitude and the virtues (2). With insight and sensitivity into the sources and expressions of the contemporary intellectual and spiritual malaise that incapacitates the lasting achievement of both natural and supernatural happiness, *Bound of Beatitude* hits the mark as a contemporary *ressourcement* in Thomistic moral theology.

The nine chapters of the book are collected together from articles and lectures previously presented and published but are bookended by a prologue and epilogue that are new and substantial and give the book its unity. For this reason, however, the organization makes for an unusual experience for the reader (the prologue and epilogue make up, save the first chapter, the lengthiest sections of the book). In some ways, the book is organized as a study in Thomistic ethics set between a study in Thomistic eschatology. The prologue and first chapter, which substantially treat the first five questions of *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II and a metaphysical study of the finality of the created intellect, respectively, begin considerations that are not taken up again until the final chapter, on Marian exemplarity, and the epilogue, on the beatific vision. The extremities of the book thus take up the principle eschatological concerns, while the central chapters largely treat particular virtues under the formality of the distinction between the journey of the *viator* and the attainment of the *comprehensor*.

Following Saint Thomas, who notes at the outset of the *prima secundae* that “the end is the rule of whatever is ordained to the end,” Hütter uses the prologue to introduce elements of the formality of the end. It is Hütter’s contention that a careful reading of Saint Thomas’s Treatise on Happiness

(*ST* I-II, qq. 1–5) will do much to affect a *ressourcement* of the Thomistic theology of beatitude amidst contemporary anthropocentric views of human happiness. Hütter's treatment of these questions, which contain Saint Thomas's synthesis of Christian eschatology and Aristotelian ethics, is tremendously valuable and worth the reader's serious attention. This Thomistic synthesis resituates the *viator's* pursuit of happiness beyond an intra-mundane state of existential appreciation for the goods of this world, and rather upon a participation in divine happiness, in which resides the superabundant and surpassing plenitude of perfection sought in any object of earthly beatitude, accessible to our understanding only analogically. Crucially, by refocusing the attention in the pursuit of happiness upon a vision of the divine essence, the *viator* does not leave behind the promise of integral human happiness, insofar as "every genuine created good . . . is entailed in divine happiness, the possession of the perfect good" (13). This is a foundational judgment which allows Saint Thomas to likewise affirm the priority of the intellective vision for perfect happiness. In presenting this and other insights and attentively reading Saint Thomas, Hütter forcefully rearticulates the participatory, intellective, and theocentric character of human beatitude in response to modern objections.

In the first chapter, the longest of the interior chapters, on the finality of the created intellect or the question of the right articulation of the natural desire for the vision of God, Hütter undertakes to re-explicate the instrumental and indispensable role of metaphysics in *sacra doctrina* in relation to final human beatitude. Along these lines, Hütter presents a lengthy defense of the principle of finality in order to properly undergird his discussion of the finality of the rational agent in nature and grace, safeguarding the real openness of the created intellect to the knowledge of God as he is in himself, the gratuity of supernatural elevation, and the proportional integrity of human nature. Hütter's treatment of natural desire, a subject which he has taken up in his previous work *Dust Bound for Heaven*, is notable also for its adept use of the doctrine of specific obediential potency, acknowledged in distinction from a mere transmutation or capacity for miracle, for articulating the created intellect as elevable to a supernatural end.

The foundational judgment of the intellective character of human happiness, of a beatific vision of God in whom all perfections are found, extends into Hütter's treatment of natural law, prudence, and conscience (ch. 2), wherein he rightly notes that the human mind measures the will and human action but is itself a measured measure, being measured by the impressed teleological order of inclinations and ends, the created effect of the eternal law, the very *ratio* of the divine governance. This same *ratio*

likewise establishes the order of divine justice, from which the sinner defects by “any thought, word, or deed contrary to the eternal law” and through which he incurs the debt of punishment. In right order, then, Hütter next treats the satisfaction which Christ undertakes on behalf of sinners in order to liberate them for divine beatitude by the restoration of charity and inchoate union with the last end through the rectitude of the will (ch. 3).

The fourth and fifth chapters, respectively, treat the theological virtues of faith and charity, with special emphasis on the inchoate union with the last end brought about through sanctifying grace, both in faith wherein the intellect of the viator assents to the First Truth, which is the same First Truth of the vision in heaven but only insofar as it does not appear, and in charity, by which the *viator* comes to share in the divine life itself as united to God in friendship. For the sake of completion, it would have been fitting to also have a chapter on the theological virtue of hope to complement the chapters on faith and charity, but for this readers should look to his previous *Dust Bound for Heaven*. The sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters, the last treating ethical matters directly, take up defenses of the virtue of religion, the virtue of courage, and the virtue of chastity as essential for the integrity of the motion of the last end. In the sixth chapter, Hütter endeavors to recover the Thomistic doctrine of the virtue of religion as the preeminent moral virtue necessary for the rectitude of the will antecedent to final beatitude. In critical dialogue with five diverse uses of “religion” in “contemporary parlance,” this chapter is both characteristic of Hütter’s breadth of theological engagement and demonstrative of the dialogical potential of Thomas’s unique synthesis of religion as a virtue. The seventh and eighth chapters, on martyrdom considered as the highest act of the virtue of fortitude and the virtue of chastity and its contemporary antithesis, pornography, show just how Saint Thomas’s account of the passions and virtue can speak to our time, at once an age of addiction and an age of martyrs. In these final ethical considerations, Hütter’s exposition recalls especially the work of Josef Pieper in his famous treatment of the virtues. Though with more explicit Thomistic apparatus and contemporary research, Hütter, like Pieper, sounds the depth of the right order which the moral virtues conserve in man with relation to his natural and supernatural end.

In the final chapter and the epilogue, Hütter resumes certain eschatological considerations introduced in the opening chapters. In chapter 9, on Marian exemplarity, he explores the doctrine of the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, body and soul, as the eschatological exemplar of the Church and all the blessed, possessing in her own person

the embodied beatitude of the new heavens and the new earth. In his treatment, Hütter affirms that the Blessed Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven entails "the reality of created heaven . . . already in the world in which the *ecclesia militans* struggles on" (384). This created heaven, he tells us, "must have the extension of at least two human bodies," having "spatial extension, circumscription, and position." An intriguing question, which Hütter leaves unanswered, is whether the place of created heaven, though "in the world in which the *ecclesia militans* struggles on," is in principle traversable or contiguous with our present vale of tears.

In the epilogue, Hütter returns to the central thesis of the book, an account of human beatitude as a "theocentric vision," defending Saint Thomas's theology of the beatific vision against contemporary objections (387). In the first half of the epilogue, Hütter engages Saint Thomas's theology of beatitude as a synthesis of Latin and Greek patristic tradition in which the creature, by means of divine assistance, really attains God in an immediate vision while nevertheless remaining a creature of finite intellectual capacity. At the heart of Saint Thomas's theology of beatitude is the foundational metaphysical judgment that the attainment of God is never a loss of any created good. Rather, the vision of God constitutes the surest vision, possession, and enjoyment of the consummate good which is "equivalent to the vision of all that is a good" (408). With this in mind, Hütter counters contemporary critics of Saint Thomas, in particular the late New Natural Law theorist Germain Grisez, who assert that perfect happiness requires additional goods beyond the vision of the divine essence. Hütter skillfully demonstrates that these "paradisiacal" theologies of beatitude not only fail to understand what a vision of the divine essence must entail for human happiness but, even more tragically, implicitly fail to acknowledge any type of potency in human nature to be united to God and to participate in his own eternal life and felicity.

In the essays that are contained in this volume Hütter confidently engages a bewildering number of philosophical and theological viewpoints, both modern and contemporary. In so doing, the doctrine of Saint Thomas not only emerges all the more numinous, but Reinhard Hütter further solidifies his place as one of Saint Thomas's most reliable contemporary expositors. N.V

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Principles of Sacred Liturgy: Forming a Sacramental Vision by Christopher Carstens (*Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2020*), xxvi + 341 pp.

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, stipulated that the study of the sacred liturgy "is to be taught under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects" (§16). Such a holistic approach is a tall order. In contemporary liturgical studies, historical investigations have dominated the field, often along with considerations drawn from anthropology and sociology. Drawing heavily from the human sciences, much of postconciliar liturgical scholarship could be considered "liturgiology from below." Christopher Carstens, however, provides a genuinely theological methodology "from above" in his *Principles of Sacred Liturgy: Forming a Sacramental Vision*. At the same time, if the book is considered not from the perspective of the academy, but from the sanctuary, where practical liturgical decision-making often happens on the basis of personal taste, Carstens supplies much-needed objective theological principles for the liturgical life of Catholic parishes and dioceses.

Indeed, the author is uniquely qualified to mediate between the realms of the classroom and the parish liturgy committee. Carstens is both a visiting faculty member at the Liturgical Institute at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary, and long-time Director of the Office for Sacred Worship in the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin. He both teaches graduate students and fields parishioners' daily queries about the liturgy. Through both his work as editor of the *Adoremus Bulletin* and on the popular Liturgy Guys podcast, Carstens regularly engages in the work of translating a theological vision of the liturgy for a variety of audiences. His most recent book is no exception.

As the subtitle of the book suggests, Carstens wants his readers to *see* in a particular way, to perceive liturgical rites and symbols through a particular lens, in short, to form a sacramental vision. While the liturgy can be studied fruitfully under any number of aspects—history, aesthetics, ritual studies, rubrics—here the reader is offered a pair of sacramental glasses in order to gaze at the liturgy mystagogically. "One of the pastoral perks of the sacramental approach to the liturgy is that anybody, with some or all of the five senses, can access the signs and symbols of the liturgy and benefit from the hidden realities they contain" (157). Here is a theological method that bridges the divide between the professional liturgiologist and the faithful in the pew at Sunday Mass (who are themselves liturgists). The content of the liturgy is Christ and his Paschal mystery, and those who see rightly see in the various liturgical signs and symbols the person of Jesus.

The whole matter is one of liturgical formation: developing a vision that disposes one to encounter Christ in the liturgy and thus be transformed into his image.

The book presents this sacramental vision to the reader in three parts. First, Carstens begins with an exploration of the essence of the liturgy, the contents of which can serve to function as “the standards by which the liturgy is celebrated and evaluated” (3). The centerpiece from which this liturgical essence is derived is *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, but read in a very specifically determined hermeneutic of reform. Thus, the book first presents the thought of some major figures of the twentieth-century liturgical movement as the roots from which the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy sprang, and thus in light of which it should be understood. Then, ten main themes from the conciliar document itself are presented as a kind of liturgical examination of conscience. For instance: “The Liturgy Glorifies God and Sanctifies Humanity,” “The Liturgy Works in Mixed Sacramental Media,” and “The Liturgy is Radiantly Beautiful.” The principles are expounded from the conciliar text and the reader is invited to evaluate her own liturgical experience in light of each principle. Following his proposed hermeneutic of reform, the author then turns to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, drafted by Joseph Ratzinger and promulgated by Pope John Paul II, as “a reliable formator of the liturgical mentality” (24). In these two chapters, the focus is eminently Trinitarian: the liturgy is the work of the Holy Trinity in which the People of God participates. Finally, two chapters turn to the aforementioned Pontiffs, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both participants at the Second Vatican Council. Carstens examines John Paul II’s *Vicesimus Quintus Annus* and *Spiritus et Sponsa* and Pope Benedict XVI’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy* to highlight the nature of the liturgy as both encounter with Christ and right relation to God, respectively.

In the second part of the book, the author considers the rites of the liturgy. Following the lead of Romano Guardini, who famously asked whether modern people are still capable of the liturgical act, Carstens outlines ten essential characteristics of rite, showing how each is deeply reflective of human nature, while at the same time challenging to some aspects of the postmodernity that shapes contemporary worshipers. Moving from rite understood as smaller ritual units to the broader perspective of liturgical ritual families, the book presents a particularly helpful explanation of churches *sui iuris* and their ritual traditions which is simplified without being overly simplistic. The same chapter presents an unfortunately anemic and abbreviated account of liturgical inculturation. The second part of the book concludes with a chapter on the characteristics

of the Roman rite which walks the reader through the various stages of its development, from roots in human nature and Jewish culture, all the way through modern and postmodern culture, highlighting the unique contributions of each stage.

The heart of the book comes in part 3, which initiates the reader into the proposed sacramental vision. The nature and centrality of symbolic and sacramental media, from which liturgical rites are woven, requires formation by means of mystagogical catechesis. "Mystagogical catechesis (or simply 'mystagogy') works only when sacramentality is taken as the liturgical starting point, rather than within a historical, legal, or other context that does not directly account for the symbolic nature of the liturgy" (159). Thus, Carstens spends the bulk of the book walking the reader through the central elements of liturgical rite, searching out their meanings by examining the sources of the symbols in: "(1) nature, cosmos, and creation; (2) human nature and human culture; (3) the Old Testament; (4) the person and work of Christ; and (5) heaven" (161). He proceeds in this way, examining in turn various objects, postures, gestures, actions, liturgical language, liturgical time, ministers, music, art, and architecture. Thus, for instance, the person formed with this sacramental vision and drawing from these various fonts of meaning will look at the first day of the week and see in Sunday "Christ through the images of work and rest, marriage and freedom, life and light, Spirit and Second Coming" (221).

Perhaps the most engaging elements of the book, and those that most potently serve to immerse the reader in the proposed sacramental vision, are the specific examples the author provides of applying this method to various elements of rite. Thus, he describes how the dedication of an altar contains symbols such as sprinkling with holy water and anointing with chrism, which evoke images of Christian initiation, completed once the altar receives for the first time the Body of Christ, all symbolizing the altar's "regeneration into an image of Christ" (321). Again, the blessing of the Paschal candle includes the cutting of a cross into it with a stylus which "indelibly marks the candle as 'Christian,' much as the sacramental character of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders brand the recipient permanently as belonging to Christ" (171). Examples such as these demonstrate that the vision which the author proposes has real substance and is not a mere mirage.

In addition to drawing the meaning of liturgy's symbols from their various sources, the author contextualizes many of them in their larger theological frameworks. So, for instance, sacramental language is placed within the context of a God who speaks, the Trinitarian God who has an interior Word, and so speaks creation into being. "The story ends with

receptive and Spirited hearts hearing their Mother, the Church, resounding the saving Word again and again until a marvelous epilogue ('after the Word!'), where the Trinity's Word resounds eternally among echoing souls. This story of the Word and his words makes fertile soil from which Mother Church's mother tongue can develop and pray a truly authentic sacramental language" (184). The reader is treated not infrequently to passages as poetic as this one.

While I have suggested that Carstens's approach could be considered one "from above," he by no means ignores what nature and human culture contribute to the meaning of the liturgy. In fact, he insists on these dimensions. They remain, however, theological realities. Nature and the cosmos contribute meaning to the liturgy precisely as the creation which springs forth from the Creator. Symbols drawn from human cultures "not only signify the worship man gives God, but symbolize God's grace and life offered to man" (162).

Undoubtedly, the breadth of this book stands out as an achievement, treating practically every topic found in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Its theological method employs a hermeneutic able to achieve a cohesive and comprehensive sacramental vision of the liturgy as a whole and in each of its component elements. In this vision, the liturgy is shown to be intimately connected to the Trinitarian God, the Word become flesh, the mystery of the Church, and the entire economy of salvation. In other words, Carstens displays the beauty of harmony in a theological vision of the liturgy. Also laudable is the conspicuous absence of any polemic that can all too easily work its way into any variety of liturgical agendas of even the most academic sort. In short, Carstens has produced an effective tool for use in the work of liturgical formation.

Where the book benefits from its breadth, it suffers in depth. Certainly, this is necessarily the case, lest the work become encyclopedic, and thus less useful. However, the reader entrenched in the daily work of parish or diocesan liturgy will certainly be left wanting for practical advice. The book masterfully addresses first things first, concentrating on the broader theological principles which should be involved in liturgical decision-making. Nevertheless, readers will undoubtedly wish to ask the author, "so where *should* the tabernacle be placed?" Or "should we use guitars at Mass or not?" Or "when should our parish use extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion?"

Carstens's book will be of particular value to those who live and breathe the Church's liturgical rites: seminarians, priests, deacons, and the faithful who desire a deeper engagement with the meaning of the liturgies in which they participate. It also has the potential to provide common theological

principles for those finding themselves in gridlock over practical liturgical matters. The book also offers a healthy counterbalance for those whose liturgical formation was primarily of the historical sort. On the other hand, those staunchly rooted in the diachronic approach to liturgy may find the book naively ahistorical, and those in parish ministry could find the book often frustratingly impractical. Hence, Carstens's book fills a definite lacuna in the field by proposing a genuinely theological method for the study of liturgy. It should not, however, stand alone, and needs to be supplemented in any basic course on the liturgy by sources stressing historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects. N&V

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Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition by Hans Boersma (*Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018*), xx + 467 pp.

HANS BOERSMA'S PROJECT over the past decade or so has largely been to establish a theology of what he calls "sacramental ontology." *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* is an excellent addition to this ongoing project. In this book, Boersma advocates for a "sacramental understanding of the beatific vision" that "takes seriously the teleological character of history" (10). At the onset Boersma makes the point that our teleological "gaze," so to speak, needs to shift from the spatial or vertical metaphor to a more horizontal or temporal metaphor in which "we anticipate seeing God at the end of our lives and, particularly, at the end of history" (10). This metaphor, Boersma argues, more accurately demonstrates that "the telos or purpose of our lives is the vision of God (*visio Dei*) in Christ" (10). Thus, "we could interpret life as a pilgrimage to a sacred place and . . . treat history as an apprenticeship that aims at acquiring a skill" (10).

In order to shift this metaphor, Boersma does not simply "rehearse in any detail the Catholic debate surrounding the supernatural" (11). Rather, he goes "beyond the broader metaphysical issue of the sacramental relationship between nature and the supernatural to the question of what it means to conceive of the beatific vision sacramentally" (11). The primary question Boersma asks is: "If the beatific vision is our ultimate telos, then how does

God's economy," or as he deems it in the last chapter, "God's pedagogy," work in line with our ultimate end? (11–12). Boersma concludes that "just as the pilgrims would sing the Songs of Ascent (Pss. 120–134) on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so we contemplate Christ in anticipation of the face-to-face vision of God in Christ. *A truly sacramental understanding of the beatific vision, therefore, points us to the recognition of the real presence of Christ already in this life, in anticipation of the beatific vision of God in the hereafter*" (13–14, emphasis original).

This book is divided into four parts, which are primarily organized chronologically. Part 4 breaks from the strict chronological presentation in order to propose a "dogmatic appraisal" of our conception of the beatific vision in light of the previous three chapters. While this book is not intended to be a historical analysis of a particular idea per se, Boersma does a good job of grounding his argument historically, as well as tracing the idea of the beatific vision within the greater Christian tradition.

The introduction and first chapter introduce the contemporary context for Boersma's appraisal of the doctrine of the beatific vision. He begins his book with the questions, "Why beatific vision?" and "Why make the claim that seeing God is the purpose of our life?" (1). Calling specifically upon the metaphor found in Christian tradition of the beatific vision as the telos of human life, Boersma explains that the metaphor of "seeing God" is found in Scripture, which influences a "system of analogies" (spirals) that point to Christ as the archetypal "sacramental reality (*res*) in which the various historical events (the types) inhere or participate as sacraments (*sacramenta*)" (9). Paraphrasing Edward Pusey, Boersma explains that "Christ—who is in his person the embodiment of the eternal Word or Son of God—is the sacramental reality (*res*) in which sacramental types (*sacramenta*) find their truth or identity" (9).

Part 1, "Beatific Vision in Early Christian Thought," begins with chapter 2 and focuses on the Platonic and neo-Platonic roots of early Christian theologies of the beatific vision. Chapter 2, "Philosophy and Vision," looks at how Plato and Plotinus help to set the philosophical stage for early Christian theological exploration into the nature of seeing divine beauty and virtue. Chapter 3, "Progress and Vision," is dedicated to Gregory of Nyssa's notion of spiritual progress in his *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, *The Life of Moses*, and *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Chapter 4, "Anticipation and Vision," looks to Augustine for guidance into the on the sacramental character of the beatific vision and the nature of our longing for the presence of God.

Part 2, "Beatific Vision in Medieval Thought," addresses how a theology of the beatific vision manifests in medieval thought. As was seen in

the representation of Eastern Christian thought with Gregory of Nyssa and Western Christian thought with Augustine in the first part, Boersma is keen to pair Eastern and Western thinkers together to demonstrate the beatific vision in medieval tradition. In chapter 5, Thomas Aquinas (Western) and Gregory of Palamas (Eastern) are discussed in conjunction in order to address the relationship between the Transfiguration and the beatific vision. Chapter 6 pairs Symeon the New Theologian with John of the Cross to investigate the relationship of mystical vision and union with Christ. Boersma investigates Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa on faculties and vision in chapter 7. Finally, chapter 8 looks to Dante to explain the relationship of speech and listening to the notion of beatific vision.

Part 3, “Beatific Vision in Protestant Thought,” traces the notion of “seeing God” in the thought of John Calvin and John Donne and follows this trajectory into an investigation of Puritan and Dutch Reformed articulations of the beatific vision (ch. 11), which ends with an analysis of Jonathan Edwards’s modification of Thomas Aquinas’s notion of the beatific vision in chapter 12.

Part 4 breaks from the chronological presentation in order to propose a “dogmatic appraisal” of our conception of the beatific vision in light of the previous three chapters, though Nicholas of Cusa and Jonathan Edwards are examined together in a section called, “Pedagogy and Providence in Nicholas of Cusa and Jonathan Edwards.” Part 4 as a whole looks at the theological language of beatific vision as a form of pedagogy that prepares us in this life for our ultimate meeting of God in the eschaton. At its core, Boersma’s notion of pedagogy demonstrates his thesis that we should shift our thinking of our life of faith as it is experienced in history from a vertical notion of relationship with the divine to a more horizontal relationship. In this model, our experience of life here on earth as both individual and collective is understood as a pilgrimage in which the telos, or final end, is found in our vision of God at the end of history itself.

One difficulty with Boersma’s analysis is his conclusion that we do see the essence of God in the beatific vision, rather than taking more seriously the distinction between essence and energies, as is alluded to in Gregory of Nyssa and spelled out in Gregory of Palamas. While this distinction—between essences and energies—is not as significant in Western Christianity, if Boersma is serious about following closely the Platonic (and neo-Platonic) trajectory of Eastern tradition, as he seems to be in part 1, then allowing this rather large distinction to be eclipsed by Thomas’s theology becomes somewhat difficult to fathom, since Nyssa and Palamas follow more closely the Platonic underpinnings that Boersma is careful to set up in chapters 2–3. While ultimately Boersma finds much common

ground between Aquinas and Palamas regarding a theology of the Transfiguration, the distinction between essences and energies is significant for Palamas and is arguably what places him more in line with the Greek Platonic tradition than some other medieval theologians. A corrective for this difficulty, rather than outrightly dismissing Palamas, would have been to provide (in ch. 5) historical context for the reason Palamas's theology developed such as it did. This historical context in turn could provide for Boersma a more nuanced and stable way to explain why he favors Thomas's explanation over Palamas's for our contemporary context.

The voices Boersma engages for this study are diverse. Voices from within the Eastern and Western traditions, including Protestant voices, are engaged on seemingly equal theological footing. However, it seems a bit of an oversight to avoid more prominent Anglican and Wesleyan sources on the topic of the beatific vision, since the theology is of major concern for theologians such as the Caroline Divines, John and Charles Wesley, and Oxford Movement theologians, such as John Keble and John Henry Newman (who ultimately converted to Roman Catholicism). While Boersma introduces some of the thoughts of Oxford Movement theologian and Hebrew scholar Edward Pusey in the first ten pages of the book, Anglican voices remain mostly silent in this work as a whole. What is interesting about many Anglican voices, particularly those of the Caroline Divines and Oxford Movement theologians, is that in they are engaging early Christian sources that are often today thought of as more inclined to Eastern Christian neo-Platonism, though filtered through a particularly English lens, which naturally has much in common with Western or continental notions of the beatific vision.

Similarly, the more contemporary Catholic *Ressourcement* movement of mid-twentieth-century Catholicism, would also have provided an interesting lens through which to view how the greater Christian tradition was being incorporated into relatively recent theological discourse during a shifting theological climate. Theologians such as Louis Bouyer, Henri de Lubac, and Jean Daniélou all engaged the idea of the beatific vision during a period in Catholic history that was shifting theologically away from a more propositional/speculative pedagogical model and exploring ways in which various sources from within the Catholic tradition could expand the way we think about our experience of God.

While perhaps a stretch for Boersma's argument, it should be noted that the idea of life as a pilgrimage in which the final aim is essentially to "see" God in the beatific vision also has roots in Jewish tradition and Semitic Christian traditions, which are more prevalent in Orthodox Christianity than Western Christianity. While following the Platonic and neo-Platonic

trajectory through both Eastern and Western historical figures certainly paints a complete enough picture for this book, figures outside the Platonic and neo-Platonic paradigm also share in the notion of a beatific vision, though they are less familiar. Perhaps a second study could look at how figures such as Isaac the Syrian and Ephrem the Syrian would help to demonstrate both the Semitic roots of the idea and an alternative to the reliance upon neo-Platonism, as well as provide an even greater diversity of ways the doctrine is expressed within the greater Christian tradition.

Boersma is to be commended for this study. The idea of shifting our thinking to a pilgrimage analogy in which our earthly lives are a preparation for “seeing” God provides our temporal experience of prayer (and life in general) with an ultimate aim and purpose. It also gives our short lives here on earth a sense of preparation for our journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. Theologically, the trajectory of this study—to trace the Platonic and Christian neo-Platonic roots of the beatific vision in early Christian thinkers, through the most influential names in Eastern and Western medieval theology, through prominent Protestant thinkers (including lesser-known Reformed thinkers) in order to demonstrate to a contemporary audience that, through our participation in a sacramental beatific vision here on earth, we are preparing to participate in the ultimate eschatological beatific vision—is not an easy task. Thus, it should be noted that the suggestions provided here are meant to further the conversation on this incredibly important theological topic, rather than simply to point out criticism. N&V

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Liturgical Mysticism by David Fagerberg (*Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019*), 200 pp.

IN THIS COMPELLING BOOK, David Fagerberg urges Christians to have their thinking arise from their worship. To worship the triune God is to have one’s being penetrated with the truths and symbols of the Paschal mystery. Slowly, developmentally, relationally, these truths inhabit the mind and rebirth it with a true *metanoia*. Such a change of thinking is analogical to a man moving from a bachelor mind in order to welcome a new and other-encompassing spousal mind. The Eucharistic

liturgy is mind-altering. A person's vulnerable and regular participation in the liturgy is life changing. Within the Eucharistic liturgy, theologians and mystics are born and sustained, their identities and mission deepened and secured (ix). Such a view of liturgy is never possessed by all in the Church, due to the weight and drag of sin and human finitude. Those who do embrace such a view long to have the liturgy transform them into icons of Christ (x). Such icons become living windows through which the secular culture can view divine love affecting a person. Even though such personal transformation is being accomplished within a liturgical life, most of what happens in each liturgy is, at levels, imperceptible to sensation or consciousness. Divine life is being communicated to the soul akin to how bodily nutrition enters the bloodstream—silently, inexorably, but vitally. No, we do not “feel” the Mass in a dramatic way, no matter how we tinker with music, preaching, and architecture. We benefit from the Mass as one benefits from food: It keeps us living. The Mass keeps us safe unto eternal life. The liturgy is like a huge iceberg where what we see “isn't the half of it.” What Fagerberg wants to know in this powerful work of theology that he has written is simple: How are individual believers affected by what is happening beneath the waterline? (83). What is happening inside of a person while he or she participates in the liturgy?

This book is an exploration of liturgical mysticism. If we were to read Fagerberg prayerfully and with pastoral hearts, a new appreciation of what ecclesial formation is would be embraced. Fagerberg's work is a meditation on how Catholics are being saved by Christ, on how one is formed into salvation. Fagerberg breathes the liturgy, theology, and pastoral life with both lungs. His mind is oxygenated in a unique way. It is a mind that nourishes others and forms others to be formators themselves. With this current text and his previous two—*On Liturgical Asceticism* (2013) and *Consecrating the World* (2016)—we have a formation library for mystical (sacramental) Catholicism. What is happening beneath the waterline of the liturgical iceberg is this: “Liturgy is the perichoresis of the Trinity kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification” (30). We are used to Fagerberg being in harmony with the Eastern masters and his beloved Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanagh, and Jean Corbon; but here he is dancing more fully with the West (Louis Bouyer, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Blessed Dom Marmion, Jean Daniélou) and inviting us all to listen to the full orchestra that captivates him. And the music enchanting him is the melody of life rising from within the liturgy, from Christ's own ongoing vim and vigor shared as grace. This life is purifying, securing a clearer sense of the Christian faith as mystical. The mystic is a person who seeks the face of Jesus and beholds his mysteries unto a change

of heart. Paradoxically, we become mystics by allowing the Holy Spirit *to lift us up* and abduct us by his *own descent* at the liturgy. The mystic is one who is “ascending” all through his or her own mundane life. The mystic himself is a “presence in the mundane of supernatural things” (37), because his life is the life of the liturgy. The mystic lives life *as* a liturgical being, as one formed in the ways of Christ in and through liturgical worship. To be a mystic is to travel the road of formation, of asceticism. By this road, the very One whose face the Church seeks, Christ, becomes *our own face for others*. When our life is over and the liturgy has etched its truth into our being, we will no longer say prayers; we will have become a prayer (44). Christ’s own shared life transfigures us until our life is a holy communion. Gabriel Marcel once said, “[the] deepest part of me is another.” That union with that Other is what the liturgy is rendering and making apparent to onlookers: “He is a saint, a mystic.” Progressively, the liturgy makes us holy; and holiness is seen in behavior, in bodies—bodies suffused with the life of God. This is what pastoring is about: leading people to the food on the altar, a life of consuming and, therefore, becoming other Christs (57).

Fagerberg understands human nature well and is no dreaming romantic proffering abstract ways to human transformation. Worship, as a passive experience, is inert. The liturgy is offered to engage us, not simply to satisfy an obligation of justice. Fagerberg knows that our “self-love must be killed” if we are ever to “know” God in the ascension that the liturgy affords. Sin is too weighty to ascend. Hence, he provides a succinct and novel approach to understanding the seven deadly sins as well. These sins are deadly because they prevent our participation in the life-giving and indwelling mystery. “The sacraments cannot take root in hardened hearts.” The Cross is the content and invitation of the liturgy; there, it is celebrated as love and transmitted as life. “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). The rest, however, is the consolation of being with Christ on the Cross, paradoxical rest indeed. “We are content to downgrade mystical faith to a religious morality, hoping to keep just enough of the Ten Commandments to squeeze past judgment day. But . . . the Holy Spirit will not stop his disciplines [asceticism] until we are perfect [mystics], as our Father in heaven is perfect” (88). Fagerberg pleads with the Church to engage with their faith as communion and not reduce it to “ethics.” Catholicism is a religion of following Christ, not one of following a code. It is a mystery lived, not rules kept. It is abiding in holy communion, not self-care (89). Christ is *kallos*. Christ is the beauty that *calls out the goodness* in us. A sustained life of contemplating his beauty, and abiding in it liturgically, leads to moral conversion to goodness, holiness. Moving through the cross of asceticism and into eager contemplation, where the Christ is

habitually beheld, gives birth to a holiness characterized by generosity and gratitude. Participating in Christological love invites us to shoulder the pain of leaving our habitual sins behind, renouncing idolatry. There is pain in renunciation because we love our sins. We must replace this bent love for the true orientation point of our human dignity: love of the Cross, and the Cross as love. When sin is passed through, we experience ourselves as resurrected persons birthed in the liturgy. Because of this, we are subsumed in gratitude and awe. From such persons come the deepest of Christian lives. These lives give witness to him who has grasped them in love (100).

The liturgy is our way to fullness of life. It makes us whole; it sustains us, defines us, and secures us in eternal life *if* we commit ourselves to it. Commitment to worship, Holy Communion, orders us through life and gifts us with a secured identity, an identity suffused with peace and eternal rest (105). This commitment to and ordering of desire passes through obedience. And obedience gifts us with the loss of self-interest and the birth of fascination with the Other. The liturgical way is a spousal journey. It is the primordial spousal way that sacramental marriage achingly longs to be fulfilled within. Sadly, humans hunger “for lesser things” than God (112), and each person’s life is a drama making its way, hopefully, toward a comedic end: where we will come to dwell with Christ in reality and reject a life “where we are all too easily pleased” (114).

Heaven begins here on earth in and through the Eucharistic liturgy (142). In sharing in the divine life at the Eucharistic liturgy, the Paschal mystery, we live a life of liturgical mysticism (127). As we participate in the Eucharistic mystery, Christ is moving the world toward its fulfillment. “Behold the Lamb of God” and contemplate the telos of the world. It is already present, pervading, moving out and among and within creation to bring all things into Christ. All of creation is in expectation of what the Eucharistic liturgy is enacting through history—Christ being All in All (137).

This book is one of beautiful prose leading the reader inexorably to prayer as it succinctly articulates theology at its liturgical core. Taking time with the text will reward the reader with time with God. It is laid out over seven chapters, leading us into the liturgy, through the meaning of liturgical mysticism, to ponder the necessity of moral conversion in the face of divine beauty, and finally, leaving the reader to think about the very fulfillment of creation in the One through whom all things were made. It is a perfect book for Christian formation of all varieties and levels, especially of clerics and theologians. N.V

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Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasure of an Intellectual Life by Zena Hitz (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020*), 208 pp.

THE PAST DECADE has witnessed a rapid decline in the humanities. We see this concretely in Catholic universities, where philosophy and theology departments have been facing increasing pressure to reduce or eliminate requirements. This movement, which makes a great deal of sense from a practical perspective, nevertheless points to a fundamental belief that intellectual activity or learning is ultimately and only valuable as it is productive. Humanities departments have largely ceded the premise. Thus, it is not rare to find departmental ads emphasizing the importance of humanities for developing “critical thinking skills,” skills that can be usefully applied in the real world. Consider, for instance, the absurdity of encouraging students to study ancient Greek and Latin as a means to memorizing vocabulary for medical or law school. Zena Hitz argues in *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* that such arguments are not merely banal and beside the point; they are “false and destructively so” (203). Intellectual life ought to be considered desirable first and foremost because it is worthwhile for its own sake.

Hitz provides a fresh meditation on the love of learning, drawing from her life experience within and without the academy. Having obtained a tenure-track position at a major university, Hitz grew increasingly disillusioned with the sort of learning that consisted solely in memorization and repetition. She left academia for a few years to learn the value of manual labor and true service at the Madonna House. Today, she is a tutor at her alma mater, St. John’s College, which uses the discussion and seminar format with a curriculum made up of the Great Books of Western civilization. Drawing on a variety of figures (both fictive and real), Hitz provides a glimpse into what the intellectual life looks like in real life.

In the first chapter, she reflects on the love of learning as such, and its companions, contemplation and leisure. Here we see that what underlies the intellectual life is a certain sense of wonder that “escapes” mere appearance to attain the truth. Next, Hitz addresses the sources of corruption of the intellectual life: *curiositas* or “love of spectacle,” which refuses to go beyond the surface. The intellectual life is ordered not simply to what delights the senses, but to deeper matters of truth, beauty, and goodness. The moment knowledge of higher truths is sought purely as a means to lower goods, learning is corrupted. In the third and final chapter, Hitz explores the relationship between the love of learning and the reality of human suffering in the world. Here, she considers the uselessness of knowledge pursued for its own sake and the desire to “make a difference.”

Hitz helpfully distinguishes between true service and what she refers to as “corrosive forms of activism” (164).

According to Hitz, the intellectual life does not fall exclusively within the purview of the “professional” academic. As is well known, academia can and often does pervert the intellectual life. The noise of publication pressures, conferences, and administrative meetings can extinguish even the most ardent desire for truth. True learning, Hitz tells us, has an ascetic character. It requires a certain sheltering from the world, which is “governed by ambition, competition, and idle thrill seeking” (53). Inasmuch as it is valuable for its own sake, true learning is only found by the pure in heart, freed from the “pressure to produce economic, social, or political outcomes” (23). It is no accident that Einstein wrote his seminal papers cloistered in a patent office, or that the French mathematician André Weil would speak of his time in prison as providing the advantage of “pure and disinterested research” (67).

If intellectual activity is not the sole property of academia, it is because it is a natural human good. As such, it is essential to human beings and indicates our dignity (110). This has implications for academics. The academic task is not to “produce reams of research, much of it completely disconnected from any recognizable human question” (200), nor is it merely to prepare students to be able to exercise critical thinking; rather, the goal of the teacher is to restore “the person-to-person transmission of the habits of mind that underlie all serious thinking, reflection, and discovery” (199).

Though of obvious interest for the academic, *Lost in Thought* is not solely for the “professional.” Instead, it is meant for anyone in pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. Hitz’s book, which reflects in its tone the discussion style, does not present a concise philosophical argument as to why intellectual activity is and ought to be the highest and ultimate end toward which we aim. Instead, her apologia for the intellectual life arises organically from a consideration of countless examples of the life of the mind. It is a worthwhile and thought-provoking book.

Reading *Lost in Thought* left me with two questions. First, I wonder whether speaking of the intellectual life so emphatically in terms of escape or refuge from the world does not inadvertently risk portraying it primarily in negative terms (based on what is, in fact, accidental to it). A reader may get the impression that the intellectual life is no more than a haven away “from the tide of lies and falsehood”—in which case it might reasonably be posed as one alternative among many other forms of escape; indeed, Hitz sometimes juxtaposes it to non-intellectual activities such as beekeeping, growing tomatoes, or knitting (84).

Secondly, I wonder whether it might not be helpful to think of the various objects of intellectual inquiry in terms of a hierarchy of goods. Hitz in one place speaks of intellectual activity as “one good among others” (110). While there are clearly other goods besides intellectual activity, nevertheless, Hitz does not ever explicitly draw a link between intellectual activity and the highest good. It is certainly implied. Hitz suggests that certain objects “might be better or worse suited to satisfy us” (33), but she never addresses the question directly. Furthermore, if intellectual activity is highest, are we able to identify a single and absolutely ultimate *object* for the intellect’s activity? To be sure, an answer to this query appears indirectly in Hitz’s meditation on Our Lady (60–63) and her treatment of Saint Augustine (145–48), but these are merely two examples among many others (e.g., Albert Einstein, Malcolm X, Johann Goethe, W. E. B. Du Bois, Antonio Gramsci, to name a few). No doubt, Hitz leans in a certain direction (44), but her sometimes polite reluctance to impose on the reader (evidenced in her repeated proposals of the possible array of objects for intellectual activity; see 28, 33, 71, 95) has the unwitting consequence of gliding over a theological and philosophical question that naturally arises from her inquiry. If intellectual activity constitutes the highest good for humans, what object (assuming that it is the object that specifies the act of knowing) should humans aim at in order to be ultimately happy?

The Catholic teaching is that human happiness consists finally in the contemplation of God himself in the *visio Dei*. We were created to contemplate not just any truth, but Truth and Goodness itself, revealed to us in the Incarnation of the Word. Thus, intellectual activity (as supernaturally perfected by grace) is not one good among others, nor merely a refuge from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Rather, it is that toward which all human beings are called as created *ad imaginem Dei*. In this vein, Hitz’s meditation on Mary’s love of study, with God as its object, already gestures toward the solution to the question posed above. Our Lady serves as a model not only for Christian believers (61), but for all of humanity. N&V

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Remain in Me: Holy Orders, Prayer, and Ministry by James Keating
(Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2019), 92 pp.

IF POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI had cast his inaugural 2005 encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* as a handbook for clerics—a kind of magisterial handbook for priestly formation—it would have looked a lot like Deacon Keating’s latest. *Remain in Me* is a short work whose main emphasis is ultimately something quite large: God as love and his divine invitation for each of his ordained ministers to unite and thus represent the convergence of agape and eros. Recall that memorable line from the Holy Father on the stern-minded tendency to separate love into something human or divine, sacred or secular: “Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life” (*Deus Caritas Est* §7). To combat this kind of senseless separation, James Keating has written a work aimed at the unity of ministries, the unity of one’s own psyche, and the unity of loves.

Proceeding in five main sections, *Remain in Me* opens with “Spiritual Direction” (1–23) and offers sagacious advice for those involved in giving spiritual direction. All the ordained are called to this ministry in one way or another publicly; all the baptized are by extension also called to be able to guide the seekers and counsel the lost. As such, spiritual direction for Keating takes on a multicolored hue, but his best advice is when he teaches deacons and priests that, “as we slowly become clerics who *are prayer* and not simply ones who *say prayers*, the Spirit can more easily speak through us to the infinite variety of needs and wounds our people bring to us for healing, . . . the establishing of creative listening in our hearts” (19). This chapter ends with very practical points on how to help guide souls who are thirsty for greater trust and surrender in the Lord. Chapter 2, “Suffering Temptations” (24–38) is an invitation to see not all things necessarily as God’s will but certainly as his invitations, citing Newman, to see all as gift. If God is love, he can have no other response to us creatures than that of love, and so even in our sufferings and temptations, the unconquerable love of God is ever present. This is what Keating calls “spiritual intimacy,” in that it is a way of uniting our most personal and persistent wounds with those crucified wounds which alone heal. The ordained have a special role here: “As servants of the gospel, we are always attending to the Word of the Lord and the cry of the poor. Simultaneously, Christ is attending to the cry of the minister’s voice. This is the triangulation of consolation that is the clerical vocation: he reveals his love, we live vulnerably in an ongoing

receptivity to his love, and we are sent in this love to pour the gospel into the pain of the needy” (35).

In “Prayer Renewed” (39–56) we revisit what we all once knew but have perhaps put behind the business of parish life and the efficiency in simply praying to produce a well-crafted sermon. Prayer is a matter of an “I–Thou” relationship that demands the same personal presence, investment in time and in the space of being together, that any relationship requires. Here there are no lofty demands but the practical suggestions that to pray well is to be ourselves and to talk to the triune Persons as friends who are more committed to our salvation than we are. Keating is devoted especially to the Sacred Heart of Christ and suggests this symbol of perfect love as a focal point for our desire for communion. The ordained are called to pray in a very unique and public way, and Keating is masterful in representing Holy Orders not as a function but as a new way to pray. “Ministry” (57–73) and “United in Holy Orders” (74–81) form a diptych in how to see diaconal and priestly ordination as two complementary ways of representing the serving love of Christ to the world. If nothing else, these ordained men are to be extensions of the Great Bridegroom’s oblation: his gift to the world as Teacher, Shepherd, Priest, and Spouse, roles that both the diaconate and the priesthood make manifest in this world. What is most freeing in these pages is Keating’s call to detect where one’s ministry is evaluated by a moral perfectionism that usually goes undetected and therefore works in a secret toxicity to keep followers of Christ from knowing the freedom and flourishing he wills for all.

This is a highly recommended work for any working in seminaries and diaconal formation programs, or for anyone actively involved in spiritual direction under the aegis of the Catholic Church. Keating writes well and here very concisely. It is a work therefore full of very practical points and easy to read summaries, and full of the wisdom of a man who has served God’s people for years. N&V

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Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism by Joshua A. Berman (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017*), xi + 318 pp.

THE “DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS” for Pentateuchal composition, which with Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) found its most famous expression, is arguably the prime example of source-critical analysis within biblical studies. That hypothesis had a long history of development,¹ but already from its clearest mature expression with Wellhausen elicited scholarly criticism from a variety of corners. Such criticisms have continued, across confessional and disciplinary boundaries, for more than a century. Joshua Berman’s own work has proved to be an important contribution to this scholarly tradition of challenges to traditional source criticism, which has received insufficient attention.² In light of this topic I think it is important first to situate Berman’s present work in its appropriate context.

Challenges to source-critical developments and the documentary hypothesis of Pentateuchal composition have been leveled by scholars every step of the way, even if such critiques have often been ignored. In 1911 J. Iverach Munro published his now forgotten *The Samaritan Pentateuch and Modern Criticism*, which argued against the late divisions of the documentary hypothesis by underscoring how similar the Samaritan Pentateuch was to the Jewish and Christian Pentateuch. If, however, Wellhausen and his fellow source critics were correct about their designations of J material to the south, E material to the north, and P and D coming out of the south after the exile, then you would expect northern Samaritans to have a Pentateuch basically containing almost exclusively E material. Then in 1919, Princeton Theological Seminary professor Robert Dick Wilson published a short article arguing against dividing sources in the Pentateuch based on the different names for God in his study of the Qur’an’s use of names for God, which all scholars agreed had a unitary authorship.³ In 1928 Augustin Bea, future cardinal and president of the mixed commission responsible for the final form of Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, published the first edition of his *De Pentateucho*, arguing primar-

¹ See, e.g., Scott W. Hahn and Jeffrey L. Morrow, *Modern Biblical Criticism as a Tool of Statecraft (1700–1900)* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020), 97–152, 196–212.

² See, e.g., Joshua Berman, “CTH 133 and the Hittite Provenance of Deuteronomy 13,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. (2011): 25–44, on the antiquity of Deuteronomy 13.

³ Robert Dick Wilson, “The Use of ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ in the Koran,” *Princeton Theological Review* 17 (1919): 644–668.

ily on internal literary grounds for the unity and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, point-by-point against the primarily internal literary grounds argued against that traditional view. In 1934, the Orthodox Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto published his lesser known *La questione della Genesi*, which brought the burgeoning Semitic philological field, including the only recently deciphered Ugaritic, to bear on the question of hypothetical documentary sources. This, along with his later and more popular *The Documentary Hypothesis* (1941), argued persuasively from linguistic and stylistic grounds for distinctions in divine names and alleged double narratives which recourse to a single author was sufficient to explain.⁴ P. J. Wiseman, father of renowned Assyriologist Donald Wiseman, published his own amateur account, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*, in 1936, in which he argued on literary grounds, in light of archaeological findings from Babylon, for unitary authorship. Between 1937 and 1956, the renowned Jewish scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann published his multi-volume *The Religion of Israel* (not fully translated into English), wherein he took on the late dating of the so-called “priestly” material of the Torah, arguing for its antiquity, contrary to the foundations of the documentary hypothesis. In light of the extensive research into single authors in the ancient Near East using multiple titles and names for an individual deity (especially in Ugaritic, but also Egyptian and other languages), most scholars have abandoned that as an indicator of multiple authorship, despite its persistence in textbooks.

Cyrus Gordon tells his experience as a secular Jewish scholar with no commitment in the debate about authorship or antiquity of the Pentateuch, but one who was immersed in the study of texts from the ancient Near East—which forced him to reconsider the source-critical assumptions in which he was trained:

while at Dropsie [College] I reread the description of Utnapishtim’s ark in the Gilgamesh Epic and observed similar concern with detailed specifications. If this feature obliged us to attribute the Genesis account to P of the fifth century, it must, I reasoned, do the same for the Babylonian account, which is absurd. I also found other absurdities in the so-called higher criticism of the Establishment. If *Yahweh-Elohim* owed its origin to the combination of God’s name in J (*Jehovah* is the mistaken reading of *Yahweh*) with his name in E (*Elohim*), then every Egyptian inscription mentioning the

⁴ See Aulikki Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), on the importance of so-called doublets in the history of source criticism.

god Amon-Re must have derived the name from an A-document combined with an R-document. One might also argue the same for Ugaritic documents, which abound with divine names composed of two elements.⁵

Many other scholars built on these and related works or contributed their own findings as time went on, such as Gleason Archer, Kenneth Kitchen, and Edwin Yamauchi. The 1980s saw groundbreaking work in this area. In 1980 Alan Millard and Donald Wiseman co-edited an important volume (*Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*) demonstrating the historical authenticity of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis posing fundamental challenges to the first-millennium BC dating of material so often bound up with the documentary hypothesis. In 1985 Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn published their robust defense of the unity of the Genesis creation and flood narratives, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11*. In 1987 Ronald Whybray published his *The Making of the Pentateuch*, which, although dating the Pentateuchal material very late in the first millennium BC, argued forcefully for unitary authorship. Berman's work presently under review here stands within this tradition but makes a very impressive and unique contribution to such prior scholarship.

Berman divides his text into three parts: "Inconsistency in Narrative" (13–103); "Inconsistency in Law" (105–98); and "Renewing Pentateuchal Criticism" (199–280). The first of these parts is subdivided into two sections: "Setting Conflicting Histories Side by Side" (15–60); and "Disparity in the Sovereign's Recounting of History to His Vassal" (61–103). The volume begins with a helpful introduction (1–11) explaining the need for a new direction in the study of the Pentateuch's origin. The disciplinary fragmentation Berman accurately describes is reminiscent of that same fragmentation Alasdair MacIntyre famously identified in his Gifford Lectures.⁶

Berman's first chapter, "Diverging Accounts within the Kadesh Inscriptions of Ramesses II" (17–34), takes a look at the divergent accounts found in the Kadesh Inscriptions. Berman's description of ancient historiography challenges our modern notions of historiography—forged in the nineteenth century—which has implications for how we read Pentateuchal material, which often appears contradictory to modern readers.

⁵ Cyrus Gordon, *A Scholar's Odyssey* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature 2000), 80.

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 6–7.

Whereas modern scholars typically posit multiple divergent original sources, authors, or authorial communities lying behind such divergences within the Pentateuch, Berman's example of the Kadesh Inscription calls such assumptions into question, since these inscriptions were all patently authorized by Pharaoh Ramesses II; that is, "the pharaoh commissioned two differing, and even conflicting, accounts of the Battle of Kadesh and had them carved side by side at several monumental sites across Egypt" (20). One key difference Berman emphasizes about ancient historiographers from modern ones is that the former "never wrote with the disinterested aim of chronicling the past for its own sake; rather, the deeds of the past were harnessed for rhetorical effect to persuade readers to take action in the present" (28). This all changed, he maintains, with the nineteenth century, and in particular, with the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810 and the first "History" department. I would argue that the sort of history represented at Berlin itself has a much older history stretching back at least to the Renaissance with Machiavelli, but Berman's point is that only later, as with his nineteenth-century example, was it expressly practiced as an ostensibly disinterested discipline.⁷

At the end of Berman's first chapter he shows how such "triumph literature," although prevalent in Israel and Egypt, remains unattested in the Ugaritic literature of Canaan, and suggests that "there may have been an Egyptian literary tradition that migrated to Israelite scribal culture" (34). Although Berman does not dwell on this point, I think it is significant. Traditionally, in the past more than a century of biblical scholarship, the Pentateuch has been assumed to emerge primarily after the Babylonian exile, at least the Pentateuch's final form, and thus Babylonian (and later) parallels have been sought and emphasized with regard to the Pentateuch in modern biblical scholarship. And yet, increasing scholarship concerning Egypt has again and again underscored the many authentic second-millennium BC Egyptian elements and similarities that seem often to form a more likely context than Mesopotamian or Canaanite for the Pentateuch, which is where the tradition previously placed the Pentateuch: for millennia Jewish and Christian tradition understood the Pentateuch as originating from Moses and the Israelites who had come out of second-millennium Egypt in the exodus.⁸

⁷ See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁸ On this increasing Egyptian evidence, see, e.g.: John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*

Berman's second chapter, "The Exodus Sea Account (Exod 13:17–15:19) in Light of the Kadesh Inscriptions of Ramesses II" (35–60), examines the similarities between the prose and poetic accounts of the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus and the Kadesh Inscriptions, showing how such stylistic variation is consistent with this ancient historiography. Berman deftly argues that "the Exodus account, particularly the Song of the Sea, deliberately appropriates royal Egyptian propaganda in what it trumpets as YHWH's victory over Pharaoh himself" (35). He does this through careful attention to minute details that connect the narratives of Exodus with unique Egyptian scribal literary techniques, imagery, and themes. After his careful examination, Berman concludes that:

The poetics of the Kadesh Poem alone call into question the validity of the source-critical methodology of establishing a text's compositional history on the basis of doublets and inconsistencies with the text. . . . The Kadesh Poem is universally recognized to be a unitary, synchronically composed composition. . . . The poetics of the Kadesh Poem demonstrate that source critics read ancient texts employing anachronistic notions of consistency, which were not shared by ancient writers. (53–54)

Berman examines the shared lexemes in the prose and poetic accounts of Exodus to show how its final form at least represents "a carefully orchestrated whole" wherein "lexemes common to both the lyric and prose accounts likewise cut across source-critical lines assigned" (60). He concludes that "the fact that the Song in Exodus 15 shares tropes and lexemes with the full prose account suggests that it is integrally related to the message and design of the preceding narrative" (6).⁹

The third chapter, which begins the second section within part 1, is entitled, "Divergent Histories between Original and Renewal Treaties in

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); James Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

⁹ Similar arguments for narratives source critics identify as distinct in Genesis are found in, e.g., Jon D. Levenson, "Response," in *The State of Jewish Studies*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen and Edward L. Greenstein (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 47–54, and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

Hittite Diplomatic Literature” (63–80). Here Berman demonstrates how earlier historical accounts were often juxtaposed rather than one replacing the other. Berman thus argues that “we may understand Deuteronomy’s retelling of events recorded in the earlier books of the Pentateuch with recourse to the Late Bronze Age Hittite treaty prologue tradition” (64). Berman’s fourth chapter, “Retold History in the Book of Deuteronomy in Light of the Hittite Treaty Tradition” (81–103), uses second-millennium Hittite traditions to account for the diverse material found in the Pentateuch. Here Berman continues his discussion from the previous chapter: “The dynamics of retelling history in the Hittite treaty prologue tradition provide an interpretive lens through which we may understand retold history in the book of Deuteronomy that conflicts with parallel accounts elsewhere in the Torah” (81). Berman explains further that what he proposes is that we see how “Deuteronomy employs the convention of retelling history at the moment of covenant renewal found in the Hittite treaty traditions just as Israel re-commits herself to YHWH at the covenant of the Plains of Moab” (100). For my part, I think the most persuasive account of the distinctions between the legislation and narrative forms in Exodus and Leviticus, on the one hand, and in Deuteronomy, on the other, is Scott Hahn’s treatment of these as different covenant types in his *Kinship by Covenant*.¹⁰

Berman’s chapter 5, “The Pivotal Characterization: Ancient Law as Non-Statutory Law” (107–17), begins part 2. In this chapter, he challenges modern studies of biblical law as anachronistic. He shows how biblical legal corpora makes sense when read in light of their ancient Near Eastern legal milieus in ways that it does not when we anachronistically read it in light of modern legal norms. His point is that changing conceptions of law changed the way biblical critics understood biblical law. He explains in more detail:

The early critics of the Pentateuch seemed to have taken no notice of what later scholars would identify as incompatible inconsistencies within biblical law. . . . They lived and wrote before there was a common conception of statutory law. The Germany of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that was home to Eichhorn, de Wette, and Ewald was a common-law culture. . . . It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that intellectual currents began to change, and radically so. (117)

¹⁰ Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 49–92.

The sixth chapter, “The Misapplication of ‘Strict Construction’ and the Semblance of Contradiction” (118–36), attempts to explain what appear to be inconsistent legal stipulations in Exodus and Leviticus in light of what were rhetorically deliberate inconsistencies in Mesopotamian law codes like the Laws of Hammurabi. Chapter 7, “Honoring a Law Code and Diverging from Its Dictates in the Neo-Babylonian King of Justice and in the Book of Ruth” (137–47), examines the interesting phenomenon of legal corpora informing the narrative plot structure of other texts, such as Deuteronomy and Ruth. This happened as well in Mesopotamian literature like the Neo-Babylonian King of Justice. In both cases the legislations are put into practice within the narratives in a way that appears to be at odds with their codification within the legal corpus from which they originate. The eighth chapter, “Blending Discordant Laws in Biblical Narrative” (148–70), looks at the ways in which legislations from various portions of the Torah are combined in later biblical texts, showing how they may not have been understood as mutually exclusive in the way in which so many modern scholars assume they were.

Berman’s ninth chapter, “Legal Revision in the Torah Law Collections: Supersessionist or Complementary?” (171–91), surveys the various interpretations of disparate legal traditions in the Torah, from those who interpret the later traditions as supplanting earlier ones to those who view them as complementary, arguing for the latter. Overall, Berman’s approach has some strengths, most notably his comparative approach. When Berman asserts, however, that, “perhaps the most significant observation we can make about the presentation of the various laws elsewhere in the Bible is this: nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do we find a prophet, priest, king, or even a biblical narrator who argues in explicit fashion for the legitimacy of one version of the law over another” (181), he neglects the weight of the narrative implications pitting laws against one another, like Ezekiel 20’s laws that were “not good.” In addition to the comments on this passage in Hahn’s *Kinship by Covenant*, I would highly recommend the interested look at his coauthored article on this exact topic.¹¹ Chapter ten, “Redacting the Torah’s Conflicting Laws: New Empirical Models” (192–98), challenges both the view of the final form of the Torah as a compromise document and the view of the Torah as an anthology of disparate legal corpora. Berman instead argues that what has happened is that the earlier traditions are utilized and redeployed. He marshals empirical evidence

¹¹ Scott Walker Hahn and John Sietze Bergsma, “What Laws Were ‘Not Good’? A Canonical Approach to the Theological Problem of Ezekiel 20:25–26,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 2 (2004): 201–18.

from more recent legal traditions.

Part 3 begins with chapter 11, “A Critical Intellectual History of the Historical-Critical Paradigm in Biblical Studies” (201–26), which seeks to uncover the deep roots of the current discipline of historical criticism, especially in its source-critical mode, and particularly of Pentateuchal source criticism. Berman traces this history back to Baruch Spinoza, and particularly to the seventh chapter of Spinoza’s *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. I concur that this is the key methodological chapter in Spinoza’s work and represents one of the great contributions to the history of such diachronic analysis which source criticism represents. Concerning what Berman identifies as Spinoza’s pessimistic “very high bar of evidence” (206) required to fulfill the historical-critical task, I would join David Dungan in understanding this virtually impossible task as part of Spinoza’s actual point, to ensure the theological task can never be accomplished.¹² Berman is fundamentally correct when he writes that, “Spinoza and [Richard] Simon established the basic questions that historical criticism asks of the texts today” (206), but I would add that they also contributed to historical criticism’s beginnings by challenging and denying traditional views of biblical authorship and composition. Berman proceeds to walk through the history of historical criticism’s development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, correctly noting that “[Jean] Astruc was the first to offer a systematic accounting for these fissures and inconsistencies” (209), and also recognizing what is too often forgotten, that Astruc, unlike most of those who followed his method, still viewed Moses as the author/redactor of the Pentateuch (210). I think Berman is also correct in his explanation of why Wellhausen’s famous formulation became the dominant explanation: “More fully than anyone before him, Wellhausen had managed to correlate the discrete sources he identified with distinct, successive periods of the Israelite religious development. . . . His work won immediate acclaim because it produced more fully than any earlier work a comprehensive *narrative*” (215–16).

The twelfth chapter, “The Abuses of Negation, Bisection, and Suppression in the Dating of Biblical Texts: The Rescue of Moses (Exodus 2:1–10)” (227–35), further challenges modern source criticism as overly reductive in nature. The thirteenth chapter, “Source Criticism and Its Biases: The Flood Narrative of Genesis 6–9” (236–68), tackles one of the prime textual examples used in source criticism, the flood narrative/s, underscoring the problems with this method. In a wonderful subsection, subtitled in

¹² See David Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 198–260.

part “When Theory Creates the Text” (240), Berman argues that, “when the two-source theory is foisted upon the text, it creates dichotomies that are of its own creation and not inherent in the text” (243). One prime example he uses is the flood narrative, comparing it, as has often been done, with the Epic of Gilgamesh. He explains: “The fact that the Mesopotamian version includes multiple species of birds should serve as a control” (245).¹³ Devastating for such theories is Berman’s point that:

The very enterprise of tracing the history of composition of Hebrew scriptures rests on the assumption that the earlier sources are recoverable solely on the basis of the internal literary evidence within the received text, and without supporting textual witnesses or epigraphic evidence—but those putative sources are available only if we assume that redactors and editors never altered or augmented their sources. (250)

Following Gordon Wenham’s very important work on the flood,¹⁴ and responding to Wenham’s critics, Berman shows the literary artistry of the Genesis account, which forms a literary unity, in light of the comparable material from the Epic of Gilgamesh. As Berman puts it, “a clear pattern emerges in Genesis 8–9, but only when the two putative sources are read together” (255). Writing further Berman then explains how Genesis 8–9 presents the flood as a new creation event in light of Genesis 1 (with a useful chart on 259). Both the correspondences between Genesis 8 and Genesis 1 and the chiasmic pattern of Genesis 6–9 (261) pose major problems for traditional source-critical assumptions. Berman brings his volume to a close with a constructive conclusion, “Conclusion: A New Path Forward” (269–280), wherein he argues for the need to acknowledge historical criticism’s very real limits, the need to further study ancient Near Eastern scribal practices in order better to understand the composition and development of the Hebrew Bible, and the benefit of utilizing the Tiberias Project, an online tool Berman helped develop.

Berman’s volume represents a masterful treatment by a first-rate biblical scholar on problems with modern source criticism in light of ancient Near

¹³ For the most thorough examination of Mesopotamian flood traditions that poses numerous challenges to source-critical and related approaches to the Genesis account, see Y. S. Chen, *The Primeval Flood Catastrophe: Origins and Early Development in Mesopotamian Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Gordon Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 3 (1978): 336–48.

Eastern historiography and scribal traditions. His tour de force shows how important it is to study the Bible in light of its ancient Near Eastern context rather than in light of nineteenth-century literary assumptions, as it too often is read. Anyone interested in the history of the Pentateuch, its composition, origin, and broader historiographical context should give Berman's book a careful reading. I think his work promises to point the way forward in a fresh new direction for the study of Pentateuchal criticism. Scholars might criticize Berman for focusing so much effort on source criticism, and particularly documentary sources, when the field has changed so much; Pentateuchal studies is replete with post-modern hermeneutics, and even fragmentary hypotheses are more common than documentary ones at the present time. Opening any biblical studies textbook, however, demonstrates that such traditional source criticism, indeed even Wellhausen's classic if dated formulation, is still the rage. Theological works that engage the Pentateuch almost always assume such source-critical designations. In short, traditional source criticism is a paradigm desperately in need of a shift. Berman's work is evidence that one can hope such a paradigm shift is on the horizon.

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