

Inspiration, Sense, & Number:

The Catholic Hermeneutic of Fishing

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In what sense do the well-known figures of St. Peter the Apostle, from the 1st century A.D., and the Prophet Jonas, from the 8th century B.C., happen to critically (i.e. hermeneutically) relate? And, is it at all relevant to us in relation to better understanding, living, and defending the impassable Catholic truths of the one true faith handed down to us by the Apostles? What follows is an answer to both questions in the almost rudimental form of an exegesis at once *innovative* and *ultimately traditional*. Innovative in so far as, to my knowledge, what I propound to explain in this article appears to have been but simply overlooked by accredited biblical scholars, many of whom assume many things, including the view that there cannot or should not be any special inspiration-based hermeneutic relationship between the “fantastical” story of the Prophet Jonas and the supernatural mission and authority granted onto the visible head of the Roman Catholic Church, Peter the Galilean. Ultimately traditional because I do not invent anything whatever but solely resort to the hard data points that have been passed down to us through the canonical texts at hand. Indeed the main merit of the exegetical analysis here introduced is its elemental reliance on the strict original—both literary and numeric—information supplied by the revealed text of Scripture. The general method consists in two correlative ways of treating the basic textual elements of comparison:

- (i) By directly retrieving them from the original Hebrew text of the book of Jonas and the Aramaic (Peshitta) text¹ of the Gospels;
- (ii) By meaningfully setting them against each other to bring to light the ‘hermeneutic of fishing’ I ultimately submit is the key to St. Peter’s magisterial prophetic Office.

We will successfully consider:

- (1) The full Aramaic name of Peter and its actual meaning;
- (2) Jonas’s full Hebraic name in relation to his principle of filiation;
- (3) The reversed correlation that obtains from the perspective of both Jonas’s and Peter’s respective relation to the reality signified by the twice-occurring² adjectival-nominal compound expression “great fish/great fishes”—twice-occurring, that is, in the entire biblical body of 73 books;
- (4) Some of the intrinsically meaningful implications of the number 153 relative to biblical interpretation, Petrinian doctrine (see (3)), major Marian devotion and apparitions, basing all these aspects of Catholic doctrine and life upon some of the former’s surprising characteristics.

Point (4) itself calls for additional introductory remarks. People in general dislike codes and are only skeptically open to the view that, fundamentally speaking, the revealed text of Scripture is an astonishingly complex and inexhaustible code system. The resistance typically comes from fear of numerology, which the real study of biblical numbers is not. One of the things I came to

realize from closely considering the apparent as well as the hidden occurrences of Scriptural numbers is that their natural arithmetic and geometric qualities are purposely assumed and integrated into the extensively symbolic nature of the biblical narrative. Scriptural numbers are primarily intelligible and powerfully functional for the same reasons regular numbers often are so fascinating and powerful—in themselves, that is, as well as in the way they universally occur to shape and govern reality. In other words, the use of numbers in divine revelation first assumes and actually uses the natural properties of numbers (which guarantees that no room is left to the “inspiration” of numerological arbitrariness), and then elevates them to much higher planes of epistemological, symbolical, metaphysical, as well as theological meaning—in keeping with the fundamental Catholic principle that grace builds upon and perfects nature³.

Numbers in Holy Scripture—be they explicit or hidden below the surface of the text—are from the Logos Himself, Who became flesh (in Scripture and in Person). And so is their meaning. There is no reason to disqualify and reject something which, in the rich tradition of biblical interpretation, remains for the most part little understood. For this particular type of interpretive work, one must become something of a Catholic “scribe”⁴ (cf. Matt 13:52). The scribe in Greek is *γραμματεὺς* (*grammateus*, lit.: “grammarian”), but in Aramaic ספרא (SaFra, lit.: “one who counts/tallies”). One must quite literally learn both to *grammaticize* and *count*, and in so doing, bring from one’s treasure “new things and old things” (Matt 13:52).

My sense is that the Fathers did know many things but did not say all they knew (real masters never do). The field is therefore open, and there is no harm to give it a try, casting one’s net into the sea of hidden meaning. May St. Peter the fisherman guide us!

1. Hearing the Divinely Revealed Truth: Peter's Full Aramaic Name

Let us begin by looking at the full, quadripartite Aramaic name of the first Pope: *Shimon Kayfa bar Yonah* (wrongly translated in English as “Simon Peter son of John”). Breaking it down to give you the most accurately literal meaning of each of the four constituents of this amazing Aramaic name, we get the following:

- 1) *SHiMon* (שמעון) = He who hears (שמע, *SHaMa*) → i.e. the hearer
- 2) *Kayfa* (כאפא) = rock or stone
- 3) *Bar* (בר) = son
- 4) *Yonah* (יונה) = dove

Putting it all together, we therefore get the following accurately literal rendering of St. Peter's full name, from the original Aramaic **שמעון כאפא בר יונה**

He who hears (the hearer), the rock, son of the dove

Shimon is given the capacity to hear, understand, and authenticate the inspiration that comes to him from the Most Blessed Trinity—which is precisely consistent with the supernatural blessing Our Lord speaks of elsewhere in direct reference to no other than Shimon bar-Yonah / **שמעון בר יונה** in Matthew 16:17:

“Blessed are you Shimon bar-Yonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed [inspiration] this to you but my Father in Heaven [i.e. the Trinitarian Head].”

Given the capacity to hear what? Precisely that which is analogously signified by the additional part of his name, *Kayfa*, which he receives directly from Our Lord:

“I tell you, you are the Rock (כַּאפָּא / *Kayfa*) ...” (Matt 16:18)

The universal symbolic function of the rock (or stone) is to analogously show, within the constricted frequency range in tune with which mankind is able to see anything at all, the properties of the invisible truth universally immanent to the real world—i.e. the *sub-sisting* structural rock-foundation underpinning both the physical and metaphysical orders of creation. Kayfa-Peter is also *SHiMon* (שמעון → שמע-ון), he who specifically *hears* (שמע) the truth (Aram. שררא / *shērara*) that is divinely revealed to him. The equivalent Hebrew term to שררא is אמת (*émêt*), which covers and very strongly implies the following lexical field: permanence, reliability, continuance, solidity, agelessness, impact-resistance, non-deformability, all of which terms properly apply to describing the properties of truth mirrored throughout the visible world in the naturally occurring hardest minerals all rocks are made of. Notice that the Greek perspective on truth completes the Semitic emphasis on solidity, conceiving it as ἀλήθεια⁵ (*aléthēia*), literally “that which is *not* [ἀ-] concealed”.

2. Jonas' Full Hebraic Name and the Foundation of Prophecy

Let us now very succinctly look at who the prophet Jonas is. The first verse of the Book that bears his name, in Hebrew **יונה** (*Yonah*), provides the answer: He is *Yonah* (translated in English by “Jonas”, with the addition of a final ‘s’ that is found neither in the original Hebrew nor in the LXX, which reads **יוֹנָן** / *Ionan*) son of Amitai (Jonas 1:1): **יוֹנָה בֶּן־אֲמִתַּי**

“[...] Yonah ben Amitai...”

This is a standardly tripartite Hebraic and prophetically very significant name! Breaking it down (as we did above with Peter’s full quadripartite name) to give you the most accurately literal meaning of each of its three constituents, we get:

- 1) *Yonah* (**יונה**) = dove
- 2) *Ben* (**בן**) ≡ Aram. **בר** = son
- 3) *Amitai* (**אֲמִתַּי** → **אֱמֶתִי**, from **אֱמֶת** / *émêt*: truth, + **י** / *yod*, which pronominally suffixes **אֱמֶת** as “my”) = my truth

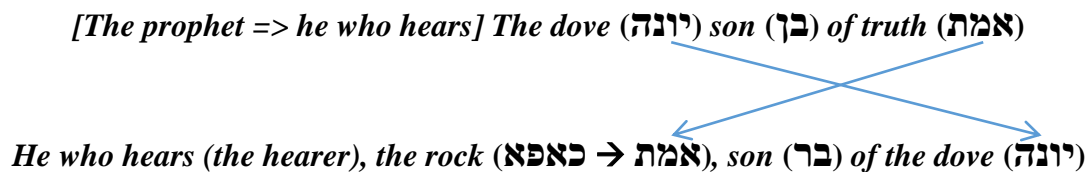
Putting it all together, we get the following accurately literal rendering of the famous prophet’s exact full name, from the original Hebrew: **יוֹנָה בֶּן אֲמִתַּי**

The dove son of my truth

God’s own truth⁶, as expressed in the name of Jonas’s father, is the foundation of all prophecy. As for divine Fatherhood, it is the Source of all knowledge of Who the Son is⁷, as will be revealed in its time to *Shimon Kayfa bar Yonah*.

3. Reversed Correlation: Solving the Jonas's Paradox

Since Jonas is a prophet, he is himself, by definition, a *hearer* of divine inspiration. Bearing in mind the analogous correlation between the rock/stone (כאפא) and the truth (אמת) undergirding the rock-foundational structure of reality (that which is metaphysically non-deformable), and juxtaposing both Peter's exact full name and Jonas's, the correspondence between both key figures should now appear with some clarity:



The reversal of order between “the dove” and the “rock-bottom truth” around the central term “son” is a classic example of biblical chiasmic play betraying the pedagogically and mnemonically oral origin of these thoroughly inspired texts. The filiation is indeed central to both the prophetic function and the specific engenderment *Kayfa*-Peter is spiritually founded on: the Source of his prophetic function and guiding authority in the Church (as much as of his very being) is no other than the Eternal Father Himself, a mystical reality revealed to him by the Eternally Begotten Son (Matt 16:17).

Furthermore, the ability and authority with respect to explaining the inspired sense or meaning of divine revelation is presented to us through the miraculous catch of fish St. John recounts in his Gospel (John 21:1-14). Where else do we hear of fish—specifically of a “great fish” (דג גדול / *dag gadol*), to be as precise as Scripture itself never fails to be? Only (and I do mean *only* as in *exclusively*) in the Book of Jonas (Jonas 2:1)! But Jonas (*Yonah*), though a real

prophet of the true God, eventually “misses the boat” (though he quite literally finds himself on the ship he boarded “to flee to Tarshish”⁸) as he fails to catch the “great fish” of divine inspiration—which, it is noteworthy, is itself designated by YHWH (i.e. the Trinitarian Source of all inspiration in heaven and earth). Instead, the “great fish” as it were catches him! Jonas is literally swallowed⁹ by the massive inspiration he has been divinely appointed as the prophetic recipient of to call out against the great city of Nineveh. This is the paradox of Jonas with respect to divine inspiration. Jonas’s fleeing attitude is met by YHWH using His inspiration to gulp the prophet down in order to spew him out “onto dry land”¹⁰. From there Jonas starts anew as a renewed inspired vessel of the divine Word (3:1):

“The Word of YHWH came to Jonas a second time...”

What of Simon Peter son of Jonas (*Shimon Kayfa bar Yonah*)? He literally reverses the situation (John 21:6) and, by so doing, conclusively solves the Jonas’s paradox! How so? By successfully catching the exact sum of 153 “great fishes” (**נונא רורבא** / *nûna rōravah*¹¹)! Under the divine commend and guidance of his risen Lord, Peter is able to make a great catch of understanding (meaning/sense) from the abundance of divine inspiration he is the final apostolic authenticator of. It is crucially important here to notice that the Aramaic word for fish, **נוך** (*nûn*, plural **נונא** / *nûna*), begins with the square Hebraic/Aramaic letter *nûn* (**נ**), which itself reads **נוך**¹² (*nûn*), referring to that specific and real class of things in creation designated in English by the word “fish”, or “poisson” in French. The Aramaic adjective for “great” (**רורבא**) qualifies and agrees in gender and number with the noun (**נונא**). Both the adjective and the noun

purposely used here by St. John exactly translate and thereby refer to the **דָּג גְּדֹלָה**¹³ adjectival-nominal compound from Jonas 2:1, the only other place in the entire body of Scripture¹⁴ those two words are found to be so compounded.

Granted the special authority of his resurrected Lord, the Apostle and first Catholic Pope *Shimon Kayfa bar Yonah*, unlike the prophet *Yonah* before him, is able not only to hear (**שמע**) the universal truth (**אמת**) revealed to him from above, but also to retrieve¹⁵ and explain¹⁶ to the world¹⁷ the inspired sense of the revealed divine Word.

4. Sense and Numbers: the Pivotal Case of 153

The Old and the New Testaments were originally composed and written in Hebrew and Aramaic, two beautiful Semitic languages of ancient logographic (pre-alphabetic or cuneiform¹⁸) origins. They were eventually translated in Greek. All the letters of these three sacred languages are ordered members of alphabetic lists readily and equally usable as sets of letters and numbers. Thus any word of the Bible taken in any of these three original languages, not only expresses that which it is the reference of through the meaningful articulations of a particular sequence of letters, but also expresses a sequence of numbers! The revealed text of Scripture, it turns out, is a prodigious encoded system made of words, each of whose particular letters together stands as an atomic piece of alphabetic information and an actual whole number. The fourth sacred language, Latin, of no less value than Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, does not include this dual property. The Roman alphabet restricts itself to just being an alphabet, i.e. a list of letters—hence the use of separated numerals in Latin.

The subject matter and study of numbers in the Bible is hardly a favorite of most respectable scholars. The whole genre has been vastly discarded, if not simply ignored by the vast majority of leading modern exegetes of various backgrounds and faiths. Moreover, there exists a legitimate reserve and caution, particularly from practicing Christians, as far as reading the Bible numerically. The prudence here rests upon a well-founded awareness of the dangers of what is called arithmomancy, i.e. the practice of the occult (of divination) by means of numbers. On the other hand, there also exists, especially among traditionally-minded Catholics, a general attitude of self-righteous skepticism and disappointing blindness towards subject matters which, however truly *traditional*, happen to fall outside the scope of what they deem tradition to be. The queer “openness” of liberal Catholics is certainly no remedy to this traditionalist blockage. Both attitudes are intellectually crippling and spiritually barren.

Furthermore, presumptive skepticism about the interpretive function and spiritual significance of patterned numbers in Holy Scripture betrays a characteristically modern bias as to the nature of mathematics and function of numbers in relationship to meaning. Modern consciousness has generally lost any conception of the metaphysical essentiality of numbers¹⁹—of numbers as *ratio-nal* objects of spiritual contemplation and *means* of expressing eternal beauty. In the meantime, the Masonic and other Illuminist legatees of the occult teachings of Hermeticism, Medieval Kabbalism, and Rosicrucianism feel perfectly entitled to syncretistically claim as their own and gnostically distort true symbolism, engaging in the overall practice of Luciferian esotericism. The syncretistic robbery and the occult practices of speculative Freemasonry have undoubtedly caused much of the distinctly modern confusion that especially obtains on the subject of symbolism and esotericism, the general understanding of which today significantly differs from their original Catholic acceptance. By his refined philosophical

thought and mystical genius, St. Maximus the Confessor²⁰ majorly contributed to the articulation of what apostolic and patristic Christianity understood symbolism to be and mean. According to St. Maximus and other major Greek as well as Latin Fathers, symbolizing belongs to the mirroring nature of visible creation itself—against all modern and post-modern definitions of symbolism and uses of symbols as culturally constrained “substitutes” for reality. All great pre-modern metaphysicians were also skilled semioticians who recognized reality itself as the proper foundation of the symbolic function of things in the world. The trichotomy²¹ of the sign (*signum/nota*), the reality (*res*) it analogously mirrors, and the sense (*rem significatam*²²) bridging them by way of mental and verbal denotation (*notatio*) reflects a worldview modernity and post-modernity have done all they could to depart from. St. Thomas Aquinas exactly understood and assumed what St. Maximus and other patristic and scholastic Doctors keenly grasped about the true nature and function of symbolism when he laid the following principle of biblical interpretation in the opening question of his *Summa Theologiae*:

“Respondeo dicendum quod auctor sacrae Scripturae est Deus, in cuius potestate est ut non solum voces ad significandum accomodet (quod etiam homo facere potest), sed etiam res ipsas. Et ideo, cum in omnibus scientiis voces significant, hoc habet proprium ista scientia, quod ipsae res significatae per voces, etiam significant aliquid. Illa ergo prima significatio, qua voces significant res, pertinet ad primum sensum, qui est sensus historicus vel litteralis. Illa vero significatio qua res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant, dicitur sensus spiritualis; qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit.”²³

Likewise, consider the Patristic notion of esotericism notably put forward by St. Augustin²⁴ and Clement of Alexandria²⁵: it bears hardly any relation to the debased contemporary idea of “esoteric literature” and neo-pagan esotericism. That which is truly esoteric²⁶ belongs, in truth, to the sacramental²⁷ mystagogy²⁸ of the Catholic Church. St. Augustin, who did not speak and write

in Greek, used the term *arcana* whenever he referred to the esoteric nature of the Church's sacramental life. The *disciplina arcani* was and should still be (still is to some lesser degree) the Church's rule and way to protect her sacramental Mysteries²⁹. Is there such a thing as a truly Catholic esotericism? Absolutely! Yet, if one goes around telling traditional Catholics that the Church really practices esotericism by virtue of her sacramental life, they will likely meet the claim with suspicious apprehensiveness.

So it goes with numbers, the interpretation of which is often subjected to the skepticism with which, again, numerology definitely deserves to be met. Yet the fact that few have endeavored to study the meaning of numbers in Sacred Scripture does not imply that the subject is better left to itself as helplessly hermetic, or that to uncover hitherto overlooked connections and venture interpretations (based on actual textual data) should remain subject to distrust. Even while our tradition is somewhat inexplicit about the meaning of numbers in Scripture, it has certainly not banished them from conveying revealed meaning and teaching spiritual truths. On the contrary, a number of aspects pertaining to biblical-based Catholic doctrine imply and rely on the interpretive mediation of numbers, as is crucially the case with 153 relating to Peter's magisterial Office and authority insomuch as explaining the meaning of divine inspiration. Many other numbers are equally significant with respect to rooting and explaining the biblical foundation of Catholic teachings, and function as coded conveyers of meaning.

We shall now consider the pivotal case of the number 153 by zooming in on just a few of its richly meaningful implications³⁰:

- As a matrix of biblical interpretation of other biblical numbers
- Relative to foremost Marian apparitions and the traditional format of the Holy Rosary

Let us begin by briefly examining the singular numerical quiddity of 153. 153 is a 17-sided triangular number (i.e. the geometrical representation of 153 is a triangle of side 17^{31}), which is the same as to say that it is the sum of the first 17 natural numbers.

By the rule for the summation of all x from x_1 to x_n :

$$\sum_{i=1}^n x_i = x_1 + x_2 + x_3 + \dots + x_n$$

We get $T(1 \rightarrow n)$,

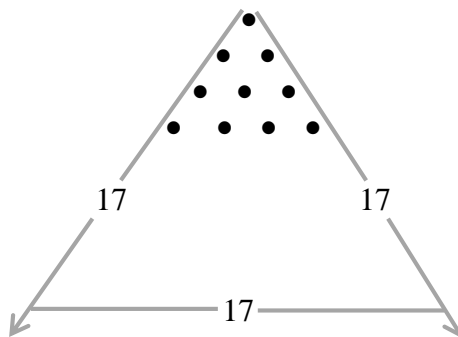
$$T(n) = \sum (n) = 1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + n = \frac{1}{2} n(n + 1)$$

Hence,

$$\sum (17) = 1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 17 = \frac{17(18)}{2}$$

$$\sum (17) = 153$$

As stated above, we can express the same result by way of the triangular expansion of 17 made of 153 piled dots, as shown below (NB: diagram not drawn to scale; the remaining 143 dots from $n = 17$ are implied from the displayed gnomonic expansion of $n = 4$):



The Greek theological mathematician Nicomachus of Geraza³², a proponent of the Pythagorean mystical philosophy of numbers, is the first to have derived the basic formula³³ above as he discovered triangular numbers and their singular properties. A contemporary of St. John the Evangelist³⁴, his observation of numbers combined with his overall mystical outlook may have given him access to and knowledge of old Qabbalistic doctrines pertaining to the religious meaning of numbers found throughout the biblical corpus. Nicomachus observed and studied numbers to gain insight into their metaphysical properties, as he did not assume numbers to merely be self-contained objects of reason and epistemologically self-sufficient signs³⁵.

Nicomachus notably wrote an *Introduction to Arithmetic* (*De institutione arithmetica*³⁶) focusing especially on the significance of prime as well as perfect numbers. He also wrote a treatise entitled *Theology of Number* (*theologoumena arithmeticae*³⁷) in which he endeavors to equate the properties of Plato's supra-sensible Forms with the formal properties of numbers, develops a universal theory of numerical symbolism, and makes a general case for the divine origin and function of numbers. While Plato recommended geometry as the clearest model to describe the metaphysical world of intelligible Ideas, Nicomachus sought to account for the universal nature and archetypical meaning of numbers.

The surprising mathematical (arithmetical and geometrical) features of 153 are actually plentiful (I will hardly exhaust them in what follows). For instance, it is equal to the sum of all its digits raised to the power of the number of digits³⁸, 3:

$$153 = 1^3 + 3^3 + 5^3$$

But 153 is not only the sum of the cubes of its own digits, it also generates itself from the standpoint of the positional numeral order of its hundreds, tens, and units:

$$153 \rightarrow 1, 5, 3 \rightarrow 1^3 + 5^3 + 3^3 = 153$$

This additional self-generating property intrinsic to the numerical quiddity of 153 is considerably more remarkable than it may appear at first glance to anyone unfamiliar with the world of numbers and the staggeringly complex ways they happen to mathematically interact. Self-generation from the cubes of one's own digits is an extremely rare occurrence in \mathbb{Z} ! Take any random number, for example 243:

$$243 \rightarrow 2, 4, 3 \rightarrow 2^3 + 4^3 + 3^3 = 99 \text{ (hardly 243!)}$$

Or, also randomly, 568:

$$568 \rightarrow 5, 6, 8 \rightarrow 5^3 + 6^3 + 8^3 = 853 \text{ (Significantly different!)}$$

Not only are 17 and 153 co-implied by virtue of the latter being the natural triangular development of the former, its triangular root; they are also comprised in and consubstantially implicit to another important biblical number most modern readers are inclined to politely downplay by means of the vaguely defined epithet “symbolic”. It is the number 969, which occurs in the Book of Genesis, chapter 5, verse 27:

“All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.”

Nine hundred and sixty-nine years is the longest a man, namely Methuselah, is recorded in Sacred Scripture to have lived. By the formula $T(n) = n/2(n + 1)$, we can easily generate all first 17 triangular numbers, and see how the generated values relate in any way to 969.

$1/2(1 + 1) = 1$	$2/2(2 + 1) = 3$	$3/2(3 + 1) = 6$	$4/2(4 + 1) = 10$
$5/2(5 + 1) = 15$	$6/2(6 + 1) = 21$	$7/2(7 + 1) = 28$	$8/2(8 + 1) = 36$
$9/2(9 + 1) = 45$	$10/2(10 + 1) = 55$	$11/2(11 + 1) = 66$	$12/2(12 + 1) = 78$
$13/2(13 + 1) = 91$	$14/2(14 + 1) = 105$	$15/2(15 + 1) = 120$	$16/2(16 + 1) = 136$
$17/2(17 + 1) = 153$	$n = 18$	$n = 19$	$n = 20$

Strikingly enough, 969 lies constitutively hidden under all these generated triangular values added together:

$$1 + 3 + 6 + 10 + 15 + 21 + 28 + 36 + 45 + 55 + 66 + 78 +$$

$$91 + 105 + 120 + 136 + 153 = 969$$

Or:

$$\sum [T(1 \rightarrow 153)] = 969$$

Geometrically, the sum of all triangular expansions from 1(= 1) to 17 (= 153), which is 969, generates a tetrahedron, with its 4 triangular faces and 6 edges! In other words, 969 is the three-dimensional development of 153! Gnomonically, the numbers neatly confirm the immanent interconnections that obtain between the full triangular development of 17, which is 153, and the full tetrahedral development of 153, which is 969:

$$4 \text{ (triangular faces)} \times \mathbf{153} = 612$$

$$969 - 612 = 357$$

$$357 \div \mathbf{17} = 21$$

$$21 = \sum (6) = 6/2(6 + 1)$$

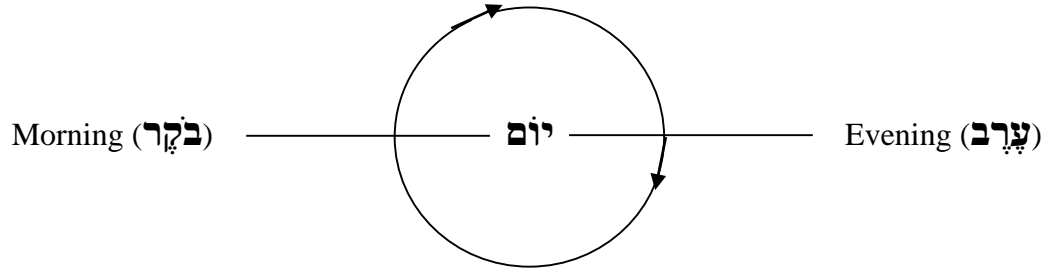
What are we theologically to make of the intrinsic relationship of 153 and 969? More than we can possibly say in the limited format of this article. Suffice here to point out that as 153 expresses the full development of 17 and signifies the fullness of inspired meaning (sense), so 969 must express the fullness of what 153 represents in relation to the prophetic context of Methuselah's life span, the longest of all in the Bible. The number of years Methuselah lived would only be anecdotic if it were not itself a sign of another reality. Thus, of what reality is the tetrahedral development of 153, the number 969, the likeness of? As Plato recognized, "time is the moving image of eternity"³⁹. Likewise the "length of days" Scripture speaks about is but an analogical manner of referring to that which lasts forever (eternity) by using the categories of that which is governed by and coincides with the arithmetic of movement (time). The time-based principle of analogy used to express realities that are not contingent upon time is thoroughly biblical and lies at the foundation of the liturgical order inherent to revealed religion. At the heart of the liturgical practice of Mosaic Judaism—and Catholicism, which fulfills it—stands the divine command of setting apart one day "in time" in order to ritualize and properly express eternity, i.e. the order of that which has neither beginning nor end. Sacred Scripture uses the basis of the idea and direct experience of days—which themselves represent a measure of movement—to express realities pertaining to eternity; and, with the divine institution of the

Shabbat, to express eternity itself. Thus while time and eternity certainly are distinct realities, they definitely are relative realities, which the economy of God's Creation is ordered to express by way of the clear distinction and revealed relation of days one to six, to the set apart seventh one. Indeed the latter is a very special "day" purposely standing apart from the others, but with sufficient intelligible likeness with them to relate to them as a "day". As far as the original six-day structure of the order of Creation revealed in Genesis 1, it is tantamount to expressing completeness (\equiv finiteness) as well as the "sinusoidal" possibility and nature of 'time' itself (i.e. all change ratios making up the visible world), which is governed by the bidirectional relationship of potency and actuality. Time coinciding with the arithmetic of movement, everything falling within the rule underlying the relation of potential existence to contingently actualized existence, $\{\text{potency}/(1) \rightarrow \text{actuality}/(2)\}$ & $\{\text{actuality}/(2) \rightarrow \text{potency}/(1)\}$, falls equivalently under the structural framework of cyclicity⁴⁰, which implies the foundational 6-based ritual matrix of Creation (more commonly known as *Hexameron*). The Hexameron echoes the sexagesimal numeral system of the Sumerians and subsequent Babylonian astronomers, 6 and its multiples being the proper circular numbers for the expression and measurement of the movement of change (time) governed by $\{\text{potency}/(1) \rightleftarrows \text{actuality}/(2)\}$.

The most fundamental and correct definition of what a day consists of is found in the very first lines of Sacred Scripture, which also provides the basic framework for structuring time liturgically. The quiddity of day (יוֹם / *yom*) is exactly expressed in the ritual formula giving its six-fold rhythm to the narrative of Creation (from Gen 1:1 to 1:31):

“And there was evening, and there was morning, day (first⁴¹, second, third, fourth, fifth, the sixth⁴²)”.

Thus a day, properly defined, is the paradigmatic event running from evening to evening, as shown with the following diagram:



It follows that the “seventh day” is, in fact, a Non-Day ($\sim D$); in other words, a “day” with neither a *beginning* nor an *end* (as do all finite reality). Thus it can only be understood as a “day” in an analogous manner, using the semantically conducive time-based category of ‘day’, but without the actual intrinsic structural features of a regular (i.e. cyclical) day—which are the evening (beginning), the middle morning, and back to the evening (end). The “seventh day” is therefore not a creation but manifests the transcendent eternity of the Most Blessed Trinity in the created order⁴³. This awesome mystery is expressed through the revealed analogy of the divine “rest” and is the object of a divinely instituted ritualization (the Shabbat and, ultimately, the Catholic Sunday).

Likewise in this particular instance the length of days and, specifically of years spanning the life of Methuselah provides an exact measure of time to express a reality transcending time itself. But the precise intelligibility of Methuselah’s number of years, 969, is directly dependent on the precise intelligibility intrinsic to the relationship obtaining between 17 and 153. Thus, not only do we need to understand the analogous function of Methuselah’s exact number of years with respect to the eternal destiny of man; but, in order to actually appreciate this revelation non-arbitrarily, we first need to understand the mutually intelligible connection that arithmetically

and epistemologically obtains between 17, 153, and 969. Thusly, to sum it up, 969 arithmetically represents and prophetically expresses the full sense of human life, man having been created immortal (Wisdom 2:23) to live forever with God. Notice, again, that this particular number would seem and only be anecdotic, were it not for its constitutive relationship with the pivotal number 153. Just like it would seem and merely be anecdotic to know that Peter caught 153 large fishes, were it not for the intrinsic relationship of this exact number to 17. The point here is that, when it comes to numbers, as of any other aspects of the Sacred Scripture and its interpretation, there really is no place for arbitrariness, be it well intended.

To end with, let us look at three familiar Marian-related instances in which the number 153 surprisingly occurs. It seems that Our Lady herself vindicates the value of this uncannily beautiful and significant number. That should give us some peace as to the proper function and hermeneutic use numbers happen to have in conveying divine revelation.

1) The Holy Rosary

The original composition⁴⁴ of the Holy Rosary happens to be undergirded by the inner triangular relationship that arithmetically obtains between 17 and 153. The number 153 is intrinsic to the Rosary from the numbers of *Hail Mary* its complete recitation consists of, namely $(15 * 10) + 3$. As it goes arithmetically, so it does also within the basic structure of the Rosary: 153 is the unfolding or development of the number 17, which here comprises a total of 16 *Our Father*, $15 + 1$, and the 1 *Apostles' Creed*. In others words the Rosary as a whole is built in terms of these two critically significant and consubstantially related numbers. A rather brilliant yet very simple way for Our Lady to pedagogically direct those who meditate upon the 15 Mysteries of

the Rosary and foster in them the Catholic awareness and understanding of the latter as encompassing the total revelation of the Incarnate Word to the world.

2) Lourdes

Marian apparitions at Lourdes in 1858 happen to also be undergirded by the number 153. The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared 18 times to Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879), with the initial apparition taking place on February 11, 1858. Between the second apparition, which took place three days later (on February 14, 1858), to the last one, which took place on July 16, 1858, she appeared 17 times within a time period encompassing a total number of exactly 153 days:

- February (1858): 14th to 28th = 15 days (the 14th day is the 1st of the 15 days); March = 31 days; April = 30 days; May = 31 days; June = 30 days; July: 1st to 16th = 16 days; we thus get: $15 + 31 + 30 + 31 + 30 + 16 = \mathbf{153}$ days.

3) Fatima

No less striking is the fact that there happens to also be 153 days from and including Sunday, May 13, 1917 to—but not including—Saturday, October 13, 1917. These two dates are highly significant as they happen to delineate the time period of the six consecutive apparitions of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima to Lúcia dos Santos, Jacinta and Francisco Marto:

- May (1917): 13th to 31st = 19 days (including the 13th day in our calculation); June = 30 days; July = 31 days; August = 31 days; September = 30 days; October: 1st to 13th = 12 days (not including the 13th day in our calculation); we thus get: $19 + 30 + 31 + 31 + 30 + 12 = \mathbf{153}$ days.

Conclusion

Peter the Galilean not only is granted the Keys (Matt 16:19), but is himself the key figure to understanding the hermeneutic dynamics moving from divine inspiration in its hidden form⁴⁵ to divine inspiration in its explicated form (its properly magisterial *ex-egesis*). The Petrinian Office of prophecy and authoritative authentication of divine truth⁴⁶ stands as the divinely established interpretive mediation between the contained and the explained, the invisible⁴⁷ and the visible⁴⁸. Peter is given the Keys, but is also founded as the key opening and disclosing the supernatural wealth of inspired sense inexhaustibly subsumed under the particular format of the Word of divine revelation. The fish taken out of the water yields a surprising abundance of 153! In that singular number, the meaning lying hidden in the number 17 is exactly disclosed, caught in effect and brought out in the open of Catholic intelligibility. The interpretive tension between that which remains unperceivably self-contained and that which exactly expresses the latter as its unveiled expansion is symbolically mirrored in terms of the natural mathematical properties governing the derivation of 153 as the fully developed expression of its triangular root, 17. The consubstantiality of both numbers can be demonstrated in countless mathematical ways, which simply reinforce the natural grounds upon which the sheer grace of divine meaning is intended to fill the net of human rationality with the profusion of inspired meaning.

Why does all this finally matter, one might ask? On more than one occasion, in and out of the academia, I found myself politely challenged to explain how these “speculations” finally served the “work of evangelization” (some might even have spoken of “new evangelization”). However, I’m of the strong opinion that opposing such “speculations” and practical evangelization is another typical trap serving no other purpose than keeping us from really applying our minds to the divine Word. We are, as it were, to strip Egypt from its gold, to spoil it from its cultural

riches and resources, as we read in Holy Scripture that the Hebrews were commanded by God to do on their way out of slavery (Ex 12:35-36). This line of interpretation was originally propounded and expounded on by early holy Doctors and Scriptural scholars of the class of St. Irenaeus of Lyon⁴⁹, Origen of Alexandria⁵⁰, St. Gregory of Nyssa⁵¹, and others. Whatever is true, beautiful, and good, belongs to Christ, Who is Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Incarnate, and to His Holy Catholic Church, His Mystical Body. Thus an obligation lays upon us all, wherever we are and whatever we are able to do in this life within our particular circumstances, to draw everything we learn and do in the order of the true, the beautiful, and the good to Our Lord and His Holy Catholic Church. Nothing whatever that is true, beautiful, and good should scare us or be rejected by us, out of ignorance and foolish disdain for the things we may already have decided⁵² do not belong in God's magnificent symphony of meaning. Who are we to say? This creation is the Most Blessed Trinity's. He has placed us in its midst that we may freely come to knowledge of Him Who is our life and find purpose along the way of our purification in the abundance of intelligibility He freehandedly dispenses through His many works to guide us as rational beings.

The despoliation of Egypt's wealth is commended by the Most Blessed Trinity to every new generation. Coming out of our slavery, just as the paradigmatic example of the Hebrews shows us in Holy Scripture, we too must take care of dispossessing the Egyptian culture around us, and do so for the sake of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Incarnate. This is the rationale guiding the "speculations" I laid out in this paper. On a personal note, I have tried (however much imperfectly) to apply this principle over the past fifteen or so years of my life, within the limits of my particular circumstances and abilities, to both the life of the mind and the practical demands of evangelization—which, more often than not, do include the instruction of the poorly

catechized. I would like to conclude this article and its conclusion by turning to two theological masters who originally articulated this principle on the basis of their inspired exegesis of Holy Scripture, and exhorted others to apply it in all their intellectual endeavors in relation to the world and its paradigmatically Egyptian culture.

In his *Letter to Gregory*, Origen of Alexandria compellingly encouraged the young and famously learned bishop of Neo-Caesarea (in Asia Minor), known as Gregory the Wonderworker. Having heard and recognized the peculiar quality of the latter's works and grasp of the secular sciences, Origen draws from his allegorical understanding of the figures of Holy Scripture. He specifically expounds on the figure of the righteous dispossession of the Egyptians by the sons of Israel to promote the proper integration of pagan liberal arts as a means to better prepare the mind to grasp the higher things of the Christian faith.

"[...] I am anxious that you should devote all the strength of your natural good parts to Christianity for your end; and in order to do this, I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures, in order that all that the sons of the philosophers are wont to say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy, as fellow helpers to philosophy, we may say about philosophy itself, in relation to Christianity.

Perhaps something of this kind is shadowed forth in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the children of Israel were commanded to ask from their neighbors, and those who dwelt with them, vessels of silver and gold, and raiment, in order that, by spoiling the Egyptians, they might have material for the preparation of the things which pertained to the service of God [...] And why should I go on, in this untimely digression, to set forth how useful to the children of Israel were the things brought from Egypt, which the

Egyptians had not put to a proper use, but which the Hebrews, guided by the wisdom of God, used for God's service?"⁵³

St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his magnificent *Life of Moses*, is likewise able to elucidate a more elevated meaning from underneath the historical surface of the biblical narrative. Interpreting the same episode of the Hebrews spoiling of the Egyptians on the night of their divinely guided departure from slavery, he sums it up as follows:

"The loftier meaning is therefore more fitting than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. Our guide in virtue commands someone who 'borrows' from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason."⁵⁴

Let us finally be mindful of the parabolic teaching of Our Lord, echoing that of Sirach:

"[...] in absconditis suis consiliabitur."⁵⁵

The true spiritual life is not bereft of secret, quite the opposite. Hiddenness serves a holy purpose in the purification and perfection of our souls, which includes the practice and exercises of wisdom through knowledge of the Mysteries of the Word—in His Scriptural pre-Incarnation, in His Incarnation and Sacraments, and in His inner Trinitarian life. Thus Our Lord compares the Regulation of Heaven⁵⁶ to a treasure "hidden in the field", and adds (Matt 13:44):

"[...] which a man having found, hid it [*abscondit*]; and from his joy he goes selling everything that he has and buys that field."

Notes

¹ The Peshitta text is the original liturgical New Testament in Aramaic. It predates the earliest Greek codices. The Eastern Church recognizes it as the liturgical version of the Judeo-Aramaic Church of the Apostles based in Jerusalem. The use of the Aramaic language spread across the Parthian world Eastward of Palestine over thousands of miles. The square script is the oldest known and is common to both Hebrew and Chaldean Aramaic, i.e. the language spoken in pre-exilic and exilic Babylon. Prior to the square script was the Phoenician-Cursive Hebrew script (pre-Mosaic and early Mosaic periods). Chaldean/Babylonian square script Aramaic is found in the text of the Hebrew Bible, namely in the book of Daniel, which moves from Hebrew to Aramaic, and back to Hebrew. The script is identical, but the grammar quite different—like Italian or French are to classic/scholastic Latin. The Syriac script for New Testament Aramaic manuscripts is written in the *Madhnaya* script form of the Aramaic alphabet also known as *Swadaya*. Syriac manuscripts of the Peshitta (and Peshitto) are typically written in the *Abjad Estrangela* script system, which resembles Arabic and is more accurately called Assyrian Aramaic. The latter is thus less ancient than Chaldean Aramaic written in the square form (found in the book of Daniel). The Syriac Church split in the 5th century A.D. into Nestorians (Eastern Syriac) and Jacobites (Western Syriac), and both branches adopted Assyrian versions of the *Madhnaya* script form of the Aramaic alphabet.

² Gk. *δῖς λεγόμενον* (*dis legomenon*): lit.: “twice-occurring word/verbal expression”.

³ Which more accurately reads: *Gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam* (“Grace does not destroy, but implies and perfects nature”).

⁴ To rehabilitate the noble function and artful category of scribal scholarship mostly unknown to modern people, particularly to slaves of the Computer Age.

⁵ *λήθεια* (hiddenness/concealment), from *λήθω* (I am concealed), also relates to the word *λήθη* (*léthē*: forgetfulness, oblivion, indifference), as in *Λήθη* (*Léthē*), the mythological River of Concealment.

⁶ In *אֱמִתַּי* (*Amitai*) “my truth”, it is ultimately God Who speaks.

⁷ Luke 10:22: “All things have been delivered to Me from My Father, and no one knows Who the Son is but only the Father, and Who the Father is but only the Son, and anyone to whom it pleases the Son to reveal Him.”

⁸ Jonas 1:3.

⁹ בָּלַע (*BaLa*): to be swallowed, but also confused (see Isaiah 9: 15, 28:7, and Psalm 107:27).

¹⁰ Jonas 2:11.

¹¹ John 21:11.

¹² נּ ≡ נוּן. Hebraic letters form a list of things as opposed to standing for alphabetic sounds only. Speaking a letter is to simultaneously speak the name of a thing by mode of direct designation of the latter. For example, to speak the letter נּ (*nûn*) is to simultaneously speak the general name that designates the particular nature under which fall all “gill-bearing aquatic craniate animals”. To say נוּן (*nûn*) is strictly identical as to say נּ (*nûn*)! The difference is only graphic, not verbal. The example of the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet will sound familiar to most: it is the letter בּ (*beth*), or בֵּית (*beth*), the “house”.

¹³ *Dag gadol*, the “great fish”.

¹⁴ Old and New Testaments.

¹⁵ By catching it!

¹⁶ As we shall see from considering the mutual implication of numbers 17 and 153.

¹⁷ On a universal (Catholic) scale.

¹⁸ From Pre-Semitic logographs, to Early Semitic pictographs, to Middle and Late Semitic letters.

¹⁹ Thanks to the colossal influence of logical positivism which, from the end of the 19th century on, dogmatically conceived of mathematics as devoid of any meaningful content outside the a priori syntactic rules of formal systems.

²⁰ 580-662 A.D.

²¹ Or threefold signification theory (refined by the Scholastics and corroborated in Pierce's semiotic works).

²² Implying *intellectus conceptionem*.

²³ ST. I^a, q. 1, a. 10, co.: "I answer that the author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man can also do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it."

²⁴ 354-430 A.D.

²⁵ 150-215 A.D.

²⁶ Gk. *εσωτερικός*

²⁷ Gk. *μυστηριων* (*mustērion*) \equiv *sacramentum*.

²⁸ Gk. *μυσταγωγία*

²⁹ Which really is to speak tautologically: Sacraments are, by definition, Mysteries, as signaled above.

³⁰ In and outside the biblical text.

³¹ Thus, the three sides of the triangle account for $17 * 3 = 51$, which leaves 14 layers of gnomonically contained triangles.

³² 60 B.C.-120 A.D.

³³ To be known later as Gauss Sum.

³⁴ 15-100 A.D.

³⁵ Such a view rather represents, on a whole, the position of modern epistemologists, number theorists, and philosophers.

³⁶ So translated by Boethius (480-525 A.D.) from the original Greek title *Ἀριθμητική εἰσαγωγή*.

³⁷ The original format of which was lost but partially recapped by Photius I, Patriarch of Constantinople (810-893 A.D.).

³⁸ The interesting constraint here is that the number itself is generated from the sum of all its digits raised to the power n = the number of digits.

³⁹ *Timaeus* 37 d: *εἰκὼ δ' ἐπενόει κινητὸν τινα αἰῶνος ποιῆσαι, καὶ διακοσμῶν ἅμα οὐρανὸν ποιεῖ μένοντος αἰῶνος ἐν ἐνὶ κατ' ἀριθμὸν ἰοῦσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα, τοῦτον δὲ δὴ χρόνον ὠνομάκαμεν*. [“For that reason, he determined to make a moving image of eternity, and, as he marshaled the order of the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself abides in unity; and this image we call time.”]

⁴⁰ The set of all things governed by cyclicity (\equiv by sinusoidal functions)

⁴¹ Literally “Unique”, *עֶחָד* (*ehad*), which deserves much explanation in its own right

⁴² “...the sixth”. The use of the definite article *הַ* (*ha-*) before the ordinal adjective *שִׁשִּׁי*, *שִׁשִּׁי הַ* (*ha-shishi*), narratively marks the exact closing of the 6-fold configuration of the created (finite) order. It occurs exclusively in this place (1:31). From days 1 to 5, all respective ordinal adjectives occur article-free!

⁴³ The orderliness of which obtains both chronologically and metaphysically, subsumed under the paradigmatic concept of ‘day’ throughout Genesis 1 (and the beginning of 2)

⁴⁴ The addition of 5 new Mysteries cannot but disrupt the original and critically significant structure of the entire Holy Rosary. A new complete Rosary thus comprises 20 decades, or a total of 203 *Hail Mary*, and 22 remaining items (instead of the critical 17, as the explanation that follows will lay out).

⁴⁵ That which the prophet is as such appointed to *hear*.

⁴⁶ As expressed in Peter’s full Aramaic name: *Shimon Kayfa bar Yonah*.

⁴⁷ The fish concealed under the sea.

⁴⁸ The fish caught in the net and brought up out of the sea to the light of day.

⁴⁹ 130-202 A.D.

⁵⁰ 185-232 A.D.

⁵¹ Born between 331 and 341, died in 394 A.D.

⁵² Sometime, even without our own awareness.

⁵³ From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, Translated by Frederick Crombie, Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe., (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

⁵⁴ *Life of Moses*, Book II, § 115.

⁵⁵ Ecclesiasticus 39:10.

⁵⁶ Kindgom of Heaven (lat. *Regnum caelorum*), better translated from the original Aramaic מלכותא דשמיא (*Mālkûtâ d’Shmaya*) as: Regulation of Heaven/Heavenly Regulation, which the Latin lexical field centering around the stem *reg-* also closely suggests: *reg-ula* (rule), *reg-num* (kingdom), *reg-imen* (reign) = Regulation.

From this observation, it appears that the specific petition about the Kingdom in the *Our Father* is better translated in English as: “May your *Regulation* come.”

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