RECLAIMING THE ATONEMENT

An Orthodox Theology of Redemption

VOLUME ONE

The Incarnation

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The Incarnate Word

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To my Father in God,
Bishop ANTOUN
of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese, to declare my debt and
confess my gratitude
to a solicitous and wise pastor
and ever faithful friend over many
years,
this modest work is humbly dedicated

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Introduction

The work presented here, a labor that has swollen into three volumes since its inception, addresses the theology of redemption, a subject commonly called "soteriology." The latter term is derived from the Greek word for salvation, *soteria*.

I originally undertook this work, let me mention, under a benign duress. Times out of mind various Christians—but mainly converts to the Orthodox Church—have asked me to publish something about the differences between Eastern and Western theologies of redemption.

I confess now, with embarrassment, that the work presented here is probably not the one they requested, and, before going further, I should explain why I have written something rather different from what my friends sought from me:

First, at present there appears to be no shortage of published efforts to contrast Western and Orthodox views on various theological themes, including soteriology. If Orthodox Christians feel they need yet another work of theological polemics, I am not the man to write it.

Second, I fear the request received from my friends may presuppose there is only *one* legitimate Orthodox theology of redemption. I am persuaded this is not the case. Indeed, I doubt this has ever been the case. In matters of defined dogma, Orthodox Christians speak with a common voice, but within the established dogmatic limits we should expect—as certainly we will get—a considerable variety of theological perspectives from Orthodox Christians. Moreover we can observe this phenomenon all the way back to the Bible itself, where the inspired writers—Peter, John, Paul, *et alii*—contemplate the Mystery of Christ from divergent angles of reflection.

Third, although sincere appeals to the authority of the Catholic/Orthodox

Third, although sincere appeals to the authority of the Church Fathers will, I hope, inform both the writer and the readers of the present work, the actual synthesis presented here is my own. Both its language and its areas of interest necessarily reflect its composition in the early twenty-first century. This will become perfectly clear within the work's earliest chapters.

In particular, I plan for these reflections on soteriology to extend certain thematic lines traced in *The Jesus We Missed*.[1] In the development of my own understanding of salvation, it was important for *that* book to be written *before* this one, for the simple reason that soteriology must be rooted in Christology. That is to say, we cannot seriously reflect on salvation without prior answers to the questions, "Who is Jesus?" and "What account does He give of Himself?" For this reason—even though the present effort will stand or fall on its own—I think of it as a growth from certain germinal ideas presented earlier in *The Jesus We Missed*.

What follows here, then, is my own attempt to synthesize an Orthodox theology of our redemption through Christ. Although it will range over a host of subjects, there are only two or three guiding ideas that govern the present work: What does it mean when we declare that Christ has *saved* us? From *what* has He saved us, and *for what purpose* has He saved us? The reader will benefit from trying to read every paragraph of the present book from a perspective prompted by those questions.

Pastoral Needs and Personal Experience

Adult converts to the Orthodox Church often remark on the sense of relief—not to say liberation—they felt on becoming acquainted with Orthodoxy's teaching on salvation. I have heard testimonies to this point on many occasions.

These folks, coming mainly from Protestant backgrounds, had previously thought about salvation in chiefly forensic terms. Perhaps they were accustomed to hearing the word *merit* a lot with respect to the Cross. Their former soteriology might be summarized in Archbishop Cranmer's lines in *The Book of Common Prayer*, which declare that on the Cross Jesus Christ, "by his one

oblation of himself once offered," made "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world."

Not all these Orthodox newcomers would attach an identical meaning to such formulas, of course. In some cases their ideas had been formed in the tradition of an earlier Archbishop of Canterbury, Saint Anselm, who taught that the sacrificial death of Jesus satisfied the requirements of God's infinite honor, which was offended by sin. Others, more simply, would have described the work of salvation as answering the ontological standards of justice; Jesus "corrected" man's relationship to God within the structure of created reality.

In a large number of cases, I have found, these new Orthodox converts had adhered to a theory commonly called "penal substitutionary atonement"; they had believed that Jesus, by His sufferings and death, had propitiated the divine wrath, in the sense that God laid on *Him*—in place of *us*—the punitive retribution deserved by our sins. According to this theory, God's Son bore the punishment (*poena*) that properly was ours. *Somebody* had to be punished, so God punished Jesus in our stead.

In all these cases, however, our newcomers soon noticed that expressions like these—*meritorious cause, satisfaction,* and, emphatically, *punishment*—are grandly absent from Orthodox prayers and hymns on the theme of redemption. Nor is an Orthodox Christian likely to hear expressions of this sort from the pulpit. As I mentioned, many converts have borne personal testimony to me on this matter; when they joined the Orthodox Church, they gave up thinking about salvation in terms of justice, honor, and, especially, the propitiation of wrath.

Let me confess that I am not among those Orthodox converts for whom this was the case. Not for a very long time had I conceived of salvation in chiefly forensic terms, nor, I believe, had I ever seriously thought of Jesus being *punished* on the Cross; I don't think I have ever imagined that God *took out* His anger on His Son. Indeed, even words like *merit* and *satisfaction* were long gone from my vocabulary when my family and I joined the Orthodox Church in 1988.

It is true that, in my earliest theological studies, more than a half-century ago, I had been content with the "satisfaction theory" of Saint Anselm, according to which the death of God's Son repaired the injury that sin had inflicted on the

divine honor. At that early stage in my studies, this idea of *reparation* sufficiently met my own understanding of "atonement" (a term, by the way, not only unfamiliar to Saint Anselm, but utterly at odds with his thought).

Followed by the Western Scholastic tradition generally, Anselm described theology as "faith in quest of understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Now, if the task of theology was to "understand" the content of faith, then theology needed to give a great deal of attention to "causes," inasmuch as understanding (thank you, Aristotle) is the comprehension of things in their causes. In those days I sometimes had the impression that the determination of causes was *the* purpose of studying theology. (This is why St. Thomas Aquinas described theology as a *scientia*.)

The task of determining causes, being fundamental to Aristotle's theory of understanding, imposed on medieval scholastic theology a new and somewhat revolutionary structure. The great scholastics of the Middle Ages began to speak of the death of Jesus on the Cross as the "effective *cause*" (*causa efficiens*) of our salvation. That is to say, the "because" of our redemption was Jesus' sacrificial death.

I remember reading in Saint Thomas Aquinas, during my early twenties, that the Lord's death on the Cross was the "effective and sufficient cause" (*causa efficax et sufficiens*) of our salvation. Also, the expression "meritorious cause" was often used; salvation had a lot to do with achieving a defined measure of *meritum.* Redemption was something transactional.

The Incarnation and the Resurrection

Nonetheless, I had begun reading, in those days, far beyond scholasticism. When I specifically thought about redemption back then, it was mainly in connection with classical patristic theology, according to which an absolute premise of our redemption was the integrity of the humanity assumed by the Incarnate Word. In the scholastic theology known to me, the Incarnation was essential to our redemption, not so much as an *act* as a *condition*. That is to say, the Incarnation was not, in itself, redemptive; it made redemption *possible*.

In the Church Fathers, however, I began to discover another perspective. I learned that, if the goal of redemption is the *union* of man with God, then the Incarnation was far more than a *condition* for our salvation. It served, rather, as the effective model and exemplar of salvation. The Church Fathers insisted that the "full humanity" of Jesus Christ was *essential* to man's redemption, because "whatever was not assumed was not redeemed." The principle enunciated in this simple formula was the foundation of much of the dogmatic work of the ecumenical councils.

From the mid-fifties through the mid-sixties, I read widely in the writings of both the Greek and the Latin Fathers—the complete works of Saint Basil, for instance, and all the sermons of Saint Leo of Rome—where salvation was rooted in the Incarnation. That is to say, I began to perceive that soteriology was a part of Christology; its foundational thesis declared that what Jesus accomplished on our behalf, and for our benefit, depended entirely on *who He was*.

Somehow, nonetheless, this patristic perspective on the Incarnation still left room in my mind for Saint Anselm's "satisfaction theory" of redemption: the "final cause," or purpose, of redemption was the satisfaction of God's offended honor, and its "effective cause" was the sacrificial death of Christ. What was missing in my understanding at that time was a proper grasp of the redemptive quality of the Lord's Resurrection.

My perspective on this matter changed dramatically in my mid-twenties. In 1963, the year of its publication, I read with great profit an English translation of F. X. Durwell's book, *The Resurrection: A Biblical Study*. This reading was, I think, my first recognized exposure to the thesis that the *Resurrection* of Christ was essential to the "causality" of redemption. According to Durwell's analysis of the New Testament, for our eternal salvation the Resurrection of Jesus was just as essential as His death on the Cross.

Indeed, no other explanation would fit Saint Paul's declaration that Christ "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). (To this day I am amazed that I had failed to observe this same teaching during my extensive reading of Saint Augustine of Hippo, in whose writings the soteriological importance of the Lord's

Resurrection appears with almost thematic frequency. More will be said about this in the pages to come.)

Biblical Categories

In the sixties, I was blessed to take a course in soteriology under Father Stanislas Lyonnet, to whom my personal debt is immense. In recent years Lyonnet's major work, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, has been translated into English, but in those days his theology of redemption was little known in this country. For me, the major value of Lyonnet's lectures derived from his exegesis of the Apostle Paul in the context of the Old Testament theology of sacrifice. I came to see the serious deficiencies in my understanding of "sacrifice" in the Bible.

In particular, Lyonnet demonstrated that attention to God's wrath was *not* part of the theology of Israel's sacrificial system. Indeed, the wrath of God was a concept alien to Israel's understanding of blood sacrifice; although the Hebrew Scriptures have a great deal to say about the divine wrath in connection with sin, they say nothing about it in connection with the sin offering.

And if the sin offering was not related to the wrath of God, how much less the other sacrifices prescribed in the Torah. The God worshipped in Israel's ancient temple was not bloodthirsty. When He became angry, the anger might be *turned away* (by the offering of incense, for example, a symbol of prayer), but it was never *appeased* by the shedding of blood.

Something similar must be noted with respect to punishment for sin. A chief problem with the theory of penal substitutionary atonement is the difficulty of justifying it within the biblical understanding of sacrifice. In the Torah there is no indication that the victims of Israel's various sacrifices—the bulls, the goats, the sheep, the doves, and so forth—were being punished in any sense whatever. Clearly those mactated animals were substitutes, but not in a sense that implied penal retribution.

In Israel's sacrificial system, then, neither divine anger nor human punishment (*poena*) was a part of the picture. (Once again, how had I failed to notice something so obvious throughout the Torah?)

I narrate this account of my experience by way of explaining why, when my

family and I joined the Orthodox Church in 1988, we had no sense of discovering something new or different in respect to redemption. On this point, at least, our transition into the Orthodox Church was absolutely seamless. Although I had never read any modern study of Orthodox soteriology, I found Orthodox teaching on salvation identical to biblical doctrine to which I had already adhered for more than forty years. My formal, academic study of theology depended, in large part, on recent secondary sources written by Western Christians, but it prepared me to feel completely at home in the Orthodox Church.

Atonement?

It is imperative that these introductory comments explain somewhat my choice of the word *atonement* in the title of the present project.

This word is new to Eastern Orthodox theology, which has only recently, after all, found its way into the English language. Much of theological English is dominated by terms of Latin origin: *trinity*, *generation*, *mission*, *procession*, *sacraments*, *grace*, *deification*, *advent*, *nativity*, *presentation*, *redemption*, *salvation*, and so on. Now it is a fact that most Orthodox Christians have no problem using these terms from Western theology. Non-Latin theological words are used less frequently, *Lent* being the obvious exception.

Since I am writing in English, I hope to find sympathy from other Orthodox Christians for my use of a uniquely English expression, *atonement*, to designate what Christ the Redeemer accomplished on the earth. Aware that this term is widely (and improperly) associated with satisfaction theories of redemption, I recognize the objection that might be raised against it for this reason.[2]

However, this objection is not, I believe, well founded, nor should a common misunderstanding of a term necessarily preclude its use, especially when the use is joined to a proper explanation. My adoption of the word, moreover, is not without historical analogies.

Thus—to use what I think is a stunning example—how many modern Orthodox Christians would object to the word *Incarnation*? Nonetheless, the

history of sacred theology testifies that this term was once—and widely—understood in a heretical sense. Apollinaris of Laodicea understood *Incarnation* (*Sarkosis*) to mean that God's eternal Word assumed a human body *without* a human soul.

The Church, nonetheless, would not permit Apollinaris, though he was a stern opponent of Arianism, to claim exclusive use of the word *Incarnation*. Orthodox writers continued to employ the expression, even though they knew it was widely understood in a heterodox sense. Today, can we imagine an Orthodox Christian objecting to the word *Incarnation*?

I note a second example. The adjective *homoousios* ("of the same being as"), prior to its canonization at Nicaea—and rather widely *after* Nicaea—was understood in a "unitarian" sense; it was used to affirm that there is *no* real difference between the Father and the Son. That is to say, the Fathers at Nicaea decided to use (and even to insist on) a word widely understood in an unorthodox sense.

Why? Well, they believed *homoousios* to be the *right* word to express the Son's relationship to the Father, even though they were aware that it was often understood in a heretical sense. Can we imagine, today, an Orthodox Christian objecting to the adjective *homoousios* as it appears in the Nicene Creed?

Much the same can be said of the Latin-derived word *deification*, a term highly favored among Orthodox Christians. Notwithstanding the currently widespread use of *deification* in New Age philosophy, I am familiar with not one Orthodox Christian who is hesitant to say "deification" when he speaks of our union with God. Must we Orthodox Christians drop the word *deification* simply because it is widely and more commonly understood today in an unorthodox sense? No one seems to think so, and I agree.

In fact, it seems to me there is virtually *no* theological term that has not been appropriated, at some time or other, to express heresy or unsound teaching. I believe, then, that these significant analogues in the history of theology amply warrant the use of the word *atonement* in an Orthodox sense. When using any term capable of more than one meaning, we simply explain which meaning we have in mind.

Let me suggest, moreover, that the sheer etymological wealth of the word *atonement*—"the setting at one"—more than justifies our using it to express the richness of what Orthodox Christians mean by *salvation*. In the present work I am relying on *atonement*—the significance of which is best conveyed in its central, accented, and load-bearing syllable—to support the weight of four ideas. In truth, I am hard pressed to think of another English word that carries all four of these ideas equally well.

First, "at-one-ment" conveys the force of the Pauline idea of *reconciliation*. It well expresses what Paul said to the Corinthians:

> Now all things are of God, reconciling (*katallachsantos*) us to Himself through Jesus Christ and giving us the ministry of reconciliation (*katallages*); that is, God was in Christ reconciling (*katallasson*) the world to Himself—not reckoning to them their offenses—and He has entrusted to us the word of reconciliation (*katallages*). (2 Cor. 5:18–19; cf. Rom. 5:10)

On man's part (not God's!), says Paul, there stood an enmity God Himself abolished by what He accomplished in Christ. This is one of the meanings of *atonement*: "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

Second, "at-one-ment" conveys our *experience* of being "*in* Christ"[3] and "*with* Christ."[4] These analogous prepositions of place have long served to designate the deep, living union we have with Christ by His gracious love. *Atonement* expresses this union perfectly: We are *at-one* with Christ. The Father, gazing upon us, sees and loves the Son He perceives within us.

Third, *atonement* expresses the goal of redemption, which is the transfiguring union of man with God. Orthodox soteriology does not start—as Saint Anselm did—with fallen man. It commences, rather, with man completely restored and transformed in Christ. The word *atonement* signifies the goal, the *telos* or *skopos* of all God's activity in this world: man's participation in the divine life.[5]

Total transformation in Christ is a very early and traditional idea in the Church. Already in the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons, a direct and immediate heir to the Pauline and Johannine traditions of Asia, wrote of "our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his supreme love became what we are, in order to bring us to what he himself is."[6]

More boldly, Athanasius of Alexandria, two centuries later, wrote of God's Son, "he became man that we might become God" (*Avtos gar enenthropesen hina hemeis theopoethomen*).[7] The tradition represented by Athanasius regarded the divinizing of man as the purpose of the Incarnation. Variations of this idea, whether as a noun or a verb, appear repeatedly, especially among the Alexandrians.[8]

Slightly later in the fourth century, St. Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzen) coined a shorter expression, *theosis*, which became more common among the Greek Fathers to designate the believer's incorporation into the life of God.[9] This persuasion—and even this mode of expressing it—became standard during the period of the great Christological controversies.[10] (We will return to it later, when we look at Saint Maximus the Confessor.)

Largely through the Latin translations of St. John Damascene and Pseudo-Dionysius in the Middle Ages, the equivalent *deificatio* gradually became acceptable in the West.[11]

I use the word *atonement*, then, to include redemption's full effect in the human being—that is, man's deification, his transfiguration in the glory of Christ. Among properly English words I cannot think of one that better expresses this theandric (God-man) quality of what Christ accomplishes for us.[12]

Fourth, *atonement* enjoys the added merit of expressing the cosmology of redemption, the reconciliation of the whole universe, its "re-heading" (*anakephalaiosis, recapitulatio*) in Christ. *Atonement* conveys everything St. Paul meant when he wrote that it pleased the Father, through Christ, "to reconcile all things (*apokatallaxsai ta panta*) to Himself, through Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."[13]

Christ's reconciliation embraces "all things"—*ta panta*. The glory of the transfigured Christ transforms the entire universe; heaven and earth are full of His glory.

The Scope of This Work

In treating of salvation, many writers adopt what I may call a "post-hole-digger" approach to the subject; they narrow their field of interest and concentrate attention on a severely limited number of considerations, chiefly those favored in the polemical literature of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Other concerns tend to be left out.

For example, the Incarnation. It is not uncommon for modern books of soteriology to refer to the Incarnation only in a cursory way; they speak of the two natures of Christ, but solely in order to explain why Jesus' death on the Cross was efficacious or meritorious in God's sight.

Also, the revelation contained in the earthly life of Jesus is hardly mentioned in some works on soteriology, as though the drama of redemption were separable from the other events—and teaching—of Jesus that gave rise to the Holy Week narrative. What an Orthodox Christian should find especially distressing is the total omission of the Lord's Transfiguration from some modern soteriological studies.

The Lord's Ascension into heaven, likewise, goes often unmentioned in treatises of soteriology; there is frequently no sense that the Ascension was an act integral to our salvation. It is amazing how rarely—or in what a cursory manner—the Ascension is mentioned at all, as though His entry into the heavenly sanctuary, "not made with hands," carried no soteriological weight.[14]

The approach to redemption in the present book, if I can help it, will not be narrow. Its working style will, in this respect, resemble rather a shovel than a post-hole-digger; the opening of the hermeneutical hole will encompass a much larger area. Assuming that the entire life and ministry of Jesus will be treated as salvific, everything between the Incarnation and the Ascension of our Lord—everything of which the four Gospels speak—should be our subject matter.[15]

In addition, this wider scope of attention will require comments on a number of subjects not always associated with the atonement in the popular mind—subjects such as cosmology, history, philosophy, language, literature, and psychology. This work will devote consideration to expressions of human consciousness and creativity. It will concern itself with man's place in the world, his vocation to be the "thinking part" of the cosmos, the one *locus* in creation where the universe searches to make sense of itself.[16]

Let me say, up front, that I believe the disassociation of these subjects—history, philosophy, language, literature, and psychology—from the consideration of redemption represents a serious defect; their exclusion narrows the Christian soteriological thesis to a mere fraction of its meaning.[17]

If, however, the reader is not to be bewildered by the inclusion of these subjects in the present book, he should consider that the word *atonement,* in its very etymology, conveys a unique kind of catholicity (*kat'-holon*, "wholeness"). The oneness of redemption is not a monistic extension of God's being. It is the incorporation, rather—the *embodying*, the *sarkosis*—of all the divine (and human!) work Christ accomplished as the God-man.

I include considerations of these human subjects of inquiry, therefore, with a twofold intent:

First, I want to demonstrate, as far as I can, that these expressions of our humanity—history, philosophy, language, literature, psychology—bear man's intrinsic capacity for spiritual transformation; the divine energies knock persistently on their doors. These branches of human inquiry already possess, by reason of God's salvific purpose in Creation itself, an innate openness to—an obedient potential to receive—what the transfiguring glory of Christ ultimately confers upon them.

Second, if the fact of the Incarnation means that the Word adopted the fullness of human experience—sin excepted, says the Epistle to the Hebrews—then *nothing human* can be excluded from the study of redemption. The Word, embracing our humanity, took possession of *all* of it in order to redeem all of it.

The Mind of Christ

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, provided both the matter and the form of sacred theology, I believe, when he declared,

> The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. . . . Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. . . . For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:10, 12, 16)

I am not confident—let me mention—that the usual translation of *nous Christou*, "the mind of Christ," adequately conveys its content. Perhaps "Christ's *perception*" is closer to the mark, as indicated by the Vulgate's *sensus Christi*. If (St. Jerome and) I interpret Paul's expression correctly, the *nous Christou* is *how Christ Himself understands* "the things freely given to us by God"—*ta hypo tou Theou charisthenta hemin*.

And just what have we been given in Christ? He Himself tells us: "All things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Christ discloses to us the mind of God, and He does this through the medium of His own human mind, His own *sensus*. That is to say, the Incarnation is not simply a revealed truth; it is the fact and foundation for knowing *all* revealed truth, including the truth of salvation. This is why I plan to explore in these reflections, as much as possible, Jesus' own self-understanding, His interpretation of His redemptive work. If we want to understand what Jesus *was doing* on this earth, perhaps we should first inquire what Jesus *thought* He was doing. I have not the slightest doubt that this is what the apostolic writings endeavored to do.

Mine is not, however, an individual exercise, something worked out in isolation. I presume, at all times, the mediating and formative context of the Orthodox Church as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). At no point, please God, must these reflections stray from the living continuity of the Body of Christ. I intend for my reliance on the Sacred Tradition to be clear, absolute, and without reservation.

The purpose of this book is to serve the ministry of God's Word, in which "we speak in words—not in the teachings of human wisdom, but in the teachings of the Spirit—assessing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). I take this *sensus Christi* to be the proper supposition and the final purpose of sacred theology.

Moreover, according to Paul, we are given this same perception of Christ, this *nous Christou*, by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10–14). It is in the Holy Spirit that the Church thinks theologically. Consequently, sacred theology is conceivable only as an extension of the transformative outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of the Church, centered—as we shall explore in the first chapter—in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Within the context of the Church's worship, I hope to show, the recitation/chanting of the Psalter holds a privileged place. The praying of the divinely inspired Psalms obliges the believing mind to enter into those sacred poems that the Son of God addressed to His Father.[18]

The Context of Christ's Mind

If the subject of soteriology is approached in this way—and if the word *salvation* is taken to summarize "the things freely given to us by God"—the first question sacred theology may want to ask is, "Just what did Jesus the Savior think He was doing in the work of salvation? How did the God-Man perceive what He was about? What, in His mind, were 'the things of My Father' that He had to accomplish? What was Jesus' own *sense* of redemption?"

We must rely, then, on the Gospel. Since the theology of redemption takes its rise from the Gospel itself, it is reasonable to start with the Gospel in order to discern its direction, method, structure, and content.

Understanding salvation to consist in the union of human beings with God, the Church—rather early in the history of sacred theology—perceived (and went on, in her conciliar determinations, to define) an intimate connection between the truth of salvation and the truth of the Incarnation. Briefly stated, this means that man's salvation required the Savior, God's divine and eternal Son, to

become an integral human being. The *res*, the reality, of man's salvation, demanded the *res* of the Incarnation. Each of the seven ecumenical councils declared and defended some aspect of that principle.

This thesis regarding the integrity of the Incarnation, however, is not adequately expressed by saying that God's Son assumed human nature. It must say, rather, that the Son assumed *the full human condition*; He entered into and experienced history, not in a general and abstract way, but by the organic insertion of His personal being into a determined time and specific circumstances. Otherwise it would not be the case that "in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Heb. 2:17).

As this quotation suggests, some of our earliest formulations of this truth come from the Epistle to the Hebrews, a work of incalculable importance in the thinking of the ecumenical councils.

The author of Hebrews, by way of interpreting Psalm 8 ("You have made him a little lower than the angels"), comments that God's Son "does not assume (*epilambanetai*) [the nature of] angels, but he assumes the seed of Abraham" (2:16). This statement is a striking illustration of my point. The author of Hebrews does not say that God's Son "assumes human nature." He is said, rather, to assume the conditions of a specific line of history: Abraham's seed. He did not simply become a man; he became a covenanted descendant of Abraham.

By the Incarnation, God's Word embraced humanity within a biological and historical framework at a specific point in a stream of revelation unique to the children of Abraham. The Son's appearance in this world is set in the context of God's continuing revelation to this particular people: "God, who at various times and in various ways formerly spoke to the fathers by the prophets, has in these final days spoken to us by a Son" (1:1).[19]

The Theology of Sacrifice

As the Christological understanding of the Old Testament pertains to the theology of salvation, a special importance attaches to the Old Testament's theology of sacrifice, inasmuch as Jesus interpreted His own death as a sacrifice

offered for man's deliverance from sin and death. Consequently, a concentrated study of Israel's ritual worship, particularly the significance of sacrifice, is of primary importance for a proper theological understanding of *what* was accomplished—and *how* it was accomplished—on the Cross.

This aspect of soteriology points to a more general principle that pertains to all Christian theology: It is impossible to grasp "the mind of Christ"—which is, after all, the work of theology—apart from the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures. No Old Testament, no Christian theology. God set it up this way.

The Apostle Paul indicated the same approach when he described his initial message to the Corinthians:

> I delivered to you—as of primary importance—that which I also received: that the Messiah died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day *according to the Scriptures.* (1 Cor. 15:3)

The apostolic preaching did not simply declare the soteriological significance of Jesus' death and Resurrection; it specifically did so "according to the Scriptures." That is to say, an explicit reference to the Old Testament was contained in the content of the Gospel. It was an integral part of the proclamation itself. Paul would have regarded the omission of the Hebrew Scriptures as a defect in the apostolic message.

If this is true of the Gospel, it must also be true of a soteriology based on the Gospel. An authentic theology of redemption will be—"as of primary importance"—exegetical. It will investigate the death and Resurrection of Christ in a specific way; namely, "according to the Scriptures."

In making this point in 1 Corinthians, Paul simply gave prescriptive form to the soteriological approach we find all through the literary evidence left us by the apostles and the apostolic churches. For now, I limit our consideration to just two texts:

First, when the Apostle Peter set himself to convey the meaning of Jesus' death and Resurrection to the assembled crowds on the morning of Pentecost, he appealed to the testimony of the Scriptures—specifically, to Psalms 16(15):8–11

and 110(109):1 (Acts 2:23–35). Instinctively, as it were, Peter interpreted the redemptive work of Christ "according to the Scriptures."

Second, when the Church incorporated the theme of redemption into her worship, this incorporation included images and expressions drawn from the ancient Scriptures. A very early example is in the hymn fragment quoted by the Apostle Paul, when he wrote of Christ Jesus,

> who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be seized, but He emptied Himself, assuming the form of a slave, coming in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:5–7)

In the primitive soteriology of this hymn, we discern references both to Genesis, where disobedient Adam sought equality with God, and to the Book of Isaiah, where God's obedient Servant emptied Himself.

In both these New Testament texts, which I take to be typical of the soteriology in the apostolic period, the Old Testament serves as the interpretive lens. It provides direction, method, structure, and content to the theology of redemption.

In the Church's impulse to search the Hebrew Scriptures for the understanding of redemption, I believe we should see, not only the quest to identify objective prophetic references, but also the effort to discern the subjective "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Authentic theology is an extension of the mind of Christ; it proceeds through an understanding of the revealed Scriptures as Jesus understood them. There is one and only one reason Christian theology investigates the Hebrew Scriptures in order to grasp the meaning of redemption: this is what *Jesus* did.

In other words, the Old Testament and the redemptive work of Christ are not related simply by way of objective semantic reference, but also through the living subjective experience of the Redeemer—Jesus' own understanding of Holy Scripture. The conjunction of the Sacred Text and the redemptive event was originally discerned in the active, self-reflective understanding (*phronesis*) of Jesus of Nazareth, who heard in the words of the Hebrew Bible the Father's

personal summons to obedience. Jesus' own mind was the defining *locus* of humanity's capacity to hear and obey the historical summons of God.

In the very act of commissioning the Gospel, Jesus elaborated this personal understanding of the Holy Scriptures for the benefit of the Church. Jesus did not send the Apostles out to evangelize the world until He made sure they *understood* the Hebrew Scriptures:

> Then He said to them, "These words I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things." (Acts 24:44–48)

Even before His Passion, Jesus intimated certain aspects of this understanding. Perhaps the clearest example of this intimation is found in the words of the eucharistic Institution: "This is My body which is given for you. . . . This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." In these words, Jesus had recourse to thematic imagery from Exodus and the Book of Isaiah in order to interpret His celebration of "this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15–20).

Such a preoccupation with biblical prophecy will, I hope, explain why, at many points in this book, I attempt to indicate the teaching of the Old Testament in every aspect of soteriology.

Finally . . .

When, more than a decade ago, Ancient Faith Publishing approached me about writing on this subject, I conceived of it as having three parts, corresponding to three recognized sections of textbook theology: the Word Incarnate, the Mystery

of the Cross, and the Triumph of the Resurrection. (It will be clear, shortly, that I adopted this outline from the thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor, without whose guidance I would never have had the wisdom or courage to proceed.)

That original project will now fill three volumes, each dealing with one of those headings. In chapter two of the present volume I will indicate how this division of the work is based on the tripartite soteriology of Saint Maximus.

That second chapter, however, will be preceded by another, dealing with the ecclesiological context of sacred theology. With chapter three, we will start more specifically to concentrate on the Mystery of the Incarnation.

I conceive of this work as a collection of "reflections." Although it is composed with an intentional and discernible structure, it is not a systematic or scholastic treatise. The things written in these pages are simply the thoughts of a parish priest, charged with tending and feeding the flock of the Lord. Almost every line of this work began with notes made for sermons and adult Sunday School classes.

All English translations in this book, including those from Sacred Scripture, are mine. When I thought it necessary to support my translation, or when it seemed otherwise pertinent, the original language is quoted in either the text or the endnotes.

The Old Testament is quoted according to the Septuagint when either the New Testament writers or the Church Fathers presuppose that version; this is almost always the case for the Psalter. Otherwise, the translation is from the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text; the context and presentation usually indicate which. Old Testament references are given with the Hebrew book name, followed by the Septuagint name, if different, in parentheses. When I mention textual variants in either Testament, these are normally drawn from the critical apparatus of the standard editions; in one or two cases the reader's attention is called to exceptions.

Notes

1 Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012.

2 “Atonement” is often used to designate Anselm’s theory, even though Anselm, who wrote in Latin, was not familiar with the term. Indeed, I am at a loss to explain why the word “atonement” was *ever* used to describe Anselm’s theory of satisfaction. As far as I can tell, there is not the faintest whiff of “atonement” in Anselm’s satisfaction theory.

3 Rom. 6:11, 23; 8:1–2; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7; 1 Cor. 1:2; and so on.

4 Matt. 28:20; Mark 3:14; Luke 23:43.

5 The present work was nine-tenths complete when Dr. Christopher Veniamin, the much-appreciated translator of St. Gregory Palamas, published his densely rich book, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation: “Theosis” in Scripture and Tradition* (Mount Thabor, 2013). I recommend this scholarly and devout study of the Greek Fathers with enthusiasm and without reservation.

6 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 5, Preface.

7 Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 54.

8 For instance, Origen, *Homilies on John* 2.2; *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 25; Didymus the Blind, *On the Trinity* 3.16; Cyril of Alexandria, *Treasury on the Trinity* 33.

9 Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 25.2; cf., *inter alios*, Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* 1.3; Anastasius of Sinai, *The Leader* 2; John Damascene, *Carmen in Theogoniam* 93.

10 Cf. Gregory the Theologian, *Dogmatic Poems* 10.5–9; Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 25; Diodoch of Photike, *Sermon on the Ascension*.

11 Even in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), this noun never appears, though I know of one time he uses the cognate verb, *deificari*, to refer to the life of heaven; cf. his *De Diligendo Deo* 28.

12 I say “atonement,” then, for pretty much the same reason a Russian Orthodox writer says *Bogochelovek* (God-man): Both words are able to express the transfigured anthropology of redemption.

13 Col. 1:20. I quote the longer version of this verse (with the extra “through him”), which is adequately supported (in my opinion) in the manuscripts and is

certainly preferred among the Antiochian Fathers.

14 There is a stunning example of this neglect in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, published over several years during the early twentieth century; in the entire course of that mammoth, thorough, indispensable, multivolume work, there is no article devoted to the Ascension!

15 Some episodes and aspects of our Lord's earthly life will receive less attention than others, particularly those I have already considered in *The Jesus We Missed*.

16 Material of this kind will appear mainly in the second volume of this work.

17 On those several occasions when I have been invited to speak on this subject at Protestant campuses in Chicago, students remarked on how much more "ample" is the Orthodox understanding of salvation.

18 Even as this first volume goes to my editor, a new and important study of this theme has just appeared: Matthew Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 2015). While I lament my inability to make use of this book in this first volume of my work, I thank Dr. Bates for sending me an advance copy in galley form. It is an intriguing investigation, demonstrating how the developing Trinitarian convictions and formulas of the Church arose from her discernment of the Trinitarian "voices" (*prosopa*, *personae*) heard in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. I deeply appreciate Bates's magisterial presentation of this subject, which I was barely able to perceive in the second edition of *Christ in the Psalms* (Conciliar Press/Ancient Faith Publishing, 2011), pp. xi–xiv. I hope, however, that his remarkable book will better inform the next two volumes of the present work.

19 The lack of a definite article modifying "Son" in the Greek text conveys a nearly adjectival sense; it heightens the *quality* of Jesus' testimony. "Son" is contrasted with mere "prophets." This is the first of dozens of such contrasts in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

CHAPTER 1

Life in the Church

Since these reflections on the atonement will form an exercise in sacred theology, I believe it necessary to preface them with some attention given to their principal (and principled) contextual presuppositions. We should begin by asking *what*, exactly, does sacred theology try to do, and, specifically, *what* is the proper setting for doing it?

These initial reflections will, I hope, provide the proper mental and spiritual context for the whole work. I will try to show here that *life in the worshipping Church* is the proper and indispensable context for doing theology. Erudition is no substitute for a devout mind. Sacred theology may be studied in a classroom, but it is *learned* in worship.

Prior to exploring the theology of redemption in a specific way, it is appropriate to reflect on the social/sacramental setting in which such an exploration is made. Sacred theology is, after all, an activity of the Church. Its deepest and most lively context is the Church's sacramental and liturgical worship.

More specifically, the study of salvation is properly formed from within the ecclesial experience and process of being saved, and this experience is chiefly communicated in the Church's sacramental and liturgical worship. Prior to examining the larger subject of this book, therefore, it is fitting to reflect on the ecclesial context and experience of salvation.

We often hear of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3), but it is anybody's guess how often we reflect on the identity of those "saints." It seems important to do so, nonetheless, because we have no historical access to that

important to do so, nonetheless, because we have no historical access to that faith except through the experience of the believers to whom it was delivered. Divine revelation—God's Incarnate Son included—is available to us only through the specific men and women in whose lives the revelation took place.

This fact is most obvious in the Sacred Writings. Our access to the events of Sinai, for instance, comes to us through Moses and the myriad authors, editors, and scribes—Jewish and Christian—who transmitted the experience and content of what took place in the Exodus and the Sinai encounter. Likewise, our historical access to Jesus, the Son of God, comes through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and, prior to them, through Peter and Paul and the congregations to which they and their companions ministered. In short, none of this revelation is available to us except through that corporate, historical body: Israel/the Church.

The Faith of the Saints

The biblical God does not seem to send private messages (and, if He does, they should probably remain private). Whenever He speaks to *anybody*, He intends the message for *everybody*. In other words, a listening and faithful *congregation* is always the purpose, goal, and intent of the message. The very notion "Church" is implied whenever God speaks. The root of the Church is the Word of God; the Church is the *qahal*, the assembly, or *ekklesia*, summoned to hear the Word of God. As soon as God speaks and man believes, there is "Church."

For this reason I have always wondered about the adequacy of the expression *solus Christus* ("Christ alone"). Christ is, in fact, *never* alone. God's Son did not simply show up here one day. He came to us through a believing Mother (whose consent in faith was absolutely essential to the event of the Incarnation), and He gathered around Him disciples and apostles, whom He commissioned to evangelize the nations. In the Bible we hardly ever find Jesus alone. He stands always with the saints. We know our Lord—and, in the strict sequence of history, He is certainly *our* Lord before He is *my* Lord—through the experiences and writings of the saints.

Indeed, the experiences and writings of the saints pertain to the revelation itself, and this is the reason the original witness to Christ was multiple. A certain

perspectivism[1] pertains to the very essence of the revelation. Just as much as our natural vision comes from the joined perspectives of our two eyes, our gaze at Jesus is shaped by the divergent angles from which the saints beheld the same glory shining from His face. That is to say, their experience of Jesus, their perspective, is an essential component of the faith once delivered to them. The Church is not only the recipient of divine revelation; she is also *part* of divine revelation.

Thus, the experience of the saints is essential to the matter and form of the revelation. The Church—the body of the believers, the saints—pertains to the very substance of the Gospel. Those who mediate the Good News are an integral component of the Good News. This is the reason the Creed includes "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" within its articles of belief. It is an extraordinary thing to reflect that God reveals Himself to us through the responsive experience of others who preceded us. Their Spirit-given response to God's revelation became a component of the revelation.

Consequently, it is crucial not to mute the historical quality—the sequential and transmitting process—of the revelation. When we speak of the historical, factual nature of revelation and redemption, we mean something very clear and definite: Certain historical events actually *constitute* the substance of revelation and redemption. Redemption and revelation are *identical* to those events.

A simple analysis of the Nicene Creed demonstrates this to be the case; the creedal articles form a sequential narrative. A certain specific (and recorded) history *is* revelation and redemption. This is what we call *salvation history*, a term indicating that distinct events, including inspired reflections on these events, constitute the very activity by which believers in Christ are saved.

Revelation, Time, and the Bible

But there is no history without time. Indeed, this salvation history embraces "time" as understood in two senses: both time as "moment" and time as "sequence"—both *kairos* and *chronos*.

First, with respect to history as "moment" (*kairos*), revelation and redemption were effected in specific *kairoi*, individual revelatory and redemptive events—Creation, the summons to the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the Sinai experience, the Davidic covenant, the call of the prophets, the Incarnation, the founding of the Church, and all the rest. These *moments* are treated in the Bible with considerable attention.

Second, with respect to the second meaning of "time" (*chronos*), the aforesaid events took place sequentially, in the formal process of a Tradition (*paradosis*). They were transmitted—and in the Spirit-given memory of the Church, the very historical identity of the Church, continue to be transmitted—in a specific historical, accumulative *sequence*; revelation and redemption are chronometric. All of sacred theology, including the theology of salvation, comes through salvation history. It is essential to the Christian faith to insist that at absolutely no point do revelation and redemption lose their historical quality.

The privileged book of this salvation history is Holy Scripture—but Holy Scripture only as it is read, proclaimed, understood, chanted, and prayed-over *in the Church*. Holy Scripture is the text of a proclamation; it is the *Word*, spoken and listened to. It is not a mere book of record; it is God's living and dynamic Word. It is the book of the divine energies, and whenever it is read and proclaimed in faith, God speaks to His People in the here and now—as surely as He spoke at Bethel, on Sinai, and along the road to Damascus.

We should consider three points of the relationship of the Scriptures to salvation history:

First, the Bible not only records salvation history; it also transmits and creates salvation history. By this I mean that the Bible, as written down, read, and proclaimed in the ongoing community of faith (the Church of both Testaments), influences and directs the course of salvation history. We ourselves are part of that history created by Holy Scripture. We are the *qahal*, the *ecclesia*, the gathering of those who in the Holy Spirit are assembled to attend to God's Word. In what it records, the Bible itself prolongs the reality of salvation history in those who receive the Word in faith.

Second, this unified history, comprised of what the Bible records and what the Bible creates, is a single, living, ongoing reality, in which there is a continuity between the words of the Bible and the Church's understanding of those words. If there were to be a break between the Bible and its interpretation, that continuity would be lost. There would be a disruption in salvation history. This is the tragedy known as *heresy*. Heresy is not simply a misunderstanding of the Word of God; it is rupture between the Bible and the transmitted faith of God's People.

Within this transmission—Sacred Tradition—the Fathers of the Church hold a particular authority as witnesses to the inherited truth known in faith. The Church Fathers are not, however, a separate font of authority, so to speak, alongside the Scriptures; indeed, the writings of the Fathers testify to their own conscious, unquestioning submission to the authority of the Bible. The Church Fathers did not speak on their own authority; they believed themselves to be expositors and servants of God's Word. And this is how the Church regards them. When we speak of "the Bible and the Fathers," we do not mean there is any kind of parity between them. The Bible is God's inspired Word; the Fathers are the charismatic readers and expositors of that Word.

Third, this ongoing continuity—the transmission of the Holy Spirit in the Church from one generation to the next—is called Holy Tradition, which embraces, as a single reality, the history narrated in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Scriptures themselves, and the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church that reads these Scriptures in her worship, understands them in her teaching, and proclaims them in her ministry to the world. The biblical history narrated in the Church by the reading and proclamation of the Scriptures is the early part of the Church's own history. Salvation history is *our* history, and we in the Church understand it as such.

The Evening Sacrifice

Inasmuch as the history of salvation is a unified reality—stretching from the far reaches of biblical history through the life of God's People in both testaments, and extending even to the event of the Lord's Second Coming—the Church has

consistently believed, from the time of the Apostles, that the Old Testament Scriptures continue to function as our "instructor unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24). The substance of the faith, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, remains identical through the continuity of the two Testaments. Christ is the link joining Old Testament history to Church history. Profound affinities of fact and narrative bear witness to their unity.

By way of illustration, it may be useful to test that persuasion by examining a concrete example from the Torah. For this purpose I have chosen Jacob, to see how the saga of that patriarch's life still shapes, even today, the religious experience and even the literature of God's People.

Jacob, according to the Holy Scripture, was the true founder of the shrine at Bethel. Genesis describes the prompting occasion:

> Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he prayed in a place (*vayiphg'a bammaqom*) and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (28:11–12)

In the course of the dream, Jacob received specific promises of God relative to his own life and to the ongoing drama of salvation history. On awakening, he found himself still deeply moved by the experience:

> "Surely, the Lord is in this place, though I was unaware." And he was afraid and said, "How terrifying is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (28:16–17)

Then, by way of consecrating the site, Jacob "took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place 'House of God' (*Beth-El*)" (28:18–19). This modest ritual consecration was the beginning of Israel's traditional shrine at Bethel.

My translation of *vayiphg'a*—"and he prayed"—in Genesis 28:11 follows the lead of Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, better known as Rashi (died AD 1105), who records the interpretation "of our rabbis" (*rabotenu*) that *vayiphg'a* was understood to replace the word "intercession" (*tephillah*).[2]

According to Rashi, it is the proper sense of this verse that Jacob "*prayed* in this place" before he lay down to sleep. The vision in his dream, therefore, was God's response to Jacob's prayer. "Thus," wrote Rashi, "we learn that he originated the custom of evening prayer."[3]

In due course, Jacob's prayer at eventide received a more solemn form in the ritual of the Temple: the evening sacrifice, which became, in due course, the office of "Vespers" in the diurnal of the Christian Church. Jacob is, in short, the man who began the discipline of Vespers. Thus, whenever believers assemble for evening prayer, they gather with Jacob at Bethel.

The Church's first "Theologian" portrays the prophetic force of the Bethel event in his description of the calling of Nathaniel:

> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said to Him, "How is it You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree?' You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Amen, I say to you, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (John 1:47–51)[4]

The allusion to the Bethel scene—Jesus Himself as the mediating ladder of Jacob's dream—continues John's introduction of the Incarnate Word dwelling among us (cf. 1:14). Jesus is here identified as the true shrine, the tabernacle (or temple—see 2:19–21) of the Word among men.

Saint Augustine of Hippo revels in the rich imagery of the scene:

> Who is the stone placed under Jacob's head but Christ, the head of man? And in its anointing the very name of Christ is expressed, for, as all know, Christ means "anointed."

In making this identification, Augustine is aware of following the thought of the first chapter of John. He continues:

> Christ refers to this in the Gospel, and declares it to be a type of Himself, when He said of Nathanael that he was an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile, and when Nathanael, resting his head, as it were, on this Stone, or on Christ, confessed Him as the Son of God and the King of Israel, anointing the Stone by his confession, in which he acknowledged Jesus to be Christ. On this occasion the Lord made appropriate mention of what Jacob saw in his dream: "Amen, I say unto you, you shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."[5]

Jacob's prayer and consecration, according to Scripture and Holy Tradition, constituted a living prophecy of the Incarnation; his anointed stone was a *typos* (type) of Christ, the true *locus* (place) where earth and heaven are joined. The Incarnate Word is the living medium of the Church's prayer.

Faith in Jesus

I set as foundational in this book, not a consideration of faith in general, but the believers' living relationship to Christ. In binding us to Christ, faith ties us to the history of salvation. Thus, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, after his long panegyric on the biblical heroes of faith, refers to Jesus as "the author and perfecter of faith" (12:2). This striking expression requires, I believe, closer inspection, in order to understand Jesus' relationship to faith.

First, we should clear up the misunderstanding—begun, I believe, in the King James Version—created by the incorrect insertion of "our" with respect to faith: "*our* faith." There is no manuscript support for the insertion of this

modifier, and it fits ill with the large historical sweep of the author's view of faith. Hebrews is concerned about faith—or perhaps *the* faith—and not just *our* faith. On the contrary, faith permeates the whole of salvation history. It does this, moreover, as a principle of continuity, because "without faith it is impossible to please" God (Heb. 11:6).

Second, we observe that the Epistle to the Hebrews juxtaposes two descriptive nouns—"author and perfecter"—to form a polarity implied in their roots: *Archegos* ("author") is based on the root *arche*, which means "beginning," and *teleotes* ("perfecter") is derived from *telos*, which means "end." "Beginning" and "end" are syntactical poles. Thus, as the two nouns are employed in this text—covered by a single article in Greek—they convey the tension of contrast. Jesus is both the beginning and the goal of faith.

This combination—"author *and* perfecter"—is similar to Jesus' self-identifications in the Book of Revelation. For example, "I am the Alpha *and* Omega" (1:8) and "I am the first and the last"—*ego eimi ho protos kai ho eschatos* (1:17; see 2:8). Indeed, at the end of Revelation all these terms are combined into a triple expression of the same polarity: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the *protos* and the *eschatos*, the *arche* and the *telos*" (22:13).

Third, in what sense does Hebrews call Jesus the "author" of faith? As we observed above, "author" translates the noun "*archegos*," which conveys the sense, not of a manager or director, but of someone who actually "commences" something. In classical Greek the word often conveys the sense of a "founder" or "originator."

Such a meaning of the noun is consistent with the other place where Hebrews uses it in reference to Jesus:

> For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make perfect [*teleiosai*], through sufferings, the *archegos* of their salvation. (2:10)

The image of Jesus as *archegos* is apparently derived from the traditional apostolic preaching. St. Peter used the word twice in reference to Jesus, calling

Him the "leader of life"—*archegos tes zoes*—and declaring, "God exalted Him to His right hand as *archegos* and Savior (*soter*)" (Acts 3:15; 5:31).

As Jesus inaugurates both "life" and "salvation," He also inaugurates faith. In the context of Hebrews, He does this by going out ahead of believers as the leader who shows them where and how to run: "With endurance let us run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." He modeled this faith chiefly in His Passion, inasmuch as He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (12:1–2).

Fourth, Jesus is the "perfecter of faith" in the sense that He brought to its proper completion the faith earlier exemplified in the lives of those champions of faith celebrated in the previous chapter of Hebrews. He brings to perfection those who preceded Him.

It seems probable that the author of Hebrews coined the noun he uses here —*teleotes*, "perfecter"—inasmuch as the expression is otherwise unknown in either the Greek Bible or other literature of the time. This suggestion is consistent with the emphasis on "perfection" all through Hebrews. Thus, we read in Hebrews 2:10:

> For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings (*ton archegon tes soterias . . .teleiosai*).

Or, again, in Hebrews 5:9, where it says that Jesus, "having been perfected, . . . became the source of eternal salvation" (*teleiothes . . . aitios soterias*).

Or, again, in Hebrews 7:28, where it is said that God's oath appoints "the Son who has been perfected forever" (*huion . . . teteleiomenon*).

Or, again, Hebrews 10:14, which says, "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (*teteleioken . . . hagiazomenous*).

When the Sacred Text declares that Jesus is the "perfecter" of all the faith that preceded His coming, it summarizes the long list of faith-heroes during the course of salvation history.

The Old Testament saints had faith, of course, but it was not perfect, "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect

apart from us" (Heb. 11:40).

The "perfection" accomplished by Jesus was not simply a supplement—a "more"—added to the faith of the ancients. The relationship between "perfect" and "less than perfect" is not just quantitative. The perfect is *qualitatively* different from the less-than-perfect. It is of a different order. Indeed, the Epistle to the Hebrews began with that *qualitative* distinction: The God who earlier spoke through the prophets has now spoken through a Son (Heb. 1:1–2; see 3:5–6). The Son is not simply *one more* prophet. He pertains to a different order.

The Prayer Book of the Church

Since the Church's theology of salvation is rooted in her experience of worship, it is time, now, to turn to the prayer life of the Church. We should note, to begin with, that this prayer life is mainly structured by the Book of Psalms. Indeed, I am prepared to argue that the Psalms are an *essential* form of Christian worship. The Church has always regarded the Psalms as a form Jesus commonly assumed in His prayer to the Father—a view no little bolstered by the recorded fact that He prayed them on the Cross (see Matt. 27:46; Luke 23:46). For this reason believers, from the beginning, have prayed the Psalter incessantly (see James 5:13), recognizing that to pray it properly is to pray it in Jesus' name.

Even in speaking to one another, Christians readily invoke the psalms (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Christian lips gladly break forth with the words of the Psalter, because the Christian heart meditates on the psalms day and night. Ultimately the words of the psalms are the mighty name of Jesus broken down into its component parts.

Nonetheless, there is a special quality characteristic of psalmody, a quality not found, I think, in other forms of prayer. It is a diversity of voices, or what the Church Fathers called a plurality of persons, or "faces," *prosopa*.

Normally, when we address God, the voice of the prayer is first person, whether singular or plural. I pray either as "I" or "we." We petition the Holy Spirit to "come and abide *in us*," for example; or we beseech the Lord, "take

from me the spirit of sloth." We adopt this first person voice as a natural assumption.

It is a mistake, however, to bring this assumption—uncritically—to praying the Psalms. Indeed, to do so may lead to some very disordered prayer. If, for instance, I think of myself as the voice who says, "reward me according to my innocence," or "my heart is not lifted up," I am plunged into a serious conflict with truth, because there is not a speck of "innocence" in my heart, which is—in addition—almost always "lifted up." In other words, I turn my prayer into a flight from reality if I assume the "I" in the Psalms invariably refers just to me.

In respect to this variety of voices, the Psalms exemplify a larger interpretive concern pertinent to Holy Scripture: In the Bible, revelation takes place, not only when God speaks to man, but also, on occasion, when man speaks to God, and even when man speaks to man on God's behalf. All of these instances are the voices of revelation.

The whole Bible is God's Word, even in those words by which man speaks to God. Revelation is conveyed, not only when the Lord tells Habakkuk, "the just shall live by his faith," but also when Habakkuk inquires, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?" (2:4; 1:1). In Habakkuk—as in Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others—revelation takes on the quality of conversation—or *dialogia*.

This complex quality of divine revelation is, if possible, even more pronounced when the Bible is read through Christian eyes. We should have expected as much, since it was Jesus who explicitly raised the point. He raised it, in fact, in respect to the Book of Psalms:

> David himself said by the Holy Spirit, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Therefore David himself calls Him "Lord"; how is He then his Son? (Mark 12:36–37)

With this exegetical question, Jesus dropped a very large hint that even the word "Lord" was possessed of more than one reference in the Psalter.

The Complexity of the Conversation

Conversation is especially a trait of the Psalms, where we discover, not only ourselves speaking to God about Christ, but also Christ speaking to His Father about us, and so on. The voices will vary, not only in each psalm, but also during the course of a single psalm.

According to Justin Martyr, the Jews who rejected Jesus were deceived by a failure to recognize this variety of voice references in the Scriptures. The Divine Word, said Justin,

> sometimes speaks as from the person (*apo prosopou*) of God, the Ruler and Father of all, sometimes as from the person (*apo prosopou*) of Christ, sometimes from the person (*apo prosopou*) of the people answering the Lord or his Father.[6]

Justin's word, *prosopon*, already had a long history as a literary and theatrical term. Its original meaning, "face," had been adapted to the stage, to mean the mask worn by the actor who portrayed some dramatic character. From that reference it was a short step for *prosopon* to signify the character himself—the part played by the actor.[7]

Perhaps the theatrical mask accounts for the word's Latin equivalent, *persona*, which may indicate a "sound coming through." In any case, *persona* in classical Latin was normally a stage term, which is still preserved in our expression *dramatis personae*, "persons of the drama."

The theatrical sense of *prosopon* was very familiar to the early Christians. We find it in Origen, for example: "Actors in a theatrical drama are not what they say they are or what they seem to be, in accord with the character (*prosopon*) they assume."[8] This word (as well as a variant, *prosopeion*) occasionally has the same meaning in Athanasius, Basil, Chrysostom, and others.

Justin Martyr's adaptation of this theatrical term to the understanding of biblical literature suggests a perception that Holy Scripture is the presentation of

a *drama*.[9] If the term be allowed, the Bible is the Lord's script in the enactment of history.

This dramatic quality of Holy Scripture is most obvious in the Psalms, I believe, because of their enhanced sense of immediacy. In the Psalter, the biblical narrative takes on a more personal and existential quality. Praying the Psalms—speaking to God in those words—renders drama inescapable.

When we recite the lines of the Psalms, we are a part in the larger and transforming drama of redemption. The paltry circumstances of our own existence are taken up, through this prayer, into the ongoing history of God's People. We may study the Psalms as *gramma*, but we must pray them as *drama*.

Already in the New Testament, we observe the recognition of various voices in the psalms. Thus, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares that the Father spoke to His Son in the words of a psalm: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Heb. 1:8; Ps. 45(44):6).

Moreover, this same author asserts, the voice of God's Son, as though in the very moment of the Incarnation, used a psalm to address His Father:

> Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure." Then I said, "Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God." (Heb. 10:5–7; Ps. 40(39):6–8)

When we pray the Psalter, then, the words are not spoken in our own voice. We put on, rather, what St. Paul called "the mind of Christ." Through the inspired lines of the two psalms we just mentioned, the Holy Spirit inserts our prayer into the conversation—the *dialogia*—of the Father and the Son.

This form of prayer is not some sort of mental juggling but the Holy Spirit's elevation of the mind:

> These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Spirit teaches, deliberating (*synkrinontes*) spiritual things

with spiritual. (1 Cor. 2:13)

The Sacramental Proclamation

Theological reflection is always based on "the Word of Faith," but God's Word is also proclaimed through the enactment of the Sacraments. Recall, for instance, what the Apostle Paul declares with respect to the Holy Eucharist: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* (*katangellete*) the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

To grasp the full import of this declaration, it is necessary, I believe, to give equal accent to each noun in the expression, "the Lord's death." If the accent is placed on "death," the Eucharist is a proclamation of the event on Mount Calvary. If the accent is placed on "Lord," the Eucharist is a proclamation of the Resurrection. It is, of course, both, because in the proclamation of the Gospel, the Cross and the Resurrection are two aspects of the same mystery. Both are proclaimed in the Holy Eucharist.

This twofold proclamation is also clear in Paul's teaching on baptism. Thus, Paul asks,

> Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3–4)

Paul extends this thought later, when he reminds the Colossians that they were "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. 2:12).

Jesus, too, when questioned by Zebedee's sons on a point of precedence, queries them on the implications of both sacramental rites: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:38).

Christian theological reflection on redemption, therefore, requires not only

faith in Christ's Death and Resurrection, but also the Church's initiatory, sacramental experience of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Sacraments provide access to the full mystery of our redemption. Sacred theology, separated from the experiential context of these Sacraments, is in danger of becoming purely speculative.

Because both sacraments are so foundational to Christian theological reflection, more must now be said about each of them with respect to the baptismal transmission of the Faith and the eucharistic experience of the atonement.

The Creedal Experience

The Church's sacramental initiation, beginning with Baptism, is an absolute requirement for the pursuit of sacred theology. Theology is for the *initiates*,

> those who were once illuminated (*hapachs photisthentas*), have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. (Heb. 6:4–5)[10]

There is no such thing as sacred theology prior to Holy Illumination, *Hagios Photismos*. "This bath," wrote Justin, "is called Illumination"—*kaleitai touto to loutron Photismos*.[11] This term has always been a common reference to Baptism throughout Greek Christian literature.[12] To this day the Church prays a litany for "those preparing for Holy Illumination."

The very possibility of sacred theology arises from what I call the "creedal experience" of the believer, his personal knowledge and ecclesial profession (*homologia*)—inseparably associated with baptism—of the Fatherhood of God and the Lordship of Jesus, and all this through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "I believe in one God, the *Father* almighty . . . I believe in one *Lord*, Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Thus has it been from the beginning: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:5–6).

This profession is conferred on the Church—and on the believer within the Church—through the Holy Spirit's revelation. In testimony to this profession

Church—through the Holy Spirit's revelation. In testimony to this profession, the Apostle Paul wrote, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, exclaiming, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal. 4:6). And again, "you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we exclaim, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15). And again, "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3; see also 8:6).

No matter when this Spirit-given revelation arises to the believer's consciousness, it is sacramentally conveyed in baptism: *hapachs photisthentas*, "once enlightened."

The Spirit-given revelation is, moreover, what links the Christian's baptism to that of Jesus. We must reflect on this further: From the traditional accounts of Jesus' Baptism, the Gospel of John preserves only one detail: the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in the likeness of a dove. This detail is preserved, moreover, not directly in the narrative itself, but in a quotation from John the Baptist:

> I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." (John 1:32–33)

The Fourth Gospel indicates two features of significance in this detail: First, for John the Baptist the Holy Spirit's descent proved a Christological proposition: "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (1:34). Second, for the author of this Gospel, it indicated a sacramental thesis: Jesus "is He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."

Among the gospel references to this event, only John explicitly stresses the permanence of the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus: "He *remained* (*emeinen*) upon Him"—"*remaining* (*menon*) on Him."

This Johannine detail of the Spirit's descent has long been the object of Christian observation and comment. In the second century, for example, St. Irenaeus of Lyons regarded it as indicating the spiritual renewal of the human

race. He wrote on this point by way of commentary on Isaiah 11:2, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest (*anapavsetai*) upon him.”

Irenaeus also commented that the Holy Spirit

> descended on the Son of God—who was made the Son of Man—becoming accustomed with Him to reside (*skenoun*) in the human race and to abide (*anapavesthai*) among men and to reside in the workmanship of God, accomplishing in them the will of the Father and renewing them from what is old to the newness of Christ.[13]

The Holy Spirit’s “abiding” on Jesus, for Irenaeus, referred to a renewed state of humanity by reason of the Incarnation.

Almost three centuries later, St. Cyril of Alexandria pursued Irenaeus’s interpretation of the text, but he placed it within the Pauline theology of the New Adam. Into the body and soul of the first Adam, wrote Cyril, God had “impressed, like a seal, the Holy Spirit, that is, the breath of life.” Because of this creative activity, man’s nature was “established for every kind of excellence, by virtue of the Spirit given to dwell in it.”

The old Adam, however, had failed to safeguard this state of grace. He and his seed had lost the presence of the Holy Spirit conferred at Creation. What was needed, Cyril believed, was a Second Adam, who would not forfeit the gift of the Holy Spirit. From the old Adam the Holy Spirit “flew away” (*apepte*), but on the Second Adam He came down and remained. The Spirit descended on Jesus, wrote Cyril, “that He might become accustomed to remain (*menein*) in us.”[14] Thus, the Holy Spirit, descending on Jesus at His Baptism, found a permanent and completely suitable dwelling in the human race. As the presence of the Holy Spirit was lost by fallen man, it was permanently recovered by Christ, the New Man, who, at His Baptism in the Jordan, received God’s transforming gift on our behalf and unto our benefit.

Irenaeus and Cyril understood the Baptism of Jesus not as addressing a personal need on Jesus’ part (for, as the Church later declared, the Son and Holy Spirit are *homoousioi* with the Father), but in terms of Jesus’ relationship to

those who adhere to Him. Representing the human race, He received the Holy Spirit on our behalf—to be communicated *to us*.

In this respect, we may return to the significance the author of the Fourth Gospel saw in the Spirit's descent: "This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." John's Gospel portrays Jesus as the One who confers the Spirit: "He breathed and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (20:22). The Holy Spirit is the gift breathed forth upon the Church from the risen Body of Christ.

It was using this same imagery that St. Paul contrasted the old Adam with the risen Christ. Recalling Genesis 2:7 ("And the Lord God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"), Paul commented, "The first man was made unto a living being." But of the risen Christ, Paul said, "the last Adam unto a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

The Eucharistic Experience

We believers are baptized in Christ in order to enter into the table fellowship of the Holy Eucharist. In fact, the discipline of the Orthodox Church maintains a close proximity between these two rites, following the custom of all ancient Christians. Normally the new believer receives Holy Communion at the same service as he receives Baptism. The Holy Spirit, conferring on us the creedal experience, moves us promptly to the mystery of the Lord's Body and Blood. It is all the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Speaking of the Holy Eucharist, the Fathers and early liturgical texts of the Church have recourse to the metaphor of the flaming coal (*anthrax*, *pruna*) in reference to Holy Communion. For instance, with Isaiah 6:7 obviously in mind, the Liturgy of St. James refers to "receiving the fiery coal" (*labein to pyrinon anthrax*) from the eucharistic altar. Indeed, even without using this word, those same doctrinal sources regularly appeal to Isaiah's experience when they speak of the Holy Eucharist.

Thus, in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, when the Christian has received the Holy Communion, the priest tells him, "Lo, this has touched your lips and has taken away your iniquity." In comparing the sacramental Body of Christ to Isaiah's living coal, these texts testify that the Flesh and Blood of the risen

Christ bear the fire of the Holy Spirit, drawn from the hearth of the heavenly altar.

It is through this purifying and sanctifying coal that we are deified in the Holy Eucharist. Thus, St. John of Damascus wrote,

> Let us draw near to Him with burning desire and . . . let us take hold of the divine coal [*tou theiou anthrakos*], so that the fire of our longing, fed by the flame of the coal, may purge away our sins and enlighten our hearts. Let us be enkindled by touching this great divine fire, and so come forth as gods.[15]

In addition to the symbolism of the fiery coal from the altar, the eucharistic bread itself seems naturally to evoke the image of the oven. This image is amply justified in the *epiclesis*, the prayer that beseeches the Father to send down the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Lord's Body and Blood. Rupert of Deutz (1075–1149) perceived this truth when he wrote:

> The Virgin conceived Him of the Holy Spirit, who is the eternal fire; and through the same Holy Spirit He offered Himself as a living victim to the living God, as the Apostle says [Eph. 5:2]. Accordingly, on the altar He is immolated by the same fire. For it is by the operation of the Holy Spirit that the bread becomes the body, and the wine the blood, of Christ.[16]

The Divine Liturgy, we may say, is the oven of the Holy Spirit. That grain of wheat which was sown in the earth on Good Friday sprang forth as the infinite paschal harvest and now abides forever in the granary of heaven. Christ our Lord is not content, however, simply to abide in His glorified Body. In this Body, Christ can be found in only one place. He is needed, however, in *many* places, and this is the reason He provided a new, sacramental mode of presence. In the Holy Eucharist, He lives on thousands of altars at once, available—edible!—for the myriads of believers who draw near in the fear of God and with faith and love.

In the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the wheat, which is Christ's glorified Body, is baked in the oven of the Holy Spirit, so that the nutritive energies of God may pass into those who receive Him in faith. Through the cells and sinews of our own flesh there course those divine energies that transform and deify our bodies and souls—our whole being—with the power, the *dynamis*, of immortality.

Commenting on the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6, St. Clement of Alexandria plays on the image of fire stimulating the yeast in the dough, as the heat of the sun raises the sown seed:

> Here is observed the sacrament of the bread (*to mystikon tou artou*), for He says it is His flesh and as manifestly raised up; just as fire raises up the sowing from corruption (*ek phthoras kai sporas*), so like baked bread it has truly been raised up through fire for the enjoyment of the Church.[17]

Clement speaks likewise of this sacramentally conferred immortality in connection with the Lord's Blood, which we receive from the chalice. Recalling, with Leviticus 17:11, "the life of the flesh is in the blood," he comments:

> To drink of the blood of Jesus means nothing less than to participate in the Lord's incorruption (*tes kyriakes metalabein aphtharsias*). For the Spirit is strength to the Word, just as the blood to the body.[18]

This eucharistic participation in the fire of the Spirit is also symbolized in the boiling water added to the chalice right before the reception of Holy Communion. As the deacon pours this water into the Blood of Christ, he identifies its symbolism: "The fervor of faith, the fullness of the Holy Spirit."

All our righteousness, St. Nicholas Cabasilas (1323–1392) reminds us, comes through the immolated Body of Christ. Human righteousness counts for nothing.

> But once men are united to Christ's flesh and blood by partaking of them, immediately the greatest benefits ensue: the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of the Kingdom, which are the fruits of Christ's

> inheritance of the Kingdom, which are the fruits of Christ's righteousness.

In the Holy Eucharist, he goes on, we receive the whole Christ, everything that was assumed in the Incarnation, "soul, mind, will—everything that is human." These God's Son took on

> in order to be united to the whole of our nature in order to penetrate us and assimilate us into Himself by totally uniting what is proper to Him with what is proper to us.

"Thus, it is clear," says Nicholas, that "God infuses himself into us and mingles himself with us, changing and transforming us into him," as "when iron is united to fire and thereby takes on the properties of fire."[19]

In order not to be reduced to sterile speculation, all consideration of the atonement must be rooted in, and fed by, the eucharistic life, in which we believers, in our common celebration, "proclaim the *death* of the *Lord* until He comes."

Notes

1 For this useful term I am grateful to various meditations of Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis.

2 Rashi cites the authority of Jer. 7:16 for this usage; see also Jer. 27:18.

3 *Velimdanu shattiqqan tephillat 'erbit*—Rabbi Silbermann's edition of Rashi's *On Chumash* (Jerusalem, 1984), vol. 1, p. 131.

4 It is immensely significant that this section of John is our Gospel reading on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

5 Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus* 15.26.

6 Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 36.

7 See Homer, *Odyssey* 19.361; Demosthenes, *Orations* 19.287; Epictetus, *Dissertations* 1.29.45.

8 Origen, *On Prayer* 20.2.

9 It is worth observing that Theodoret of Cyr uses this Greek word, *drama*, in reference to Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb (*On 2 Kings*, quest. 24; *On Isaiah* 3.9).

10 See also Heb. 10:32: "But call to mind the former days in which, after you were illuminated (*photisthentes*), you endured a great struggle with sufferings."

11 Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61.

12 See among others Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 32; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts* 41.2; *Homilies on Philippians* 3.4; Theodore the Studite, *Letters* 2.219; John Moschus, *The Meadow* 207, 214.

13 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 3.17.1.

14 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, on 1:32–33.

15 John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 4.13.

16 Rupert of Deutz, *On Exodus* 2.10.

17 Clement of Alexandria, *The Teacher* 1.6.

18 Clement, *op. cit.* 2.2.

19 Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* 4.6.

CHAPTER 2

Anselm, the Fathers, and Holy Scripture

Western/Latin soteriology adopted a new direction in the eleventh century, when Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) wrote his reflections on the theology of salvation in a work that asked, *Cur Deus Homo?*—"Why did God become man?" Anselm began this work by addressing the question: What is sin?

His was a reasonable approach, surely, on the assumption that God's salvific work in this world was directed, first of all, to the remission of sin. That is to say, one could hardly understand salvation unless he understood the meaning of sin. So sin seemed to be a promising place to start.

Anselm understood the evil of sin to consist in its affront to the honor of God. He assumed this idea to be self-evident to any reasonable man, and acquiescence to it required neither faith nor a special revelation. Indeed, he argued, it was a concept of sin that could stand on its own, even *remoto Christo*, even if Christ had never appeared in this world. It was a plain philosophical truth that sin is an offense to the honor of God.

Now, reasoned Anselm, if the evil of sin consists in its affront to the divine honor, the affront can only be removed by someone equal to God in honor, someone able to render to God the honor men owe Him. That is to say, the very idea of satisfying the divine honor required the Incarnation, the enfleshing of Someone equal to God; this is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This line of argument is known as St. Anselm's "satisfaction theory," which for centuries has dominated Western soteriology.

How should an Eastern Orthodox Christian reply to St. Anselm? I propose to respond in the present chapter.

respond in the present chapter.

Let us begin by my conceding that some notion of *satisfaction* was always implicit, at least, when Christians thought about "being saved." That is to say, the very concept of salvation carries with it, at least tacitly, the question, "What was *required* for us to be saved? What would *satisfy?*"

In fact, that question was raised explicitly in the great Christological controversies of the early Church. For example, a major and often-cited premise of the Orthodox faith affirmed, "Whatever was not assumed was not healed." This assertion, which came to be accepted as a principle, meant that the Son's full assumption of our human nature was *required* for the work of redemption. A qualified or *limited* Incarnation would not *satisfy*. If God's Son had not become a full human being, he could not have been a Mediator between God and the human race. In other words, only the Word's full assumption of human experience could satisfy what was needed for human beings to be saved.

This principle, enunciated explicitly by the Chalcedonian Fathers in the fifth century, was later applied to the question of Christ's human will by the Third Council of Constantinople in 670. According to the latter council, the work of salvation required a complete agreement of the divine and human wills in Christ. Hence, said the council, a full human will (*thelema*) in Christ was *required*. Nothing less would . . . *satisfy*.

The Order of Things

When we turn to Anselm, however, we detect in his satisfaction theory a new component: his definition of sin as an affront to God's honor. This addition, I contend, is what took soteriology in a new direction. Let us review his reasoning one more time, perhaps a bit more closely.

Man's obligation to render God His due honor, Anselm argued, pertained to the moral structure of creation and history—what he called the *ordo rerum*. This proper "order of things," Anselm continued, was radically upset by the introduction of sin into human history, because sin is an offense to God's honor. This affront to the order of things, accordingly, constituted a *debitum honoris*, mankind's sinful "debt" with respect to the honor of God. And *this*, Anselm

concluded, rendered necessary the event of the Incarnation, because only God's own Son could represent humanity in the adequate satisfaction of that debt.

I have long suspected that Anselm's primary inspiration for this theory was an encomium composed in the fifth century and annually chanted by the deacon in the celebration of Pascha. It is properly known as the *Praeconium Paschale*, but it is more commonly referred to as (from its first word) the *Exultet*. Our earliest extant copy of this beautiful, rich, and magnificent text is contained in the Bobbio Missal, a seventh-century manuscript of the Gallican Sacramentary. This text invokes the salvific work of Christ, "who for us *remitted* to the eternal Father the *debt* of Adam"—*qui pro nobis aetero Patri Adae debitum solvit*.

Although I am familiar with no earlier liturgical text in which the work of salvation was described in precisely this way, the hymnody of the Christian East contains another hymn, roughly contemporary to the Bobbio Missal, which also speaks of Christ's salvific work as the remission of a debt. This *akathyst* of Sergius of Constantinople (a Monothelite, alas, who died on December 9, 638) described Christ as "He that remits the debt of all men"—*Ho panton chreolytes ton anthropon*.[1]

The image of man's "debt" owed to God is, of course, perfectly biblical. Jesus spoke of God as "a certain creditor who had two debtors" (Luke 7:41). He also described the judgment of God as the summoning of the master's debtors (16:1–12).

But with regard to this *debitum* of the Lord's parables, we encounter an immense irony: It is the whole point in these parables that the debt is *not* paid; it is simply forgiven. As the Church Fathers understood these parables, they refer not specifically to the work of Christ, but to the mercy of God and to man's obligation to imitate that mercy.[2]

Consequently, what we find in Anselm's case is genuinely new: He appears to be the first to think of man's burden of sin as a "debt of honor" to God.

> *Hunc honorem debitum qui Deo non reddit, aufert Deo quod suum est, et Deum exhonorat, et hoc est peccare*—He that does not render to God the

> honor that is His debt (*debitum*), takes away from God that which is His, and dishonors God, and *this* is to sin.[3]

"And nothing less tolerable in the order of things," Anselm went on, "than that the creature should deprive the Creator of the honor he owes Him (*debitum honorem*), or to fail to restore what he deprives Him of." Anselm finds salvation's "necessity" in what he calls the proper *ordo rerum*, "the order of things," which he identifies with justice.[4]

Anselm's references to the Creator and the creature indicate that he means the proper relationship of man to God, the correct structure of creation, which Christ came to earth to restore.

A Theological Critique

So what is wrong with Anselm's explanation? This, I believe: What is missing in Anselm is a full and properly *theological* understanding of the order of things. Anselm expects anyone to understand the correct order of things, consisting in man's proper submission to God, whereby he honors God.

For Orthodox Christian theology, however, the truly correct order of things entails a great deal more than simply the satisfaction of God's offended honor. The correct order of things must also include God's very purpose when He resolved to make man in His image, according to His likeness.

When, in a strict sense, we treat the order of things *theologically*, we should begin by asking, "For what was man created?" Only if we answer this question, I believe, can we grasp what is truly meant by "the order of things."

According to the Church Fathers, whom I will be consulting all through the material that follows, man was created to be joined to God in an intimate union, whereby he would be incorporated—in the elevated measure divine grace makes possible to a human being—into the very life of God. Man was created in order to be "at-one" with God. Man was created for theosis. Theosis, then, is the true and proper *ordo rerum*. Because man could not share in the divine nature unless the Word shared in human nature, man's participation in the divine nature

required the Incarnation. This ample, plenary understanding of the order of things required that the Word should become flesh and dwell among us.

This is what is missing in Saint Anselm. He does not begin by asking, "For what was man created?" Or, "What is the final goal of redemption?" He begins, rather, with man's fallen state, not with his final goal.

And this is my point of critique: Prior to any consideration of Christ Himself and what God reveals in Christ, Anselm defines sin as a debt of honor; he then inquires what was necessary for the remission of that debt. In short, Anselm begins his inquiry, not with Christ and man's ultimate transformation in Christ, but with a philosophical consideration of sin. Indeed—as we will consider presently—Anselm explicitly begins his inquiry by removing Christ from consideration—*remoto Christo*.

Apologetics and Theology

It is important to reflect that Anselm's intent was prompted by an apologetic interest; he set himself to convince unbelievers of the *a priori* plausibility of the Christian faith.[5]

I intend to argue here that apologetics is no safe or reliable way to begin any aspect of sacred theology. It is of the very nature of apologetics that it must be determined by factors *outside* of—prior to—the Christian faith. As I argued in the first chapter of this book, sacred theology must begin *from within* the Church, the creedal experience of Baptism, and the proclamation of "the death of the Lord" in the celebration of the Eucharist. Sacred theology cannot start from outside the full, faithful, and incorporated experience of the Sacraments.

Apologetics, on the other hand, does *not* begin at that point. It is part of the Church's proclamation *to the world outside*. We are not surprised, therefore, that this proclamation includes a defense of the faith with respect to those who do not—as yet—share it. This endeavor is very much in evidence in our records of the apostolic preaching to those outside the faith. The Apostle Paul, for instance, wrote of his "defense (*apologia*) and confirmation of the gospel" (Phil. 1:7).

Paul illustrated such a defense when given the opportunity to address a Jewish mob gathered near the temple. He began by declaring, “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense (*apologia*) before you now” (Acts 22:1; cf. 25:16), and then he went on to argue for the truth of the Gospel.

This ministry of defending the faith to outsiders was not limited to the apostles, however. On this subject Saint Peter gave a general exhortation to all Christians:

> But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you a reason (*logos*) for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15).

The discipline of apologetics allows considerable flexibility and even room for innovation, because its effective use is necessarily determined, in some measure, by the presuppositions of those to whom it is addressed. Indeed, the process can hardly begin unless the apologist shares at least some of those presuppositions with his audience.

These suppositions may be of various kinds. The Christian arguing with the Jew, for instance, shares a massive theological presupposition: the canonical authority of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the apostles, when they argued in the synagogue, invariably commenced with the Old Testament. We find the identical pattern in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*.

When arguing with pagans, on the other hand, Christian apologists often begin with a shared philosophical perspective. The earliest example of this approach may be St. Paul’s speech to the philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17. Again, Justin Martyr, who began the *First Apology* by recounting his youthful studies in philosophy, borrowed extensively from Stoicism in the course of his defense of the faith. He was addressing his work, after all, to the Antonine emperors, one of whom—Marcus Aurelius—he knew to be a Stoic.

In addition to theological and philosophical presuppositions, zealous apologetics does not hesitate to examine literature and other cultural expressions to find some common ground on which to engage unbelievers. Tertullian, for

instance, when he mentioned the bravery, sobriety, and self-control encouraged by the Christian faith, knew very well that these virtues were central to Rome's ascetical tradition and military culture. Clement and Origen, arguing for the Gospel in Alexandria, strove to express it in terms the local Neo-Platonists might find attractive. Augustine, in undertaking that vast historical *apologia* known as *The City of God*, demonstrated to contemporary pagans his ability to cite—and, what is more important, to appreciate—his Vergil and Varro with the best of them.

I speak of the necessary function of apologetics, however, as the preamble to a word of caution. Although it is an essential component of the Church's kerygmatic mission, apologetics is sometimes troublesome—or worse—to sacred theology. Indeed, as I reflect on the matter, I am not sure I can name a single heresy in Christian history that did not have some apologetic concern near its root.

Apologetics is burdened with a very difficult task: to discover theological, philosophical, literary, and cultural windows through which to cast the light of the Gospel into the darkened minds of unbelievers. Yet the apologist is not entirely free to choose the size, shape, and position of those windows. Those choices are necessarily limited by the sympathies of those to whom the Gospel is preached. That is to say, the mind of the unbeliever largely governs the very terms of the discourse, and the unbeliever is free, at any time, to close down the conversation.

Hence, it may happen that the Gospel, when it is defended to the pagan inquirer, is intellectually compressed to fit a mere slit of a window, or its constitutive outline is adjusted to accommodate an incompatible cultural shape. Without the guidance of sound dogmatics, the incautious apologist may be unaware that he is taking theology itself in a different and dubious direction. It appears to me that this is exactly what happened in the case of Anselm's soteriology.

The Outraged Honor of God

When its starting point is apologetics, soteriology is compelled to commence outside of the full context of salvation; it must start, as Anselm did, with the state of *not*-being-saved. Apologetics obliges soteriology to inquire, "From *what* are we saved?" The expected answer, of course, is "sin." But it seems fairly clear in Holy Scripture that the redemptive, atoning work of Christ involves a great deal more than deliverance from sin; it includes the full and inexpressibly rich union of man with God, the union God had in mind in the first chapter of Genesis.

How can we make an adequate assessment of sin except in the light, not merely of philosophy, but of the glory revealed in Christ? If we inquire about sin from the perspective of apologetics—particularly if we ask exactly what sin is—the conditions of the inquiry force us to think about the subject *without* the light of revelation. The contractual terms of the apologist's craft oblige him to abandon the single adequate foundation for interpreting sin: man's transfiguration in Christ.

In other words, the nature of apologetic discourse limits the assessment of sin to what philosophy, psychology, and other non-theological disciplines are qualified to pronounce on the subject. In order to reach the unbeliever, the apologist begins with a non-theological concept of sin. In order to speak coherently about sin to those outside the Christian faith, the apologist is prohibited from speaking of sin as a properly *theological* dilemma.

This is a serious theological problem, because sin itself is a mystery—albeit a negative mystery—and mysteries cannot be measured except within the full light of Divine revelation. Apart from Christ—*remoto Christo*—there *is* no adequate theological understanding of sin. Philosophy, psychology, and the behavioral sciences can hardly do more than describe some of its symptoms.

A Loss of Perspective

I believe this problem is related to a major difference between St. Paul and many of his interpreters. Paul approaches sin—as all human experiences—from within

the light of revelation. Paul writes of fallen man from the perspective of man *in Christ*.

Thus, when he contrasts Christ and Adam, Paul starts with Christ, not with Adam. Because of what God accomplished in Christ, Paul understands the bondage imposed through Adam's sin. For him, the Cross alone can take the full measure of the Fall, for the same reason that only the Resurrection illumines the full meaning of death.

My problem with the history of soteriology since the Western Middle Ages is a persuasion that much of it commences, not with Christ, but with Adam. In order to defend the doctrine of our redemption on the Cross—to demonstrate to the unbeliever how the death of God's Son was "both reasonable and necessary" (*rationabilis et necessaria*, says Anselm)—apologetics felt compelled to define sin in a manner intelligible to the unbeliever. The apologist feels himself obliged to speak of the Fall, not from within a full theology of sin (that is, relying on the light of revelation), but along lines persuasive to those outside the faith. Unbelievers, ironically, are thus permitted to determine the Christian theological task. Unregenerate minds set the terms for the mysteries of the faith.

According to St. Anselm's own logic, the concept of sin required not a scintilla of faith or special revelation. Anselm reasoned thus: On the hypothesis that God really exists (he elsewhere offered an intriguing way to prove this hypothesis), God deserves the full loyalty and devotion of men. Hence, disobedience to God's will is an affront to His honor, and this affront requires adequate satisfaction.

Anselm placed this very thin, non-theological understanding of sin at the base of his "satisfaction theory," which became widespread—sometimes dominant—in Western soteriology.

Now, not for a minute do I challenge Anselm's reasoning here. Much less do I consider his argument heretical.[6] My problem with Anselm's theory is not his reasoning but his starting point, his resolve to begin the study of salvation, as he said, "without Christ," *remoto Christo, quasi numquam aliquid fuerat de Illo* —"apart from Christ, as though there had been nothing of him." This *quasi*—"as

though”—is bothersome, because it does not embrace a truly theological assessment of sin.[7]

Unbelievers, however, can hardly begin to understand what is meant by sin. We should insist that one does not comprehend the nature of sin except by being set free from it. Apart from Christ—*remoto Christo*, says Anselm—how is there an adequate assessment of sin? After all, even in the full light of divine revelation, sin is deeply mysterious. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “It remains a mystery of darkness, of night.”

Anselm’s “satisfaction theory,” then, though thoroughly comprehensible, is scarcely comprehensive; “anemic,” I think, is closer to the mark. Indeed, is Anselm’s theory really theological at all? To explain my reservations on this theory, I propose that we contrast it with other approaches to soteriology.

From Anselm back to Maximus

In Christian theology prior to Anselm, however, approaching soteriology from an apologetic perspective was not common, nor has it ever been so in the East. The more traditional approach begins, not with fallen man, but with man in his Christian fulfillment: union with God.

Traditional soteriology commences, not with man as sinner, but with man as sharer in the life of God. It contemplates, first, the goal of redemption, which is man’s participation in the divine nature. Thus, when the Church Fathers asked, “Why Incarnation?” they answered “Deification,” man’s participation in the life of God.[8]

St. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) was an heir to this Tradition. Pursuing the question of why God became man, Maximus wrote of God’s eternal purpose, “the mystery according to Christ” (*kata Christon mysterion*). Relying on the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, he appealed to the “mystery revealing the great counsel of God” (*megalen tou Theou boulen ekphainon mysterion*), hidden from all previous generations but manifest in the Word’s assumption of our flesh—namely, the plan to confer his own nature on the human race. In the

mind of Maximus there was a radical correspondence, then, between the Incarnation (*sarkosis* or *ensomatosis*) and deification (theosis).

For Maximus, this plan of divine Providence (*pronoia*) was no afterthought. In creation itself, the Word's Incarnation and man's deification were already determined: "Looking toward this very goal, God brought forth the essences of the things that exist—*pros touto to telos aphoron tas ton onton ho Theos paregagen ousias*."[9]

For Maximus this relationship between Incarnation and deification lay at the root, not only of creation, but also of the whole of Sacred Scripture. It is revealed, he said, to those initiated into the Cross and Resurrection of the Savior. In a very dense reflection, Maximus wrote:

> The mystery of the Word's embodying (*ensomatosis*) has the power (*dynamis*) of all enigmas and types in the Scriptures, and the understanding (*episteme*) of creatures, whether visible or perceived with the mind. And he that knows the mystery of the Cross and the grave also knows the defining reasons (*logoi*) of these things. But he that is initiated (*myetheis*) into the unspeakable power of the Resurrection knows the goal (*skopos*) God established even as He brought forth all things.[10]

Maximus's understanding of redemption is not based on a philosophical, prebaptismal evaluation of sin, but on the fullness of the Christian revelation, "the mystery according to Christ." For him, the order of things is not established —as it was for Anselm—apart from Christ.

A theologically adequate answer to the question "Why Incarnation?" is given to the Church, not as a point determined by apologetics but by the sacramental—mystical—initiation into the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. It is inseparable, therefore, from the Christian understanding of creation and the Sacred Scriptures.

Consequently, a properly theological grasp of sin requires that we begin, not with how it allegedly affects God, but how it truly affects man. What is the deprivation caused by sin? It is the loss of the divine life, the true human destiny.

The Triad of Maximus

Starting with the premise that the goal of both creation and redemption is man's deification in Christ—participation in the divine life—St. Maximus speaks of three stages in the attainment of this goal. Regarding existence, he writes,

> those who understand the things of God say there are three modes (*treis gar phasi tropous hoi ton theon epistemones*): being (*einai*), well-being (*eu einai*), and everlasting being (*aei einai*).[11]

Accordingly, he says, salvation is accomplished through these three stages. First, there is man's existence itself, effected by creation. Man is a finite being for whom God plans an infinite destiny. Consequently, man's existence was incomplete—even in creation—inasmuch as God intended for man a sharing in His own nature. In order, therefore, that human beings could participate in the divine nature, God's Son assumed human nature and historical existence.

Maximus uses the traditional expression *sarkosis*, "enfleshing," the literal Latin translation of which is *Incarnatio*.[12] Thus, the initial step toward theosis is sarkosis: man's deification is based on God's Incarnation. According to Maximus,

> God and man are patterns (*paradeigmata*) of one another. Just as God, through love for mankind (*philanthropia*), is humanized (*anthropizesthai*), in the same measure man, enabled by love, makes himself divine (*heavton . . . apetheose*) for God.[13]

Second, there is man's "well-being" (*eu einai*, or, in Latin, *bene esse*). Whereas his created being requires only the action of God, man's *well*-being requires also the cooperation of the human will. Man's well-being requires the freedom of human choice.

But here is the problem: The freedom of man's will has been seriously impaired by reason of sin. In disobedience he was no longer turned toward God but away from God; man's experience of sin, then, constitutes a second impediment to man's deification.

To address this metaphysical aberrance in history, the Incarnate Word reversed the disobedience of fallen humanity, submitting His human will in obedience to the Father. By Christ's obedient death on the Cross, man's sinful existence—his "non-well-being"—was remedied and made well. God's Son healed us, saved us from our transgressions, by surrendering His spirit, throughout the Passion and finally on the Cross, into the hands of His Father. This loving and obedient surrender—"Thy will be done"—delivered the human race from the power of darkness.[14]

Third, man is called to "everlasting being"; his intended destiny, that is to say, is "incorruptibility" (*aphtharsia*). Because death entered the world through the sin of Adam, however, fallen man was left with only a corruptible existence. So, to remedy man's state of corruption—eternal death—God raised His obedient Son from the dead. The Resurrection is, thus, God's answer to man's "third impediment."

Thus, the threefold impediment (*kolyma*) to man's deification was overcome in three ways (*tropoi*): first, the Son's Incarnation, whereby He opened a path for man's return to union with God; second, His sacrificial death on the Cross, by which He vanquished the reign of sin; and, third, His Resurrection from the dead, by which He delivered us from that final enemy.

According to this formulation, the entire "event" of Jesus Christ was redemptive, beginning with His personal and permanent assumption of our human existence.

All three components in this patristic outline should be understood in an ample and plenary sense. First, when we speak of the Word's Incarnation, we must consider not only the assumption of our nature, but also His ongoing entrance into our whole existence. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, not simply at the moment of the Virgin's "be it done unto me" in response to Gabriel, but at every moment of our Lord's earthly life. *All* of the "Christological moments" (an expression borrowed from Oliver O'Donovan) were revelatory and redemptive. The Word's incarnate existence took place in time and through the normal processes of human growth and experience. All the

stories in the Gospels, then, and not just their opening chapters, are revelatory of the Incarnation.

Second, when we speak of the death of Christ on the Cross, we should consider that this reference embraces not just the moment when, "bowing His head, He handed over the Spirit" to the Church gathered at the foot of the Cross (John 19:30), but also the specifically sacrificial moments associated with Holy Week: Jesus' manifold sufferings and the libation of His Blood, whereby God washed away our sins. Indeed, the Bible's chief image of the reconciliation on the Cross is Jesus' Blood, poured out in a loving sin-offering, whereby the Lamb of God took away the sins of the world.

Third, when we speak of the Resurrection of Christ, we should include the entire range of the other paschal moments: His passing into glory, His enthronement at the right hand of God, and the mission of the Holy Spirit. These mysteries also pertain to the fullness of Christ's Resurrection, as does His triumphal return to judge the world at the end of time.

These considerations, moreover, must not be sundered from the Church's experience of worship; these are *liturgical* mysteries. In the spring of each year, the Church devotes special times of prayer, reflection, and observance to these three means of our redemption: the Word's Incarnation on March 25, our Lord's sufferings and atoning death during Holy Week, and His Resurrection, celebrated through the fifty days—*pentekostarion*—of the paschal season. This theological triad, I submit, provides a proper structure for an adequate soteriology.

Before leaving Maximus, let me remark that his triadic outline is not speculative but creedal; he adopted it directly from the Christological affirmations in the second article of the Nicene Creed, which declares of God's Son that

> for us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven and *became incarnate* of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man; He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, *He suffered and was*

> *buried*; and, in accordance with the Scriptures, He *rose again* on the third day, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father.

In short, Maximus bases both his material and formal treatment of soteriology on the creedal experience of the baptized and eucharisticized People of God.[15] His systematic theology is but an extended meditation on the Church's creedal and sacramental worship.

The Outline in Cabasilas

The traditional triadic outline of soteriology, as elaborated by Maximus the Confessor, was further developed in the fourteenth century by St. Nicholas Cabasilas, who worked on the theme by way of commentary on the Sacrament of Holy Anointing, or Chrismation.

This sacrament represents, for Nicholas, "the point of contact" between God's nature and ours. It is, thus, an image of the Incarnation, in which the humanity of Christ is infused with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit-filled humanity of Christ becomes the medium of our sanctification. In the unique mediation of Jesus, we are united to God: "He left no barrier (*kolyma*) standing which could separate us from Him."

Apart from Christ, however, there *is* a threefold barrier separating us from God. "Human beings," writes Nicholas,

> are separated from God in three ways—through nature, through sin, through death (*trixos tou Theou tous anthropous diistamenous—dia ten physin, dia ten hamartian, dia ton thanaton*).

The first barrier between God and man, he says, is a disparity of natures: "God remained by Himself alone, and our nature was human and nothing more." This barrier, effected by the act of creation, corresponds to the disparity of being (*einai*) we saw in Maximus the Confessor.

There is a second barrier, however, which consists in the corruption of the will—the disobedience of sin. We recall from Maximus that for man's "well-

being" (*eu einai*) there was needed the cooperation of the human will, which had been corrupted by the Fall of Adam.

And there is a third barrier, which is death, the corruption introduced when "by one man's sin death entered the world." Maximus, we recall, spoke of death as preventing man from "everlasting being" (*aiei einai*). Following him, Nicholas says, "Death is still a third barrier to our abiding with God."

God's Son, however, Christ the Savior, removes all three barriers. First, the barrier of nature: "by partaking of our humanity"—*anthropotetos metaschon*. Nicholas explains:

> This division gave way when God became man, thus removing the separation between Godhead and humanity. . . . When our nature is deified in the Savior's body, nothing separates the human race from God.

Second, the barrier of sin: "by dying on the Cross—*nekrotheis epi tou Stavrou*." Nicholas says:

> The Savior removed the first by becoming incarnate, He removed the second by being crucified. . . . The Cross delivered us from sin. Since Baptism has the power of His Cross and death, we proceed to the Anointing, the participation in the Spirit.

Third, the barrier of death:

> By rising [from the dead], He completely overthrew the final wall, death's tyranny of nature—*to de televtaion teichos, ten tou thanatou tyrranida, pantapasi tes physeos echsebalen anastas*.

The Resurrection of Christ is essential to our redemption, because "it is necessary that the heirs of the immortal God should be set free from corruption." We will be completely saved when, at the end of time, we rise from the dead. The "cause" of this resurrection, says Nicholas, is the Resurrection of Christ:

> After the common resurrection of human beings (*meta gar ten koinen ton anthropon anastasin*), of which the Savior's Resurrection is the cause (*hes aition he tou Soteros anastasis*), the mirror and the dimness recede, and those purified in heart shall see God face to face.

For the Tradition represented in Maximus and Cabasilas, the work of salvation is vastly more than the satisfaction of God's offended honor. It addresses every aspect of man's separation from God.

In Maximus and Cabasilas, as in the Fathers generally, the "causality" (*aitia*) of salvation is discerned through its full effect, man's total transformation—body and soul—in Christ.

Because salvation includes also the final conferral of immortality, it will not be perfect until Christ returns to raise the dead. Death represents man's final separation from God (see Rom. 6:21, 23; 8:2, 6, 38). One recalls how often, beginning in his very first letter (see 1 Thess. 1:10), Paul uses the vocabulary of deliverance in reference to the future. Salvation is complete when "death, the final enemy, is destroyed." Nicholas comments, "He would not have called it an enemy unless it were an obstacle to our true happiness."[16]

Since, at every juncture in the path of sacred theology, we must return afresh to the perspectives of Holy Scripture, I propose that now is a good time to examine the Bible with respect to this discussion. Let us see if the elements of the foregoing outline are discernible within the Scriptures themselves. I limit this inquiry, for now, to three examples.

Isaiah's Theological Progression

The major theological themes of the Book of Isaiah correspond closely to the soteriological triad we have observed in Maximus and Cabasilas. This correspondence could be illustrated in several ways, but I propose to analyze it here around the great Isaian theme of the holiness of God. Among his biblical peers, Isaiah is particularly the prophet of the divine holiness. This permeating motif unites all three large sections of this long prophetic book.

To begin with, Isaiah's prophetic call came in an overwhelming experience

of the holiness of God. He remembered vividly the very year it happened. It was 742 BC, "the year that King Uzziah died." The prophet saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. He listened to the alternating chant of the fiery seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft, borne on their pinions, singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming, and saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, the earth is full of His glory."

It is perhaps needless to say that Isaiah was never again the same. Throughout the rest of the book that bears his name, God is repeatedly called "the Holy One of Israel." This expression is found twenty-six times throughout the book, in each of its three major parts, whereas the same expression appears only six other times in the entire remainder of the Hebrew Bible. God as "the Holy One of Israel" is arguably the most fundamental expression in the Book of Isaiah.

In addition to this specific title, Isaiah uses the adjective "holy" (*qadosh*) in ascription to God more times (thirty-three) than all the other books of the Old Testament put together (twenty-six).

The theme of God's holiness is explicitly related to the three Christological mysteries around which the Book of Isaiah is formed: the coming of Emmanuel, the suffering and death of the Lord's obedient Servant, and the final triumph over the enemies of God. The Isaian motif of the divine holiness is found in each instance.

First, the Incarnation, the coming of Emmanuel: In the first section of Isaiah (chs. 1–39) we find the great prophecies of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, including the Messiah's virgin birth. In this part of the book, the appeal to God's holiness is especially set in the context of the divine judgment on those who reject that holiness. Thus, we read, "They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel" (1:4; see 5:16, 24; 30:11; 31:1; 37:23). In this context of judgment, the holiness of God is perceived as menacing to the idolatrous and unrepentant nation; even the unclean prophet felt threatened (6:5).

Second, the Servant's Passion and death: In the second part of Isaiah (chs. 40–55), where we find the prophecies of God's Suffering Servant, the references

to the divine holiness consistently appear in the context of redemption. Typical in this respect is Isaiah 41:14: "'Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you,' says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."

In this setting, God's holiness does not inspire fear but reassurance. Thus we read, "When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (43:3–4; see 52:10). Again, God calls Himself "your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (43:14; see 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5).

Third, God's final victory over the forces of death: The theme of deliverance also marks the references to the divine holiness in the third section of Isaiah (chs. 56–66), the prophecies of the risen Lord, the Triumphant Warrior. Thus, we read of the symbolic cargo ships that will come from the west "to bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, to the Name of the Lord your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you" (60:8).

Whereas in the first part of Isaiah the unrepentant nation is threatened by the holiness of God, in this last section that same nation receives the promise, "they shall call you the city of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (60:14).

All three parts of the Book of Isaiah are concerned with the same figure of holiness, because the incarnate Messiah, God's Suffering Servant, and the Triumphant Hero are all the same Person.

First, Emmanuel is the Messiah in His conception and birth; this is the mystery of the Incarnation, about which Isaiah says a great deal (7:14; 9:1–2, 6–7; 11:1–5).

Second, He is also the Servant of the Lord in His sufferings and death; this is the mystery of the Cross, which Isaiah describes in unforgettable detail (50:4–9; 52:13–15; 53:1–12).

Third and finally, He is the Triumphant Warrior in His victory over sin and death; this is the mystery of His Resurrection and exaltation, the theme on which the Book of Isaiah ends (56:6–8; 59:15–20; 60:1–22; 61:1–3; 62:1–5; 63:1–6).

More clearly than any of the other prophets, Isaiah—often called the Fifth Evangelist—perceived the revelation of the divine holiness in all these mysteries of Christ our Lord: "Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory and spoke of

Him" (John 12:41). The divine holiness is manifest in the threefold structure of man's redemption: the Incarnation, the death on the Cross, and the Resurrection from the tomb.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Everything the Son of God did—the assumption of our flesh, His suffering and death, and His Resurrection from the grave—all of it was "for the sake of us men and for our salvation." That entire event in human history, the event called Jesus Christ, was redemptive.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the whole of this event is considered in terms of priesthood and mediation. Indeed, this emphasis is one of the distinctive characteristics of that book.

I do not mean by this that the mediating priesthood of Jesus is elsewhere unknown in the New Testament. In truth, St. Paul too speaks of the "one Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:5), and he describes our Lord's suffering and death in terms of priesthood: "Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2).

It is a fact, nonetheless, that nowhere else in the New Testament do we find greater specific attention devoted to the mediating priesthood of Jesus than in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Not only does this book twice call Jesus "the Mediator of the new covenant" (9:15; 12:24), but also this identification forms the very crux and core of the book. In addition, Hebrews is the only source in the New Testament that uses the words "priest" and "priesthood" with reference to Jesus.

It is instructive to employ the triadic outline of traditional creedal soteriology (Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection) as an interpretive key to the priesthood and mediation of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

First, Hebrews places the Incarnation at the root of our Lord's mediating priesthood. Following the principle that a biblical priest is "taken from among men" (5:1), the author goes to some length to demonstrate Christ's identification with our human nature as the foundation of His mediating priesthood. Identifying the "man" of Psalm 2 as Jesus, he argues that Christ's assumption of

our humanity was integral to His priesthood: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same” (2:14). Indeed,

> in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things that pertain to God (*ta pros ton Theon*), to make sacrifice for (*hilaskesthai*) the sins of the people. (2:17)

Later on, such affirmations were of great moment to the Nicene Fathers. Commenting on this and other texts, Athanasius of Alexandria wrote of Jesus as our High Priest,

> who leads forward and offers to the Father those who in faith approach Him, redeeming all and, for the sake of all, making sacrifice with respect to the things that pertain to God (*hilaskomenos ta pros ton Theon*).[17]

Second, with respect to the Lord’s Passion, the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms that Jesus, “for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (12:2). He assumed our mortal state, in fact, “that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (2:9), “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (2:14). His very death was redemptive, in that He bore our sins on the Cross: “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (9:28). He obtained the redemption of our transgressions “by means of death” (9:15).

The very shedding of Christ’s Blood was essential to this redemption, inasmuch as “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (9:22). This new covenant, of which Jesus is the Mediator, is a covenant in blood, fulfilling the prophetic sacrifices of the Old Testament (9:1—10:22).

Third, regarding the soteriology of the Lord’s Resurrection, Hebrews speaks of “the God of peace, who brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (13:20).

Jesus' Resurrection and entrance into the heavenly sanctuary were not afterthoughts, inessential to our redemption; they pertain to His mediating priesthood itself, which carries a heavenly, everlasting character. Indeed, "if He were on earth, He would not be a priest" (8:4). Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross is, then, completed in heaven, where "with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place, obtaining (*hevramenos*) eternal redemption for us" (9:12).

In this New Testament work, then, it is not difficult to trace the triadic structure outlined by Maximus and Nicholas.

The Good Samaritan

In Luke 10:25–37, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, which many Christians—beginning with the Church Fathers—have seen as a parable of man's Fall and redemption. Such an interpretation is usually elaborated in three steps.

First, there is the story of the Fall, concerning which we are told, "A man was *going down* from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he *fell* among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead." This man started in Jerusalem, we observe. He began his history in the garden place of God's presence.

But he did not stay there. He made a deliberate decision to *go down* on a journey. No one told him to go. He made the decision on his own, as an assertion of his independence. "Man in honor did not abide," says the Psalmist; "he became like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49[50]:12).

These robbers did not kill the fallen man completely. They left him, says the Sacred Text, *half* dead. Even fallen, he did not suffer total depravity. That is to say, there was still some chance for him, though he had no way of saving himself from his terrible predicament.

By this man's disobedience, in fact, sin entered the world, and by sin death. Indeed, death reigned already in his mortal flesh. How shall we describe this poor man's plight except that he was "alien from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12)? He had been left half dead. Holy Scripture says, and

there was no help for him in this world.

Along came a priest and then a Levite, men representing the Mosaic Law, but they had to pass by the fallen wayfarer, because by the works of the Law is no man justified. The priest and the Levite were hastening to the Temple in order to offer repeatedly the same sacrifices that could never take away sins.

Indeed, matters were made even worse, because "in those sacrifices there is a remembrance made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:3–4).

Second, a Samaritan, the Bible tells us, "as he journeyed, came to where the man was, and when he saw him, he had compassion." In the fullness of time, that is to say, God sent His Son to be a good neighbor to him who fell among the thieves. This Son, being in the form of God, did not think equality with God a thing to be seized, but He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. Indeed, this Son became an utter outcast—in short, a Samaritan, a person without respect or social standing. Although He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty we might become rich.

What was the first thing this Samaritan did for the man who fell among the thieves? He *saw* him, says the Bible. He looked upon the man in his misery. When Nathanael was still under the fig tree, our Samaritan *saw* him. A certain paralytic lay beside the pool of Bethesda with an infirmity thirty-eight years, and our Samaritan *saw* him lying there.

Showing Himself to be a good neighbor, this Samaritan, passing by, *saw* the man who was blind from birth. Blessed is he that falls under the gaze of our Samaritan. Such a one may say, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also have been known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

What did the Samaritan do for the man who fell among thieves? He washed him in the waters of baptism, cleansing his wounds, and into those wounds he poured His grace in the form of anointing oil, the holy Chrism, and the eucharistic wine to prevent infection. He blessed the fallen man with the grace of the Sacraments, by which he was initiated into the life of the Church.

Our Samaritan did not leave beside the road this half-dead victim of the fall among thieves. On the contrary, "He set him on his own animal, brought him to

an inn and took care of him." And then He went away. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. This Samaritan is also the Great High Priest who entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. But even as He went away, He said to the innkeeper, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you."

And this promise brings us to the third point. Our Samaritan says to the innkeeper, "*When* I come again." He does not say, *if* I come again, but *when* I come again. There is no "if" about the return of this Samaritan. This same Samaritan, who is taken up from us into heaven, shall so come in like manner as we have seen Him go into heaven. We solemnly confess, then, that He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time, apart from sin, unto salvation.

All of history is given significance by the two visits of the Samaritan. Only those who abide in the inn, awaiting the return of the Samaritan, really know the meaning of history. The inn is the house of history, the Church where the innkeeper cares for the Samaritan's friends.

This parable does not describe that return of the Samaritan. It says simply, "when I return." The parable leaves that return in the future. The story ends in the inn itself. It goes no further. The parable terminates in the place where the Samaritan would have His friends remain—at the inn.

It is imperative for their souls' health that they abide within this inn, to which our Samaritan has sworn to return. In this inn, which has received the solemn promise of the Samaritan, His friends pass all their days, as in eagerness they await His sworn return. This hope they have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, which enters into that place within the veil where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The rest of this work will follow the patristic outline—the three steps—elaborated by St. Maximus and St. Nicholas Cabasilas: the Incarnation of the Word, the Passion and Death of the Savior, and the risen Christ's glorification.

It is now time to begin our reflections on the Word Incarnate, the proper

subject of this first volume. The next two volumes will pursue parts two and three of the patristic outline of soteriology.

Notes

1 Sergius of Constantinople, *Hymnus Acathistus* 266.

2 For example, Hippolytus, *Psalm Introductions* 4, and Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 110.3.

3 Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.11.

4 *Op. cit.*, 1.13.

5 For a long time I have suspected that Anselm's argument had Islam in mind, that rival religion which believed in neither the Incarnation nor the death of Christ on the Cross. Indeed, the highly intellectual Muslim presence in Spain was a major catalyst in the development of scholastic theology. Whatever the Latin scholastics knew of Aristotle, they knew in translations made from Arabic.

6 Indeed, Anselm's theory was not repugnant to classical Eastern theologians. For instance, I challenge anyone to read *The Life in Christ* 4.4 of St. Nicholas Cabasilas (original available in Migne, *Patrologia Gaeca* 150.88B–C) except as an undisguised Greek translation of Anselm's argument in the *Cur Deus Homo*.

7 Karl Barth, discussing the nature of the theological task, remarks that Anselm's *remoto Christo* is "not wholly unobjectionable"! See *Church Dogmatics* I.1 [016] (Study Edition [T & T Clark, 2010], vol. 1, p. 16).

8 See the patristic sources cited in the Introduction to this book.

9 Maximus the Confessor, *Questions to Thalassius* 22, 60.

10 Maximus, *Theological Centuries* 1.66.

11 Maximus, *The Enigmas* (Migne, *Patrologia Gaeca* 91.1392).

12 See Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 3.18.3; 3.19.1; Didymus the Blind, *On the Trinity* 3.4; Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinaris* 2 (and *passim*); John Damascene, *The Orthodox Faith* 3.11.

13 Maximus, *Ambigua* 10.3.

14 Much of the second volume of the present work will be taken up with this subject.

15 I borrow the participle “eucharisticized” from Justin Martyr (*First Apology* 65.5; 66.2), who uses it to describe the physical elements of the Holy Eucharist.

16 Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* 3.2–3.

17 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Arians* 2.7.

CHAPTER 3

Primitive Christology

We begin now our reflections on the incarnate Word—*Christ*ology.

Perhaps it is best to define *Christology* as simply "talking about Christ." In this elementary sense, of course, Christians have been "doing Christology" from the very beginning—from the very minute they were faced with the question, "What do you think of the Christ?"

The earliest Christians, in talking about Christ—interpreting Christ—did so in the biblical descriptions and images familiar to them, particularly from many prophecies of Holy Scripture: Messiah (and, therefore, King), Seed of David, Son of Man, Suffering Servant, Prophet, Light unto the Gentiles, and so on. Other formulas expressive of the faith derived from the circumstances of Jesus' life: for example, born from a Virgin, proclaiming peace, doing good, suffering under Pontius Pilate. "Teacher" (*Rabbi*) seems to have been one of the earliest titles ascribed to Christ.

Formulas such as these were assumed into the apostolic corpus, in due course, through which they found their way into the Christology of the Church Fathers. Thus, the bishops at Nicaea, while they debated at length the expression *homoousios*, had no trouble with "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

The purpose of this chapter is to detect examples of the most primitive Christological formulas, to assess their original significance, and to trace their further development in the transmission of the faith once delivered to the saints. In our brief survey of this material, I hope to demonstrate three things.

First, from the most primitive time of the Church—the period prior to the composition of the apostolic writings—Christian believers held to a "high Christology." By this I mean, they believed that Jesus Christ, who already existed as God's Son, came to this earth *from on high*—was sent into human history by God His Father. He was not simply a superior human being whom God, for whatever reason, *adopted*.[1]

Second, the earliest Christians believed that the Jesus of history was both divine *and* human. Although unfamiliar with the technical vocabulary developed at a later period and enshrined in the Christological councils of the fifth century (*physis*, *persona*, *natura*, *prosopon*, *hypostasis*, etc.), they described Jesus as both God's preexisting Son *and* as a real—not merely apparent—human being. They were equally opposed to adoptionism (God "adopted" the man Jesus as His Son) and docetism (God's Son only "appeared" to be human).

Third, the earliest Christians, when they described Jesus as both God and man, strictly avoided speaking of Him as a "mixed being," as though part human and part divine. Christ's two modes of being, human and divine, were never confused, never changed, never divided, and never separated. When, in the mid-fifth century, the Council of Chalcedon dogmatically pronounced on this matter, the Fathers at that synod were fully at one with the early believers St. Paul came to know, beginning at Damascus.

Before the Damascus Trip

Our chief source for the ancient material in question is the corpus of the Pauline epistles. Inasmuch as St. Paul's letters are apparently the earliest extant writings in the New Testament,[2] he is commonly—and not inappropriately—thought of as the Church's earliest theologian.

This persuasion, nonetheless, certainly does not mean that the Church had no theology *prior* to Paul's conversion. Indeed, on the very day Ananias baptized the Apostle to the Gentiles, there already existed an authoritative body of Christian belief—a *paradosis* or "tradition"—of which Paul himself became

both the appreciative heir and the ardent proponent. As we shall consider presently, his appeal to that authority was both prompt and insistent.

With respect to Christology, in particular, Paul was familiar with many factual points from that earlier tradition. He knew, for instance, that Jesus was a human being (Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 15:21). He also knew that Jesus was a Jew (Rom. 9:5; Gal. 3:16) and that He ministered to the Jews (Rom. 15:8). Paul was sufficiently familiar with Jesus' earthly life to know that He had a mother and brothers (1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 4:4); he even knew the name of one of those brothers (Gal. 1:19).

Through the testimony of those more directly familiar with Jesus' earthly life, Paul learned of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10.1; see Matt. 11:29), of His "grace" (2 Cor. 8:9), of His "obedience" (Rom. 5:19), and of His "patience" (2 Thess. 3:5). Paul was sufficiently informed about the manners and behavior of Jesus, furthermore, to make it possible for him to "imitate" Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1).

Concerning the events of Holy Week, in particular, Paul was familiar with the major details. He knew, for instance, that the Lord gave the Eucharist to the Church on the evening of His arrest (1 Cor. 11:23–25; see 5:7). He knew that Jesus, though murdered through a Jewish plot (1 Thess. 2:15), suffered a Roman execution (1 Cor. 2:8; Gal. 3:12). He was familiar with the details of Jesus' Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1–7).

Arguably weightiest among such references is Paul's comment with respect to "Christ Jesus, who, bearing witness (*martyresantos*) before Pontius Pilate, made the good confession (*ten kalen homologian*)" (1 Tim. 6:13).

The special significance of this reference to Pontius Pilate is twofold. First, it bolsters the historicity of Paul's reference to Pilate in Luke's account of his preaching at Pisidian Antioch: "They sought of Pilate that [Jesus] should be executed" (Acts 13:28). Second, this reference attaches "the good confession" of Jesus to the documented memory of political and social history; Pilate was a real person, and the facts of his life and career were verifiable.

To the first Christians, this reference to Pilate touched on the nature of redemption itself: It was a fact essentially tied to documentable history. This

specific attachment of the Christ-event to the history of the world was perceived to be so important—even essential to the faith itself—that it led, in due course, to the insertion of Pilate's name into the creedal formulas of the Church.

Kerygma and Creed

Nor was Paul unfamiliar with the teaching Jesus gave during His earthly ministry. Since this is not the place to examine the many parallels between the ethical doctrines of Jesus and Paul, it probably suffices to mention other indications of Paul's familiarity with Jesus' teaching. For example, Paul declares with confidence, "For this we say to you *by the word of the Lord*, that we who are alive, remaining until the coming of the Lord, will have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:15). He knew of Jesus' injunction against divorce (1 Cor. 7:10) and His instruction that "those who preach the Gospel should draw their living from the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). In addition, St. Luke records from the lips of Paul a saying of the Lord that does not appear in any of the Gospels: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:25).

In what forms did Paul receive this traditional information about Jesus? He received it, first of all, through the teaching ministry of the Church, beginning with the instructions he received from Ananias, the pastor of the congregation in Damascus, when he received Paul into the obedience and sacrament of faith (see Acts 9:10–18; 22:12–16). The living Church, this "house of the catholic obedience" (Venerable Bede's beautiful expression), also conveyed the inherited faith to Paul through the words of her kerygmatic and catechetical material, her basic creedal forms, her hymnography, and her other prayers.

With respect to Paul's access to the Church's early kerygmatic and catechetical material, it probably suffices to mention his well-known references to the "traditions" he "received" and "handed on":

> Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions (*paradoseis*) you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. (2 Thess. 2:15)
> But we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not

> according to the tradition (*paradosin*) which they received (*parelabosan*) from us. (2 Thess. 3:6)
>
> Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions (*paradoseis*) just as I handed them on (*paredoka*) to you. (1 Cor. 11:2)
>
> I received (*parelabon*) from the Lord what I also handed on (*paredoka*) to you. (1 Cor. 11:23)
>
> I handed on (*paredoka*) to you, among the first things, that which I also received (*parelabon*). (1 Cor. 15:3)

In the present chapter, I will argue that Paul's letters (and other New Testament sources) contain elements of this inherited material. It is not always easy to identify these elements—nor is complete certainty invariably available—but recent textual scholarship has detected various indications of their presence throughout the Sacred Text.

Perhaps easiest to discern are the brief exclamations "Abba, Father" and "Jesus is Lord," two expressions given to the Church by the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15; 10:8–10; Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:3; Phil. 2:10). These are universally recognized as primitive creedal/invocative formulas. They eventually provided the structure of the first and second articles of the Nicene Creed: "I believe in *one God*, the Father almighty. . . . I believe in *one Lord*, Jesus Christ."

Primitive Christian Prayer

The traditions of the Church were inseparable from the forms and content of her worship. Indeed, there is substantial evidence, from her earliest days, that the Church proceeded, at least implicitly, on the premise, "the norm of worship is the norm of belief" (*lex orandi, lex credendi*).

The reasoning supportive of this axiom seems solid: If the Church's prayer was an expression of her faith, then the *words* of the prayer must give a good idea of what the Church *believed*.

How do we find this material? Consider: It is reasonable to suppose that the

sudden appearance in any prose passage of what appear to be metric lines may—and probably does—indicate that the prose writer is quoting and/or inserting a poem; any of us would make this supposition if, for instance, we found some poetic lines in a letter from a friend.

Moreover, it is also reasonable to suppose, in the case of the Christian Church, that hymnography was the original setting of such poetry. We don't know how much non-liturgical poetry the earliest Christians wrote, but we do know they wrote hymns, and we know that many hymns are composed in common poetic forms.

Now, if there was one thing perfectly clear about the early Christians, it was their disposition to sing the content of their faith—and not only to sing it, but to sing it together, to chant common texts they all knew by heart. Thus, we find Paul and his companions, in the dark of midnight, "praying, singing hymns (*hymnoun*) to God" in a Philippian jail (see Acts 16:25). Whatever hymns they were singing, they were certainly singing them from memory.

On the presupposition that some of those hymnic texts were pre-Pauline, it is also reasonable to expect that some of Paul's major theological themes actually derive from sources earlier than his conversion. The theme of the Cross/axis, for instance, surely was not an idea that originated with Paul; it was, most certainly, dominant already in the Church's faith and proclamation prior to his conversion. Paul's mind was fundamentally formed by the doctrine and catechesis inherited from the earlier Christian Tradition.[3]

In addition to her catechetical ministry, then, the ancient Church conveyed the faith in her hymnography. Indeed, after the words of Jesus Himself, texts of hymnography seem to provide our earliest sources of Christian theology. The *Apostolica*—the New Testament writings—bear witness to the existence of such hymns (see Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Eph. 3:16; 5:19; James 5:23).

Before looking at a few items of this evidence individually, let us first reflect on an obvious feature of hymns that renders them especially valuable in the history of theology—namely, the words of commonly chanted hymns are necessarily set, fixed, and determined; they tend not to change.[4] The doctrinal formulations contained in the hymnography, precisely because they are written

down—or at least memorized—are most resistant to change. Consequently, when we find traces of Christian hymnography in the New Testament literature, the discovery is particularly precious; in such instances we know that we are dealing with material Paul chanted before he wrote it down.

In the discernment of such material, it is important to bear in mind a distinctive quality of liturgical language: the expressions and formulas used in the setting of worship, including hymns, tend to remain stable and fixed long after they have fallen away from common speech and even from the vocabulary of preaching.[5]

The Servant

A single example may suffice to demonstrate what I mean here: early Christian use of the Greek noun *pais* ("servant" or "child") as a reference to Jesus. Apparently this noun was used to refer to Jesus in primitive apostolic preaching; it appears twice, for instance, in Luke's account of Peter's Pentecost sermon (see Acts 3:13, 26).

It is instructive to observe, nonetheless, that St. Paul, the New Testament's earliest author, never uses the word; as far as we can tell *pais* was not part of Paul's preaching. It would seem, then, that during the twenty or so years separating Peter's first sermons from Paul's first epistles, the Christological use of this expression, *pais*, had already ceased to be common in catechetical and homiletic language. Such a reference appears nowhere in the New Testament epistles.

Now here is where the observation becomes very interesting: In spite of the disappearance of this Christological category (*pais*) in Christian preaching and catechesis, references to Jesus as God's *pais* still continued to appear in the formulations of Christian prayer. With respect to Jesus as God's *pais*, its place in worship began early (see Acts 4:30) and was widely and long maintained.

For instance, in the *Didache*, a first-century document from Syria, the same usage is found in two prayers.[6] Likewise, near the end of the first century, Clement of Rome referred to Jesus as God's *pais* three times in a prayer formula,

although he did not otherwise make such a reference.[7] Similarly, in Asia Minor during the next century, Jesus was called God's *pais* in the final prayer of Polycarp of Smyrna.[8] Then, at the dawn of the third century, again in Rome, the identical usage appeared in prayers preserved by Hippolytus.[9] In short, liturgical sources alone kept alive the Christological sense of *pais* for several centuries, long after it had ceased to be a common expression in epistolary, homiletic, and catechetical settings.[10]

This evidence points to a distinct reluctance of Christians to change the formulas of their prayers. In the instance under consideration—*pais*—a primitive Christological reference, surely drawn from the Greek text of Isaiah (see Is. 42:1; 50:10; 52:13; Matt. 12:18), remained tenaciously stable in the Church's worship, notwithstanding its disappearance in non-liturgical contexts.

The Mystery of Our Religion

In addition to the specific vocabulary of prayer, the presence of quoted hymnography in the New Testament can often be discerned by its material and formal components; hymnic features will generally stand out from the surrounding text, sometimes by strophic, metric indications.

Thus, when a prose-writing apostle unexpectedly breaks into a line or two in metric form, it may be a promising sign that he is quoting a hymn. That impression may be further confirmed if the material itself contains vocabulary otherwise unusual in the writer's style.

First Timothy 3:14–16 provides a commonly recognized example of this phenomenon:

> Hoping to come to you quickly, I am writing you these things—in case I am delayed—so that you may know what sort of behavior is expected in the house of God, which is the living God's Church, the pillar and base of the truth. Indeed, great in its confession is the mystery of our religion:
> manifest in the flesh,
> justified in the Spirit,
> beheld by angels,

preached unto the Gentiles,
believed on in the world,
received up into glory.

The Greek text of the latter part of this passage is formed of six metric lines that use both parallelism and assonance. Read as either three couplets or a twin set of *terza rima*, the indented selection is certainly poetry, not prose; it apparently comes from a Christian hymn.

Its sudden appearance in a prose passage prompts the reader to wonder, "How did Paul come to cite a hymn in this place?" After all, the components of these lines, viewed individually, do not logically advance Paul's argument in this section of his epistle.

I suggest that what we have is, rather, a traditional text that arose spontaneously to Paul's mind, prompted by his reference to "the living God's Church" as "the pillar and base of the truth."

Let me summarize my suggestion: According to the unusual adverb Paul uses here—*homologoumenos*—the "truth" in question pertains to the Church's "confession," her *homologia*. This confession, the apostle says, gives voice to the substance of the *mysterion* of the "religion" (*evsebeia*) proclaimed in the "household of God." Finally, in testimony to this view of the Church, Paul invokes these six lines of hymnic confession familiar to—and readily recognized by—his reader, Timothy.

What, then, does Paul mean to say? The message is not complicated, I think. The argument runs like this: A "pillar" or "base" *holds up* something; it gives support to something—in this case, the truth of the Gospel. This truth of the Gospel, Paul has in mind to demonstrate, is *confessed* in the Church's hymnography. That is to say, Paul is here appealing to the authority of a recognized Christian prayer in order to illustrate his account of the Church as "the pillar and base of the truth." The Church, he says, confesses that "great mystery," *mega mysterion*, in her worship. For this reason he quotes the hymn itself as a "theological source"; this is an early example of "the norm of prayer," *lex orandi*.

Adam and the Suffering Slave

Let us consider what is arguably a more significant example: Philippians 2:6–10 appears to contain part or all of such a Christian hymn. Indeed, this may be our earliest extant example of an elaborate Christian prayer text. Paul says of Christ:

> Being in the form of God,
> He thought it not robbery to be equal to God,
> but He emptied Himself,
> assuming the form of a slave,
> becoming like unto men,
> found as a man in aspect.
> He humbled Himself,
> becoming obedient unto death,
> the very death of the Cross.
> On account of this, God raised Him up
> and granted Him a name
> above every name whatever,
> so that in Jesus' name
> every knee should bend,
> whether above, upon, or beneath the earth,
> and every tongue should confess,
> unto God the Father's glory,
> that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Notwithstanding a widespread agreement (though not an unsettled consensus) that these lines are hymnic, the actual structure and meter of the hymn is still under discussion. Leaving aside a more ample consideration of this discussion, let me mention, at least, my long-held suspicion that this passage is a Greek translation of a hymn originally composed in Aramaic.[11] If such is the case, these lines may be among the earliest words in the whole New Testament.

Whatever the value of that hypothesis, two points may be made about this passage in Philippians. First, its rich doctrinal character is surprising in a context where we would not expect it. The context in Philippians is not doctrinal. What

where we would not expect it. The context in Philippians is not doctrinal. What we have in Philippians is, rather, a moral exhortation, in which Paul prescribes how Christians are to be humble and obedient in their regard and behavior toward one another (2:1–4,12–16).

Settled in this moral context, the Christological hymn has the feel of an insertion. It takes the reader in a specifically doctrinal direction. It appears that Paul, wanting to hold up the example of the obedience of Christ, reminds his readers of a text he expects them to recognize.

In short, Paul wanted the Philippians to adopt the self-emptying of God's Son. His moral intent here is very much like that of the Apostle Peter, who reminded his readers, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21–23). And, just as Peter illustrated his point by citing a biblical source (Is. 53:7–9), so Paul cites a well-known Christian hymn to make the same point.

Indeed, the hymn cited by Paul sounded a note identical to that Old Testament text cited by Peter: Christ emptied Himself, taking on the condition of a slave, the very Suffering Slave (*'eved*, *doulos*) of the Book of Isaiah. When God's Son took on "the form of a slave," it was this specific slave foreseen and foretold by the prophet.

This Isaian theme—God's Slave suffering for the sins of men—gave shape to early Christian preaching, as we see in Philip's discourse to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:32–35) and Paul's evangelizing of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:3). Here in Philippians we observe its appearance in early Christian hymnography.

Second, at least part of the content of this hymnic insertion clearly relies on a contrast between Christ and Adam. Adam, we recall, was disobedient in trying to become like God. This was implied in what the serpent told Eve with respect to the forbidden fruit: "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). That is to say, disobedient Adam "regarded equality with God as robbery [or a thing to be grasped]" (*harpagmon egesato to einai isa Theoi*).

God's Son, in contrast, being "in the form of God" (*en morphe Theou*), was already "equal to God" (*isa Theo*). He had no need to grasp this equality. Yet He

emptied Himself and assumed “the form of a slave” (*morphen doulou*), becoming obedient to death on the Cross. This is the model of obedience Paul holds out to Christians, telling them, “Have this mind (*touto phroneite*) among yourselves.” Believers are exhorted to abandon the example of Adam and pursue the standard of Christ.

In sum, Paul himself apparently inherited this contrast between Adam and Christ from the hymnography of early Christian worship. For this reason it should be regarded as coming from the most primitive theological insights of Christians. Later,[12] in 1 Corinthians and Romans, Paul himself represents new developments on the theme, applied to the two disputed questions he had in mind to address: resurrection and justification. Earlier than Paul, however, was this primitive hymn.

High Christology

Our analysis of the hymn fragment in Philippians 2 amply demonstrates, I believe, the conviction of the earliest Christians regarding the pre-existence of the eternal Word; theirs was a *high* Christology. They started with the eternal pre-existence of the Son of God. They knew nothing of that modern phenomenon known as a *low* Christology, according to which the man Jesus *became* God’s Son at some point.[13]

In the New Testament as a whole, two verbs in particular testify to the *high* Christology of the early Church: First, *send*, as in “God *sent* His Son.” Second, *come*, as in “the Son *came* into the world.”

First, *send*: When Paul says that God *sent* His Son, the context of this expression indicates something quite different from His *sending* of the Prophets. In the reference to God “sending (*pempsas*) His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), the participle refers to the Son’s *new state*, His entrance into history. That is to say, the Son existed prior to His enfleshment as a human being.

The same thesis is affirmed in Galatians 4:4. There we are told, not simply that God *sent* His Son, but that “God *sent forth* His Son”—*exsapesteilen* (see

Acts 13:16). The verb's prefix implies more forcefully the Son's pre-existence.

For Paul, Christ's pre-existence is presumed in the very concept of the Incarnation; he speaks of the Son in two "states." Thus, he tells the Corinthians that Christ, "*being* rich (*plousios on*), for your sakes impoverished Himself (*eptochevsen*), that you through His poverty might be enriched" (2 Cor. 8:9). Virtually all interpreters of this text recognize its affinity to the ancient kenotic theology preserved in the Philippians hymn: God's eternal Son emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and assumed our low estate.

Second, there is the verb *come*, which appears in various sayings of the Lord with respect to Himself; Jesus speaks of Himself as someone who has "come" into the world. Indeed, it is hard to explain why Paul and the pre-Pauline Church thought of Jesus as "sent" unless we take at face-value Jesus' plain assertions that He had "come."

In the Gospels, these sayings of the Lord appear in two forms: In the tradition represented in the Synoptic Gospels, the subject of "come" is the "Son of Man"; in St. John's Gospel the subject of "come" is "I."

Thus, in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus proclaimed that the Son of Man *came* to call sinners, not the righteous (Mark 2:17). He *came* to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He *came* to give His life as a ransom for the many (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28). In these sayings Jesus manifests a self-consciousness of being transcendent to the merely human.

These declarations demonstrate a remarkably "high" Christology in the Synoptic Gospels. I readily agree with Johannes Schneider's assessment, rendered more than a half-century ago, that they "derive from the Messianic self-awareness of Jesus and are to be explained thereby."[14]

In St. John's Gospel, the use of "have come" in the sayings of Christ is a more direct and explicit self-attestation, expressed in the first person singular. Thus, Jesus says, "*I came forth* (*exselthon*) from God" (8:42), "*I have come* in My Father's name" (5:43), "I know where *I came* from" (8:14), "*I have come* that they may have life" (10:10), "*I have come* as a light into the world" (12:46), and "For judgment *I have come* into this world" (9:39).

Such sayings are consistent with the Baptist's declaration that God's Son, "who *comes* after me . . . *was* before me" (John 1:15). The Son already existed before He *came*.

From Eternity to Time

But God's Son not only *came* (*erchomai*); He also *be*came (*gignomai*). Because of its prominence in early Christian assertions about Jesus, the Greek verb *gignomai*—normally translated as "to become"—deserves a brief theological analysis in this discussion of the Incarnation in our earliest sources.[15]

When it refers to the Incarnate Word, the verb *gignomai* often indicates a change of condition or state. In such cases, the verb may appear as either a finite aorist verb (*egeneto*, "became") or as a participle (*genomenos*, "having become"). The most memorable example, I suppose, is found in John: *ho Logos sarxs egeneto*, "the Word *became* flesh," which means that God's eternal Son *began* a new existence as a human being.

This verse from John is not just one among many examples. Its assertion serves, rather, as the premise for every other instance where the verb *gignomai* is used with respect to the Incarnate Word. His *becoming* flesh initiated a series of ongoing events in which He assumed human experiences into His own identity and made them channels of transforming grace.

The idioms of Greek and English being very different, however, a faithful translation of the verb *gignomai*, as it pertains to Christ our Lord, occasionally requires a measure of improvisation. How, for instance, in Luke's description of the agony in the Garden, should we render his condensed expression, *genomenos en agonia*? If we render it literally as "becoming in agony," this is rather awkward English. It is difficult to translate this passage without over-translating it; so we feel obliged to settle for something like "falling into an agony." This version makes sense, but it also camouflages the subtle theological tone of *gignomai* when it is ascribed to the Incarnate Word.

The opening of the Epistle to the Romans, which contains a pre-Pauline creedal affirmation about Christ our Lord, presents a striking instance of the

translator's difficulty; the passage nearly requires a paraphrase. This protocreedal formula, by way of defining the "Gospel of God" (*evaggelion Theou*), describes God's Son as "having taken on an existence (*genomenos*), with respect to the flesh (*kata sarka*), from the seed of David."[16]

Galatians 4:4, as well, contains a parallel statement about the Incarnation—no less difficult to translate literally—in which Paul affirms that God "sent His Son, *genomenon* from a woman, *genomenon* under the Law." Since the participle in this verse (*genomenos*, "having become") pertains to Jesus' conception and birth, most translators, perhaps despairing of a more literal rendering, are content to say, "*born* of a woman, *born* under the law."

Here, too, however, the sense of the text is that God's preexistent Son, through His human and Jewish birth, took on *a new mode of existence*. He *became* what He was not before. Consequently, a more accurate account of the sense of this verse may suggest an elaborate and more emphatic form—even a paraphrase: "who took on a new existence from a woman, who took on a new existence under the Law."

Likewise, Philippians 2:5–6, which, as we saw, quoted an ancient Christian hymn, says of God's Son that, with respect to His "being" (*hyparchon*), He was of divine form, and, with respect to His "becoming" (*genomenos*), He took on the likeness of a slave.

Since all three of the foregoing examples appear to come from very early, pre-Pauline sources, they testify to the faith of the primitive Church with respect to the Son's *transition* from eternal being to the human experience of time. Indeed, according to Romans 1:3–4, this consideration pertains to the Gospel itself. This point is clarified in the more elaborate translation suggested by Matthew W. Bates; it makes Paul speak of the Gospel of God

> concerning his Son, who as it pertains to the flesh came into existence by means of the seed of David; who as it pertains to the Spirit of Holiness was appointed Son-of-God-in-power by means of the resurrection from among the dead ones—Jesus Christ our Lord.[17]

From the primitive doctrinal seed buried in this text, as from "a kind of potted creed,"[18] there gradually grew in the Church a comprehensive Christology, structured on the twin branches of the Incarnation and the Resurrection. It will be profitable, before we proceed with other themes, to indicate the shape of that growth and to demonstrate how it came to be joined to other primitive Christological themes.[19]

The Context in Romans

We should begin this pursuit, perhaps, by inquiring what prompted St. Paul to begin the Epistle to the Romans by quoting the creedal summary we have just considered. In other words, how is this primitive formula of the faith related to the thesis and material in Romans as a whole?

I suggest several considerations. First, in this epistle, Paul is about to elaborate ideas that might sound new to some believers, especially Christians who, like those at Rome, had not been catechized by the apostle himself. For such believers, his citation of this recognized creedal form serves as an initial encouragement to hear the rest of his epistle with sympathy and consent. He wants to make it perfectly clear, from the start, that what he is about to write is rooted in what all believers recognize as "the Gospel of God," the faith once delivered to the saints.

Second, later in the Epistle to the Romans Paul will devote critical attention to the destiny of the Jewish People. Through chapters 9–11, in particular, he will develop a dialectical vision of salvation history, in which Israel's rejection of the Messiah serves to advance, not impede, the power of divine grace. In addition, Paul will argue, this same historical dialectic promises Israel's return, in due course, to its proper inheritance in the Kingdom.

To prepare for his elaboration of this subject in Romans, Paul cites the short creedal formula under consideration, which affirms that God's Son assumed flesh "of the seed of David." This affirmation, which implicitly excludes—for all times—any detachment of the faith from the historical role of Israel, is a rudimentary component of the Gospel itself. In the mind of Paul it is an essential feature of the "Gospel of God" that "He promised [it] before through His

feature of the "Gospel of God" that "He promised [it] before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2). That is to say, Israel and the Gospel are not detachable from one another.

Third, later on in Romans Paul will appeal to the enfleshing of the Son as the conversion point where the intervention of grace displaces the Torah as the governing force in human experience:

> For what was impossible to the Law because it was weak through the flesh (*dia tes sarkos*)—God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (*en homoiomati sarkos hamartias*) on account of sin, condemned sin in the flesh (*ten hamartian en tei sarki*). (Rom. 8:3)

This affirmation respecting the Son's assumption of "the likeness of sinful flesh" appears as the climax to the apostle's account of the experience of "sinful flesh":

> I am fleshly (*sarknos*), sold under sin (*hypo ten hamartian*). . . . I know that in me—that is, in my flesh (*en tei sarki mou*)—no good dwells. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:14, 18, 24)

The "sinful flesh" (*sarxs hamartias*) of which Paul writes in Romans 8:2, the flesh assumed by God's Son, is the same flesh of which Paul complains all through the previous chapter. According to St. Paul, that is to say, the flesh assumed by the Son of God was identical to our own. Becoming like us (*en homoiomati*), He took on "the flesh of sin"—*sarxs hamartias*. In view of the New Testament's insistence that Christ was sinless—and that death, consequently, had no hold on Him—Paul's description of the Incarnation in this text of Romans seems unusually bold. It is valuable for its clear assertion that the Son, in the Incarnation, assumed our humanity with the weaknesses and disadvantages of its fallen state.[20]

Already, however, at the very beginning of the epistle, Paul cites an ancient creedal formula—"who as it pertains to the flesh came into existence by means of the seed of David"—by way of preparing for the doctrinal development he presents several chapters later.

The Tradition at Antioch

The subsequent history of these early formulas follows the same Christological preoccupation traced by the Epistle to the Romans. At the dawn of the second century, for instance, St. Ignatius of Antioch, using the same expressions found in Romans 1:3–4, argues several times for the physical reality of the Incarnation. He declares, for instance, that "our God, Jesus Christ, according to God's dispensation (*kat' oikonomian Theou*), was carried in Mary's womb, from the seed of David, by the Holy Spirit."[21]

This text, with its dependence on the early creedal expression regarding "the seed of David," introduces Ignatius's sustained refutation of the docetists, who taught that God's Son only *appeared* (*dokein*) to be human. He continues the theme of the Incarnation by speaking paradoxically of "three loud secrets"—*tria mysteria kravges*. These are, Ignatius writes, Mary's virginal conception, the true identity of her Son, and the salvific efficacy of His death.

"The prince of this world" (*ton archonta tou aionos toutou*), being ignorant of the three mysteries "accomplished in God's silence," was duped with respect to the true power of the Incarnation.[22] In other words, the devil was a sort of docetist, as it were.

According to Ignatius, the very idea of the Incarnation meant that Jesus *had to be* both divine and human, both eternal and historical, "God manifested humanly (*Theou anthropinos phaneromenou*) for the newness of eternal life."[23]

Even as he wrote these words, Ignatius hoped to compose a "second book"—doubtless in more detail and at greater length—about this *oikonomia* regarding "the new Man (*ton kainon Anthropon*), Jesus Christ, in His faith and in His love, in His Passion and Resurrection." Once again reverting to the ancient creedal form we saw in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Ignatius speaks of "Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David (*ek genous David*) according to the flesh, being both the Son of man and the Son of God."[24]

Within days of the writing of this letter to the church at Ephesus, this pastoral and theological preoccupation of Ignatius appears in what he wrote to the believers in Magnesia, declaring that they had

the believers in Magnesia, declaring that they had

> attained to full conviction (*peplerophoresthai*) in regard to the birth, and Passion, and Resurrection which took place during the government of Pontius Pilate, being truly and certainly accomplished by Jesus Christ, who is our hope, from which may no one of you ever be turned aside.[25]

From this text it would appear that the "historical" quality of the Church's creedal affirmation has been strengthened by tying the salvific work of Christ to the actual time of Pontius Pilate (see 1 Tim. 6:13). As we reflected earlier, the mention of this Roman procurator reflects the most primitive memory of the Church.

Ignatius continues these same themes and historical memories in the message he sent to the church at Tralles at about the same time:

> Deafen yourselves, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with (*choris*) Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David (*ek genous David*), and also of Mary; who was truly born, and ate and drank. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified and died, as beings looked on—heavenly, earthly, and sub-earthly. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father raising Him up, even as in the same manner His Father will so raise us up, who believe in Him, by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.[26]

The identical creedal formulas also appear in Ignatius's letter to the Christians at Smyrna, whom he praises as

> having attained an immoveable faith, as though nailed, in both flesh and spirit, to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and established in love through the blood of Christ, firmly convinced (*peplerophoremenous*), with respect to our Lord, that He was truly of the family of David according to the flesh (*ek genous David kata sarka*), and the Son of God according to the will and power of God, that He was truly born of a virgin, was baptized by John (so that all righteousness might be fulfilled

> by Him), and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, crucified for us in His flesh, by the fruit of which we exist through His divinely-blessed passion, that He might set up a standard for all ages, through His resurrection.[27]

The Apologists

Christological formulas and expressions from the most primitive memories of the Church, to which our quotations from Ignatius bear such clear witness, are repeated about forty years later in the writings of an early Christian apologist, St. Justin Martyr. He declared, for instance,

> the Word, who is the first-born (*proton gennema*) of God, born (*gegennesthai*) without sexual intercourse, and He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven.[28]

In this text, we observe, the historical facts relative to the Incarnate Word are arranged as components in a creedal narrative. The life enshrined in this account, says Justin, fulfilled sundry prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures:

> In these books of the prophets we found Jesus our Messiah (*ton hemeteron Christon*) foretold as *coming forth* (*paraginomenon*), born (*gennomenon*) from a Virgin, attaining manhood, and healing every disease and every sickness, and raising the dead, and being hated, and unrecognized, and crucified, and dying, and rising again, and ascending into heaven, and *both* being *and* being called (*onta kai keklemenon*) the Son of God.[29]

Inasmuch as it echoes primitive Christological expressions, two features of this rich text solicit particular attention. First, we observe that Justin maintains a formula that expresses the Son's "becoming" (*paraginomenon*) human; we have

seen how several Pauline texts (Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7) preserved that primitive Christological expression.

Second, it is significant that the title "Son of God" appears at the end, not the beginning, of Justin's creedal summary. Although it is clear that he believes Jesus already "to be" (*onta*) the Son of God, Jesus is "called" the Son of God by reason of the various experiences of His life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. That is to say, Justin's Christological assertion here expresses the more primitive quality and form preserved in Romans 1:4, according to which Jesus was "appointed Son-of-God-in-power (*tou horisthentos Huiou Theou en dynamei*) by reason of the Resurrection from the dead."

Justin repeats some of these creedal formulations in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, where he speaks of

> this very Son of God, who is the first-born of every creature, and who, born from the Virgin, *became* (*genomenou*) a man capable of suffering (*pathetou . . . anthropou*), and, because of your nation, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven.[30]

Except for Justin's quotation from Colossians 1:15 ("the first-born of every creature"), all the expressions contained in this creedal text seem to have been common among Christians from the most primitive days—the pre-Pauline period—of the Church. The sole unexpected component within this formula, Justin's reference to "*your* people" (the Jews, that is), was prompted by the polemical intent of his work, and this point, too, derived from the distant memory of Christian tradition.

In those very early expressions of the faith, then, we already discern elements that became central in the later Christological development, particularly the identity of Christ as both eternal and historical, both God and man.

Staying with the second-century apologists for now, we may observe how, for instance, the ancient formulas preserved in Romans 1:3–4, combined with Galatians 4:4, provided St. Irenaeus of Lyons with the means of refuting the docetists, who taught that Christ's humanity was only apparent. Irenaeus

docetists, who taught that Christ's humanity was only apparent. Irenaeus reasoned, "Unless Christ is fully human, then He has nothing in common with Adam. And if He has nothing in common with Adam, He cannot be the new Adam. And if He is not the new Adam, then He cannot represent the fullness of humanity." Irenaeus wrote,

> For if He did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being, He was made neither man nor the son of man; and if He was not made what we were, He accomplished nothing significant in what He suffered and endured.

In demonstration of this thesis, Irenaeus quotes Galatians 4:4 and Romans 1:34, two texts we considered earlier:

> The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Galatians, declares plainly, "God sent His Son, who was born [*genomenos*, "became"] from a woman." And again, writing to the Romans, he says, "Concerning His Son, who was born [*genomenos*, "became"] from the seed of David with respect to the flesh, and who, with respect to the Spirit of holiness, was appointed Son of God in power by the Resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ our Lord."[31]

Early Latin Testimony

Whereas Ignatius, Justin, and Irenaeus appealed to those ancient Christological formulas to refute the false teaching of docetism, Tertullian, writing early in the third century, invoked them to disprove the heresy of adoptionism. He did this chiefly in two of his more mature treatises, *On the Flesh of Christ*[32] and *Against Praxeas*.[33]

Providing insights (and some vocabulary) for the later Christological development of Augustine and Leo (and, through them, the Council of Chalcedon), Tertullian argues that Jesus cannot be made up of a jumbling of two "states" that are changed by being mixed. Jesus Christ is no "*tertium quid*, a confusion formed by mixing two things (*ex utroque confusum*)."[34] The Lord's

divinity was not diminished by His humanity, nor was His humanity rendered less human by its union with the eternal Word.

Jesus Christ, in the theological vision of Tertullian, is a single and unique subject in which are found, in their integrity, both divinity and humanity. "We see a double state (*duplicem statum*)," Tertullian writes, "not confused but joined together (*non confusum sed coniunctum*) *in una persona*, Jesus, both God and man."[35]

In testimony to this truth, Tertullian invokes the primitive creedal formula preserved in the opening verses of Romans:

> Thus the Apostle also teaches with respect to [Christ] each state (*de utraque substantia*), for he says, "He was made of the seed of David (*factus est de semine David*)"—He will be both a man and a son of man —"He was appointed Son of God according to the Spirit"—He will be both God and Son of God.[36]

Tertullian draws particular attention to the participle *factus* in the Christological formula preserved in the opening verses of Romans: *factus est de semine David*, "was made [or "became," the Latin equivalent of *genomenos*] from the seed of David." He comments on the verbal similarity between the Johannine affirmation, "the Word was *made* (*factum*) flesh," and the Pauline description, "His Son, *made* (*factus*) of a woman." Paul chose to write *factus* instead of *natus* ("born"), says Tertullian, in order to stress the reality, or *truth*, of Christ's flesh: *carnis veritatem*.[37]

Tertullian is impressed that Paul, when he refers to Jesus' Mother, calls her a "woman" (*mulier*) instead of a "virgin." The reason for this choice, Tertullian speculates, was to give recognition to (*agnovit*) the biological fact of Christ's human birth: *adapertae vulvae nuptialem passionem.*[38] Again citing Galatians 4:4 as his authority, Tertullian invokes this same concern as the reason Gabriel greeted Mary as "blessed among *women*," not "blessed among virgins."[39]

In examining, albeit briefly, the Christian witnesses who wrote during the century and a half after the composition of the Pauline letters, I hope I have adequately demonstrated how the patristic development of Christology depended

adequately demonstrated how the patristic development of Christology depended on the confessional formulas already familiar to the most primitive period of Church history. In the course of the present work we shall have opportunity to return to these authors.

For the moment, it may be useful simply to mention slightly later sources dependent on the Christological formulas preserved in Galatians 4:4 and Romans 1:3–4. These include Origen, who quoted them to demonstrate that God's eternal Word, in the Incarnation, "became what he had not been."[40] To refute the Arians, these pre-Pauline formulas were cited by Athanasius,[41] Hilary,[42] Basil[43] Ambrose,[44] and Leo.[45] Saint Augustine may be taken to speak for the whole Tradition on this matter when he declared that God sent His Son, *ut manens Deus fieret homo*, "so that, *remaining* God, He might *become* a man."[46]

Perhaps now is a good place to ask, "Why?" This is the burden of the next chapter.

Notes

1 In this respect the conviction of the first Christians (and their progeny during the Christological development of the first centuries) differed radically from the "low Christology" common in much of modern biblical scholarship.

2 I say "apparently," because it is conceivable that the Epistle of James is earlier.

3 Failing to notice that Paul spent a decade or so living among other Christian teachers before his first missionary journey—and rooting his theology solely in his conversion—many of Paul's later readers (starting with Marcion) have isolated his thought from its native ecclesiological context. This is a tragic hermeneutic mistake.

4 There is probably no need to insist on this point, not after more than a half-century of confusion and turmoil created by "liturgical experts" determined to interfere with the inherited prayers and hymns to which believers were accustomed. Jesus told the first liturgists in the Church, "Feed my sheep," not "experiment with my rats."

5 I am paraphrasing here what is known as “Baumstark’s first law.” This “law,” named for the polymath historian Carl Anton Baumstark (1872–1948), declares that settings of greater solemnity generally tend to preserve more ancient forms. “Our Father, who *art* in heaven” is an easy demonstration of this “law.”

6 *Didache* 9.3, 10.2–3.

7 Clement of Rome, *First Epistle* 59.2.

8 *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14.1.

9 Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 3, 4, 8.

10 The usage does appear occasionally in later patristic literature. It is worth observing that Gregory the Theologian (in a poem, significantly) refers to the pre-existent Word as the Father’s *pais* (*Carmina* 2.1).

11 I owe this suggestion to the late Dom Andre Louf, a revered teacher of my youth.

12 I say “later” because I believe Philippians was written from Ephesus in the early 50s. This is not the right place to make the argument, however.

13 Those adhering to a *low* Christology believe that Jesus was *adopted* as God’s Son, whether at His Baptism, or His Resurrection, or whatever. *No* early Christians held such a view; even the Arians believed in a pre-existence of Christ!

14 Johannes Schneider, “*Erchomai*,” in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids 1964), p. 668.

15 Most often in biblical narratives this verb is used in an impersonal sense, *egeneto* (“it happened”), the equivalent of the Hebrew *ve-yahi* and the Latin *factum est*.

16 Among the many treatments of this text known to me, the best is by Matthew W. Bates, “A Christology of Incarnation and Enthronement: Romans 1:3–4 as Unified, Nonadoptionist, and Nonconciliatory,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77 (2015), pp. 107–127.

17 *Art. cit.*, p. 126.

18 Archibald M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (Philadelphia 1961), p. 24.

19 Throughout this section I am much in debt to the study of Joshua W. Jipp, "Ancient, Modern, and Future Interpretations of Romans 1:3–4: Reception History and Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009), pp. 241–259.

20 The pains I took to insist on this point in *The Jesus We Missed* prompted the most severe criticism that book received. In the second volume of the present work, I plan to address that (unwarranted) criticism.

21 Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 18.2.

22 Ignatius, *op. cit.* 19.1.

23 Ignatius, *op. cit.* 19.3. The final expression, "newness of eternal life" (*kainoteta aidiou zoes*), is reminiscent of Paul's exhortation to the Romans that they should walk "in newness of life" (*en kainoteti zoes*) (Rom. 6:4).

24 Ignatius, *op. cit.* 20.1–2.

25 Ignatius, *Magnesians* 11.

26 Ignatius, *Trallians* 9.1–2.

27 Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 1.1–2.

28 Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 21.1.

29 Justin, *op. cit.*, 31.7.

30 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 85.2.

31 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 3.22.1; cf. John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 4.18.

32 Commonly dated (since Harnack and Monceaux over a century ago) sometime between 208 and 212.

33 This, the last of Tertullian's polemical writings, is commonly dated around 213.

34 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 27.12.

35 In this rather early stage of Latin Christology, Tertullian sometimes uses the words *substantia* and *status* almost interchangeably. Examples are cited by Joseph Moingt, *Theologie Trinitaire de Tertullien*, Vol. 4 (Aubier 1969), pp. 219–221.

36 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 27.11.

37 Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 20.2.

38 Tertullian, *op. cit.* 23.5.

39 Tertullian, *De Virginibus Velandis* 6.1.

40 Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, quoted by Jipp, *art. cit.* pp. 250–251. In the subsequent pages Jipp examines texts from Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyr, Cyril of Alexandria, and Severan of Gabala.

41 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Arians* 3.31; *Letter to Serapion* 22.

42 Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 12.48.

43 Basil the Great, *Letters* 261.1.

44 Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 6.59; *On the Christian Faith* 1.14.94; 3.4.26; 3.9.61.

45 Leo I of Rome, *Sermons* 23.2.

46 Augustine of Hippo, *Tractatus in Ioannem* 124.5.32.

CHAPTER 4

Incarnation and Deification

The constant assumption in the present work is that man's salvation consists in his union with God through Christ, his sharing in the friendship and very life of God. However we describe the nuances of meaning between the two ideas, atonement and union with Christ are assumed here to mean essentially the same thing.

Our union with Christ, our at-ONE-ment with the Father in Christ, has been called by various names in the history of sacred theology. In the Introduction to this book, we considered this variety in our treatment of *theopoiesis* and *theosis*. We have already reflected how these words, commonly translated into English through the Latin form, *deification*, refer to the transforming union of man with God.

Logically there must be something in common between an effect and its cause. If, therefore, the *effect* of redemption is the union of man with God, we should be able to trace that effect to redemption's *cause*, directed by the sound philosophical principle that the *cur* ("why") of something must be adequate to explain its *quid* ("what"). If God-making (theopoiesis, theosis) is the effect of our redemption, what was there in redemption that caused that effect?

Following that line of thought, the Church Fathers sought the root of man's theopoeisis or theosis in the event of the Incarnation. That is to say, these theological terms, *theopoeisis* or *theosis*, must pertain most properly to Christ Himself, in whom divinity and humanity are radically united in a single person.

The formal and exemplary cause of man's deification, then, is the Incarnate Word.[1] There can be no deification (theosis) without Incarnation (sarkosis). The final transfiguration of the human race begins with the enfleshing of the Word. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas summarized the patristic teaching on this point when he wrote:

> In Christ each nature is united to the other in the person; by reason of this union the divine nature is said to be incarnate (*natura divina incarnata*) and the human nature is said to be deified (*et humana natura deificata*).[2]

An Initial Problem

Alas, however, the history of sacred theology testifies to a problem in regard to this point; namely, some Christians have pursued a logic according to which our redemption requires nothing more than the Incarnation.

According to this logic, the event of the Incarnation was sufficient—all by itself—for man's redemption, inasmuch as the enfleshing of God's eternal Word conferred immortality and theosis on human nature in the person of Christ. In other words, by the very fact of the Incarnation, God and man are *already* "at one"; there was in the Incarnation, from the first second, an "at-one-ment" for the human race. According to this view, the Incarnation accomplishes the atonement as a "physical fact." Following this line of thought, then, man's actual liberation from sin and death—and whatever else Christ may have accomplished—is reduced to a secondary consideration. The Incarnation already accomplishes everything essential to man's deification.

At least three reasons, I believe, should prompt us to reject this opinion. First, it eviscerates what the Apostle Paul calls "the word of the Cross." This explanation of the atonement as a "physical fact" does, I concede, manage to avoid the scandal and disgrace of the Passion—a point that may explain its attraction in modern circles. The New Testament bears witness to a resistance to the Cross on the part of the Apostles themselves (see Mark 8:32–33; 9:30–35; 10:32–37), so it is hardly surprising that modern disciples, too, might like to forgo that more somber aspect of the Gospel.

Second, Jesus spoke of his Passion and Resurrection as a "must" (the verb *dei* in the Greek of the Gospels). Jesus did not regard these historical events as optional:

> And He began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* (*dei*) suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31; see Luke 17:25; 24:7, 26; Acts 1:16; 3:21; 17:3)

Third, the Tradition of the Church, as expressed in the ecumenical councils (and by the Fathers who attended them), proclaims that the Incarnation was required *on account of* what God's Son would *do* in His humanity; the eternal Logos, in becoming flesh and dwelling among us, did so *for the further purpose of* dying and rising again as a human being. By this experience of specific existential facts in His humanity, the Lamb of God took away the sins of the world, trampled down death by His death, and, being raised from the dead, restored humanity to the Father. For our redemption, in short, more was required than the inaugural moment of the Incarnation.

Consequently, rather early the Christian mind began to inquire, *cur Deus homo*—"Why did God become man?" The Council of Nicaea, in 325, declared simply that the Incarnation took place "for us men and for our salvation." The Creed of that council went on, nonetheless, to narrate the other things the Word accomplished for our salvation.

With respect to details, the history of theology witnesses to diversity in the ways this soteriological intent of the Incarnation was expressed. More specifically, the answer to the question "Why did God become man?" depended in no small measure on the meaning of salvation, but there are many aspects to man's salvation. Christians, even from New Testament times, have variously expressed the different aspects of salvation.

A Body for Sacrifice

For example, the soteriological intent of the Incarnation was formulated, very

early, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. According to this source, the Incarnation provided the Son with the means of suffering and dying in obedience to the Father—namely, His Body. The assumption of a body—Incarnation—was absolutely essential to the work of redemption. Commenting on Psalm 39(40), the author wrote with respect to God's Son:

> Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:
> "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
> But a body You have prepared for Me.
> In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
> You had no pleasure."
> Then I said, "Behold, I have come
> —In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
> To do Your will, O God." (Heb. 10:5–7)

According to this text, the obedience of the Messiah was to fulfill and replace the various sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, and for this task the Son obviously required a body in which to be sacrificed.

In other words, the Son *needed* this body in order to suffer and die for the human race. Thus, commenting on Psalm 8, the author of Hebrews described in what way the Son became man for our salvation. "We see Jesus," he wrote,

> who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by God's grace, might taste death for everyone. (2:9)

In order to "taste death" in obedience to the Father, then, the Son assumed our flesh. In order to die as an act of sacrifice, He had to experience the mortality expressed in our very flesh. Hebrews goes on to proclaim,

> Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in this very thing, that through death He might destroy the one who had the power of death—namely, the devil—and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to

bondage. (2:14)

In sum, two aspects of the soteriology of the Incarnation are especially to be observed in the treatment of the theme in the Epistle to the Hebrews. First, God's Son assumed our flesh in order obediently to die in that flesh. Second, His death in the flesh meant the destruction of the devil, "who had the power of death."

According to Hebrews, then, God's Son took flesh in order to die, and He died in order to overcome death and the devil. In this epistle, these two things—death and demonic bondage—are neither distinct nor separable, because the devil "had the power of death."

This line of theological reflection—Incarnation, death, and victory over the demons—continued throughout Christian history, combining with other biblical themes along the way.

Against the Gnostics

In the second century, Irenaeus, the second bishop of Lyons, explicitly asked—with respect to the eternal Word—"For what purpose did He come down?"[3] And the answer: "that he might destroy sin, abolish death, and give life to man."[4] Irenaeus explains,

> God created man that he might live. If man, then, having lost life through the injury inflicted by the corrupting devil, did not recover life but was completely abandoned to death, God would have been defeated, and the wickedness of the serpent would have prevailed over God's intent. Inasmuch, however, as God is both invincible and gracious, He demonstrated His graciousness in correcting man and vindicating all men (as I mentioned before), by using the Second Man to "bind the strong man and despoil his goods." Thereby He destroyed death, restoring life to man, who had become subject to death. For Adam had become the property of the devil, and the devil held sway over him by maliciously deceiving him with a promise of immortality and thereby making him subject to death.[5]

As in the Epistle to the Hebrews, these enemies—sin, death, and the devil—are inseparable in the mind of Irenaeus. For him, consequently, the Incarnation and the atonement are also inseparable. He writes:

> The very hand that formed us in the beginning and shapes us in our mother's womb, came to seek us in these latter days, when we were lost, laying hold on His lost sheep and placing it on His shoulders and joyfully restoring it to the sheepfold of life.[6]

Closely following Genesis 3 and the theology of the Apostle Paul, Irenaeus declines to separate sin, death, and demonic servitude. However they may differ conceptually, these three enemies of man are organically joined and existentially identical. Sin is not just a moral failing or an offense to the divine honor; sin is the introduction of corruption and demonic slavery into man's entire being in the cosmos.

In making this point, Irenaeus had in mind to refute Marcion and the second-century gnostics, according to whom evil pertained only to man's lower, material nature. No, responded the Bishop of Lyons, sin involves man's entire being, inasmuch as it places human existence in bondage to the devil and to the corruption of death. Death does not affect just man's body but his entire being.

Apart from Christ, death is eternal. Apart from Christ, death is hopeless. Death is the supreme alienation from God, inasmuch as "the nether world does not bless You, / death cannot praise you, / and those who descend can never expect Your fidelity" (Is. 38:18; see Ps. 6:6; W.Sir. 17:26). Irenaeus explains:

> We are not all the sons of God: those only are so who believe in Him and do His will. And those who do not believe, and do not obey His will are sons and angels of the devil, because they do the works of the devil. . . . For as, among men, those sons who disobey their fathers, being disinherited, are still their sons in the course of nature, but by law they are disinherited and do not become the heirs of their natural parents; so in

> the same way is it with God: those who do not obey Him, being disinherited by Him, have ceased to be His sons.[7]

Death and Life in the Body

Furthermore, according to Irenaeus, the Word's assumption of the flesh was required for our salvation because Adam's sin had been committed in the flesh. Sin in the flesh required salvation in the flesh. Irenaeus explained:

> So the Word was made flesh in order that sin, destroyed by means of that same flesh through which it had gained mastery and taken hold and lorded over it, should no longer be in us.

And, again, "that so He might join battle on behalf of our forefathers and vanquish through an Adam what had stricken us through an Adam."[8]

Irenaeus here is clearly the heir to St. Paul, who had already contrasted Christ and Adam in terms of "disobedience unto death" and "obedience unto life" (Rom. 5:12–19). In his treatment of salvation, however, Irenaeus stresses the Resurrection much more explicitly than is obvious in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and this emphasis, in turn, contours his approach to the Incarnation. Thus, Irenaeus writes of

> our Lord's birth, which the Word of God underwent for our sake, to be made flesh, that He *might reveal the resurrection of the flesh* and take the lead of all in heaven.

In this way, explains Irenaeus, Christ becomes "the first-born of the dead, the head and source of the life unto God."[9] In his development of this idea, as well, Irenaeus is still following the lead of St. Paul, who contrasted Christ and Adam with respect to death and Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:22, 45).

In tying the soteriological intent of the Incarnation to the Lord's Resurrection from the dead, Irenaeus advances an important doctrinal perspective: The work of salvation is completed by the glorification of Christ.

Thus, Irenaeus, not neglecting the biblical theme of "obedience in the flesh,"

sets himself to provide a more ample answer to the question "Why Incarnation?" His larger answer to this question, an answer that includes the Lord's Resurrection, colors his soteriology with a dominant concern for the total transformation of humanity—and all of Creation—in Christ. This became a major theme by which Irenaeus refuted the cosmic dualism of the gnostics.

In this respect, Irenaeus was one of our earliest biblical theologians, in the sense that he formed a biblical synthesis—mostly from Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews—in order to address the philosophical questions and religious controversies of his day. He serves as a model for the ministry in which Christian thinkers, in every age, are called upon to serve.

The Divine Propriety

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, in the fourth century, largely follows the lines of response already elaborated in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in Irenaeus of Lyons—namely, the Incarnation was required for man's reconciliation with God.

Man's repentance from sin, Athanasius contended, would not have been sufficient to restore him to friendship with God. To imagine otherwise is to suppose an inadequate and unbiblical view of sin. Sin is not a merely moral offense, after all, an injury readily cured by simple repentance. Still less is it simply a forensic declaration of guilt that could be reversed by a contrary declaration of reprieve. Nor is sin just a spiritual state that could be altered by some kind of spiritual adjustment. And certainly sin is not the sort of affront that can be remedied by a sincere apology.

According to Holy Scripture, the state of sin is bondage to death and corruption. Death and corruption are not punishments imposed on sin from without. They are internal to sin itself; they are the very em*bodi*ment of sin. Man was warned, "In the day that you eat of it you will die." Thus the Apostle Paul declared, "sin reigned in death" (*ebasilevsen he hamartia en to thanato*—Rom. 5:21). To deal with sin, it was necessary to deal with death.

For this reason, Athanasius argued, the power of sin, which is the corruption of death, had to be defeated *in the flesh*. This necessity of the Word's

enfleshment pertained to what Athanasius called "the divine reasonableness" (*to evlogon to pros ton Theon*).[10]

The death of Christ in the flesh, in the eyes of Athanasius, was directed, then, not at God's offended justice, but at man's bondage to corruption. God had not told Adam, "In the day that you eat of it, you will upset the just order of the universe," but "In the day that you eat of it, *you will die*." Sin entered into man; it did not affect God. For sin to be defeated, then, something *in man* had to change.

Now, since man had fallen *in the flesh*, reasoned Athanasius, it was reasonable, symmetric, appropriate, and proportionate—in short, *evlogon*—that man be restored through the flesh. "For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world."[11]

Thus, Athanasius explained, it pertained to the Word,

> and to Him alone, to bring again the corruptible to incorruption and to guard for the Father His *reasonableness* in all things (*to hyper panton evlogon*). Being the Word of the Father and above all things, He alone was consequently able and qualified to recreate (*anaktisai*) all, to suffer for all (*hyper panton pathein*), and to represent all to the Father.[12]

Following the line of argument we saw in Hebrews 2, Athanasius reasoned thus:

> The Word understood that corruption could not be destroyed except through death. Yet, as God's Word and Son, He was immortal and could in no wise die. For this reason He took on a *body able to die* (*to dynamenon apothanein . . . soma*).[13]

By sharing the flesh of mortal human beings, Athanasius continued, God's Word offered Himself on their behalf:

> By surrendering to death the body that He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from defilement—by this proportionate offering—He obliterated death for all those who shared it with Him.[14]

In order to overcome this corruption of sin, however, it was required, not only that God's Word should die in the flesh, but also that He should rise again in the flesh. Only in the Resurrection was corruption abolished. Indeed, God's Word assumed the body in order to be raised in the body:

> It was the Lord's chief concern to bring about (*poiein*) the resurrection of the body. With respect to death this was the trophy for public display, to be everyone's guarantee that He had overcome corruption, and that their own bodies would in due course be incorrupt. It was in pledge thereto and as a declaration of everyone's future resurrection that He preserved His own body incorrupt.[15]

For this reason, wrote Athanasius, Christ died in order to rise: "Death had to precede resurrection, for there could be no resurrection without it."[16] And again:

> He descended in a body, and He rose again, because He was God in a body. . . . Death pertains to man. Therefore the Word, as God, became flesh in order that, being put to death in the flesh, He might give life to all men by the power that is proper to Him.[17]

In Athanasius, then, whose Christology became a standard of orthodoxy in the fourth century, the Incarnation pertains essentially to the mystery of man's redemption. He insisted that the Word's assumption of our flesh was the condition of His death and Resurrection, because He perceived the fleshly nature of that redemption. For Athanasius, the doctrine of the redemption meant that something changed *in man*, not in God.

Plenary Mediation

Essential to all these considerations is the concept of the *mediation* of Christ; this means that Christ, partaking of both divine and human existence, joins them in a concrete fashion.[18] The ancient and inherited estrangement of God and man has been reconciled in Christ.

Although this teaching is common throughout Christian theology, the

dominance of Greek writers in our reflections hitherto prompts me to choose a Latin Father of the Church for consideration here: St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430).

The mediation of Christ is the central idea in the Christology of St. Augustine. Although he generally expresses his Christology in rhetorical, rather than philosophical, terms, we find Augustine using more technical language in the latter years of his ministry.

For example, decades prior to Chalcedon's declaration of two natures in Christ, Augustine spoke of Jesus as "one person in each nature" (*una persona in utraque natura*).[19] He further affirmed, "He who is God is the very one who is man, not by the confusion of nature but by unity of person."[20] Jesus Christ, said Augustine, is "all God and all man" (*totus Deus et totus homo*).[21] Summing up his Christology near the end of his life (in 430, the year before the Council of Ephesus), Augustine wrote that God's Son assumed our humanity "in an incomparable union in such wise that he who assumed and that which was assumed is one person in the heart of the Trinity."[22]

If Augustine was a precursor to Ephesus and Chalcedon, however, he was also an heir of Nicaea. After spending his youth imagining Jesus "only as a man of excellent wisdom that no one could equal," Augustine at last learned the correct Nicene Christology during the catechumenate that preceded his baptism by Saint Ambrose in 387.[23] We also know that he had begun to read St. Athanasius about that time.[24]

Like Athanasius,[25] Augustine approached the mystery of the Incarnation under the perspective of soteriology, specifically man's deliverance from mortality and his elevation to immortality, the movement from death to life. We see this in Augustine's analysis of the mediation of Christ. When he treats of Jesus as our Mediator, he does so, like Athanasius, in terms of man's passage from death to life.

That is to say, God's Son is the "distributed middle," the *medium* between mortality and immortality. He assumed the first from us, wrote Augustine, in order to give us the second.[26] God's Son took away our mortality through His

death[27] and conferred His immortality upon us through His Resurrection.[28] "In His Passion," wrote Augustine, Christ "became the sacrifice, and in His Resurrection He restored (*innovavit*) what had been killed and offered it as a first fruit to God."[29]

Augustine returned to this theme repeatedly:

> We need a Mediator who, united to us here below by the mortality of His body, should at the same time be able to give us truly divine help in cleansing and liberating us by means of the immortal righteousness of His spirit, whereby He remained heavenly even while here on earth.[30]

For Augustine, then, the redemptive mediation of Christ was enacted, not in the single event of the Cross, but in the full Christian mystery, from the first moment of the Incarnation until the final glorification of the risen Lord.[31] His perspective on this matter was historical. For Augustine, the mediation between God and man was effected in all those historical events—Christ's birth, His crucifixion, His death, and His Resurrection—by which He, in our flesh, took away our sinful mortality and conferred on us His godly immortality.[32]

Indeed, Augustine viewed all of human history under the perspective of those things the Incarnate Word accomplished in the flesh.[33]

Because he thought of salvation as the attainment of immortality, nonetheless, Augustine believed that it was ultimately with a view to the Resurrection that God's Son assumed our flesh. The "Christian doctrine and religion," Augustine wrote, "was defined in the Resurrection of Christ."[34] Hence he called Christ's Resurrection "the salvation of Christians," *salus Christianorum*, in the sense that resurrection is what Christians mean by salvation.[35] The risen Christ, he wrote, is the cause and the exemplar of our own final rising.[36]

A Fair Fight

Leo I, the Pope of Rome between 440 and 461, was a close reader of both Athanasius and Augustine. From the latter, as we shall see presently, he received

the theological vocabulary he then transmitted to the bishops assembled at Chalcedon in 451. This vocabulary has governed the Christology of the Church to the present day.

From Athanasius Leo received the idea of the "reasonableness" of God manifested in the Incarnation, and he extended that idea in a fresh and interesting direction; he spoke of the divine "fairness" (*aequitas*). What would God have proved, asked Leo, if He had used His divine power to conquer the forces of darkness? After all, Satan was no match for God. A struggle between divine omnipotence and demonic power is hardly what we would call a fair fight.

However we assess the insult the fallen spirits gave to God, the real victim of their malice was *man*. "Let Us, then," decided the Wisdom of God, "make this struggle with Satan a fair fight. Let Us devise a way for Satan to be defeated by a *human being*. This seems appropriate, since human beings are the ones Satan holds in bondage."

Leo elaborates this *divinum consilium*:

> In the fullness of time, when the inscrutable depth of the divine counsel determined (*divini consilii inscrutabilis altitudo disposuit*), the Son of God has taken on Him the nature of man, thereby to reconcile it to its Author. In order that the inventor of death, the devil, might be conquered through that same [nature] which he had conquered. And in this conflict, which He undertook for us, the fight was fought on the great and wondrous *law of fairness* (*aequitatis jure*), inasmuch as the Almighty Lord attacks His savage foe, not in His majesty but in our humility, opposing him with the same form and the same nature, which certainly shares in our mortality, though it is free from every kind of sin.[37]

The Limits of Explanation

When the Synoptic Gospels situated during Holy Week a series of altercations between Jesus and His enemies, they included an episode in which Jesus took the initiative. After those enemies had repeatedly failed to confound Him, He turned on them and asked:

> "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how, then, is He his son?" (Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44)

We are told that this question stumped the adversaries: "And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone, from that day on, dare to question him any more" (Matt. 22:46).

Unfortunately, not everyone has followed the adversaries' example. Some commentators on this text continue to advance the view that Jesus was employing a kind of exegetical legerdemain to trip up His opponents, and they go on to claim that the Savior of the world would not be able to get away with that sort of move nowadays, when "we know so much more about the early history of the Psalter."

Other (and better) exponents of the text remark that Jesus' appeal to this psalm was an implicit claim to personal divinity. Fair enough, but I believe this approach, too, needs refinement.

I am impressed by the form in which Jesus makes this "implicit claim"—the interrogative form: "*How*, then, is He his son?" This is not a rhetorical question; it is a real interrogation, supposing a real answer, and Jesus' opponents are stumped because they do not know the answer.

Do we?

Even the "better" exegetes of this text seem to imagine that Jesus asked, not "*How*, then, is He his son?" but "*Why* does David call his son, 'Lord'?" And they answer, "Because the Messiah, in addition to being a descendent of David, is also God's eternal Son, and therefore David's Lord." All true, of course, but this answer addresses a different question. Jesus did not inquire, "Why?" He asked, "How?"

This question—*How* is He his son?—lay at the heart of a dilemma Christians faced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Pope Leo I of Rome, the chief

theological architect of that council's theology, summarized the Chalcedonian thesis by referring to the Gospel text under consideration: "David's Lord *became* his son, and from the fruit of the promised branch sprang the faultless one, the twofold nature coming together in a single person."[38]

What is, perhaps, most significant about the question posed in the synoptic text is that Jesus leaves it unanswered. The question itself is the last word in the episode, not because it is a rhetorical question, but because its answer simply eludes human investigation. While it is perfectly legitimate to ask, "*How* is He his son?" neither Jesus nor His Church has ever attempted to answer this "how?" Efforts to do so, it appears to me, have always landed somewhere in the broad areas of heresy.

How are the two natures in the Incarnation united in the single person of God's Word—*How* is He both son and Lord? At Chalcedon, it seems, the Fathers expressed a consensus along these lines: "You know, darn it, we don't have the foggiest idea how this union of divinity and humanity happened. What we can and must say, however, is that the Incarnation involved no confusion of the divine and human natures. Nor, on the other hand, was either nature changed. And we are further certain there was no division in this unity, nor any separation. That is just about the limit of what we can affirm."

And this is what Chalcedon finally did determine in its four famous adverbs: *asynchytos, atreptos, adiairetos, achoristos*—"without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." This description of the mystery, we observe, is completely apophatic. Contrary to the assessment of some later historians of dogma, Chalcedon did not attempt to "throw light on the mystery of the Incarnation." It threw light, rather, on a couple of heresies.

And this, I submit, is the purpose of dogmatic definitions. They exist for the purpose of confounding heresies, not elucidating mysteries. Conciliar dogma constructs a protective hedge about the Gospel, a hedge occasionally fortified by the addition of thorns (in the shape of anathemas) as Chalcedon did. Dogmatic definitions have a single purpose: to protect the integrity of the Gospel.

Jesus did not answer His own question, "*How*, then, is He his son?" And the Christian bishops gathered at Chalcedon knew better than to try.

The Friend of Man

Why, then, did God become man? To join us to Himself. Union with God—theosis—is the full fruit of redemption. God's Son assumed our complete humanity in order to save and sanctify our complete humanity. In a poetic sense, God *couldn't help Himself*; He loves us that much.

Few themes, I suppose, are more pronounced in the teaching of Jesus than that of God's invitation. Whether to a banquet or a wedding, Jesus sees man as *invited* by God. I believe this divine invitation implies many considerations of anthropology, but I limit myself here to one: human dignity. God invites man for pretty much the same reason we send invitations to one another—friendship. Orthodox Christian theology has always insisted that His motive is friendship with man, *philanthropia*.

It is difficult, it is bewildering, and it is more than slightly frightening to assimilate the notion that God finds us lovable. It is among the most astounding truths in Holy Scripture. What could God possibly find lovable in us?

Indeed, even some Christians are so bewildered by this idea that they resort to subtleties to parse away its paradox. They may explain, for example, that God, being love, *had* to do so, even though He finds nothing intrinsically lovable in us. It is taken for granted, in some Christian circles, that God could not possibly find human beings desirable. It is assumed as obvious that there is *nothing* in us that would attract Him. It is impossible for God to love us for our own sake, we are told, but He does so because of His loving nature. He is *forced* to love us, as it were, because love is His definition.

Let me suggest that theories like this are difficult to reconcile with what God has told us about Himself—and us. In Holy Scripture He describes Himself as a Bridegroom rejoicing over a bride, who is the apple of His eye. He speaks of Himself as a Father who celebrates the return of a faithless son, in whom He recognizes His own image. Surely, these are the teachings that justify that beautiful adjective by which Holy Church addresses God: *philanthropos*.

When the Church calls God the "lover of mankind," She affirms an important truth about the human race: God finds man attractive. Indeed, when God made man, He put into his composition a radical point of attraction that

man is incapable of destroying.

This favorable and loving attitude of God toward human beings perhaps justifies our speaking of a divine anthropotropism. God shows every sign of being "drawn to man." It is hard for us to fathom this. It is as though the sun felt for the sunflower the same powerful attraction the sunflower feels for the sun. We would have to imagine a solar antheotropism prompting the sun to rush its rising each morning for another glimpse of the jonquil, the iris, and the buttercup.

Holy Scripture, however, says no less of God's feelings for man. Numerous times Jeremiah, that most tenderhearted of poets, speaks of God "rising up early" to speak to the human soul.[39]

It is arguable, indeed, that Jeremiah was the prophet who best understood this aspect of God—and of man. It was in Israel's supremely dark hour, the dreadful day of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of the First Temple, that this philanthropic God declared through the lips of Jeremiah, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee with mercy" (31:3). It is this everlasting love of God that summons humanity; it is His undying mercy that prompts the invitation He dispatches to human beings throughout the ages.

God loves us and desires us because He formed us in His own image, which is essential to, and inalienable from, the very definition of human nature. God's love for us is His response to the attraction He has made intrinsic to our being. There is absolutely nothing we can do to make God stop desiring us. Even the souls in hell are the object of His relentless affection, because they are formed in His image, the same image He saw on the day His hands gave them shape.

The truth is that God is drawn to us by love, that He has forcefully thrown in His lot with us, to the point of becoming one of us. This act of God, His deliberate assumption of our historical experience in order to make it His own, is what theology calls Divine revelation, and its defining manifestation is the Mystery of the Incarnation. In the person of His Son, God has united humanity to Himself by an indissoluble bond which theology calls the hypostatic union. Human theotropism and divine anthropotropism are both fulfilled. Perhaps we may think of it as the mutual joy of the sunflower and the sun.

Notes

1 Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 26.16; 39.16; Anastasius of Sinai, *The Leader* 14; Pseudo-Cyril, *De Trinitate* 16; John Damascene, *The Orthodox Faith* 3.17; 4.18.

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III 16.5 *ad* 2.

3 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 2.14.7.

4 Irenaeus, *op. cit.* 3.18.7.

5 Irenaeus, *op. cit.* 3.23.1.

6 Irenaeus, *op. cit.* 5.15.2.

7 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.41.2–3.

8 Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 31.

9 Irenaeus, *op. cit.* 39.

10 Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 7.

11 Athanasius, *op. cit.* 8.

12 Athanasius, *op. cit.* 7.

13 Athanasius, *op. cit.* 9.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Athanasius, *op. cit.* 22.

16 Athanasius, *op. cit.* 23.

17 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Arians* 1.44.

18 This theme will be developed in more detail in the next chapter.

19 Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons* 294.9.

20 Augustine, *Sermons* 186.1; cf. *Enchiridion* 10.35; *De Trinitate* 1.7.14; 13.17.22.

21 Augustine, *Sermons* 293.7; cf. 130.3; *Tractatus in Joannem* 19.15; 47.12.

22 Augustine, *de Predestinatione Sanctorum* 24.67.

23 Augustine, *Confessions* 7.19.25.

24 Augustine, *Confessions* 8.6.14–15; 10.23.50.

25 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 7–9, 22–23; *Against the Arians* 1.44.

26 Augustine, *De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1.35.53.

27 Augustine, *Enchiridion* 33; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 103.8.

28 Augustine, *The City of God* 9.15; 10.24.

29 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 129.3.7.

30 Augustine, *The City of God* 9.17.

31 Augustine, *Against Cresconius the Donatist* 4.54, 64.

32 Augustine, *Tractatus in Joannem* 23.15.

33 Augustine, *The City of God* 18.46.

34 Augustine, *op. cit.* 18.54.

35 Augustine, *Sermons* 361.3.

36 Augustine, *Letters* 102.1.5.

37 Leo of Rome, *Sermons* 21.1.

38 Leo of Rome, *Sermons* 28.3.

39 Jer. 7:13, 25; 11:7; 25:3, 4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14, 15; 44:4; see 2 Chr. 36:15.

CHAPTER 5

Christ and Adam

Although the fundamental Christological question remains constant—"What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?"—that question can be framed in various ways. This variety, in fact, is easy to document over the centuries.

For example, during the earlier part of her history, when the Church was much preoccupied with the polemics of Christology, great attention was given to such concepts as "person" and "nature." Obliged to refute the gnostics, docetists, Sabellians, Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, and others, Christian thinkers were frequently required to frame their reflections in order to address what might be call the "composition" of the Incarnation. They sought to determine what was the *end result*—if this expression is allowed—when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

I think it important to remark, however, that such considerations hardly exhaust the theological interest of the Incarnation. Indeed, I detect a problem in a Christology devoted exclusively to polemical clarifications.

To concentrate on the "composition" of the Incarnation is to inquire, "Exactly *what* was present in the womb of the Virgin Mary at the instance of the Word's conception?" *De facto* and out of historical necessity, the ancient Christologies of the Councils all examined some aspect of that very question. Contemporary heresies forced such questions as, "How many persons were there in the Word Incarnate?" Or, "How many wills were there in the Word Incarnate?" Or, "How should we speak of the reality of the Word Incarnate?" Or, "If the Word is incarnate, can we have pictures of Him?"

In all such questions—the importance of which we must certainly appreciate—there is a disposition to treat the Incarnation according to static categories; the *subject* of the Incarnation tends to become a stable *what*. These questions address the Incarnation as the "state" of the Word's becoming man. Indeed, we use the predicate "hypo-*static*" to speak of this mystery.

And here, I suggest, is the nub of a problem: The moment of the Incarnation was not static. As St. Gregory of Nyssa argues in his work *On the Formation of Man*, to be a living human being is not a static thing. A human being—any human being—is a work in progress. The sequence of personal consciousness is an essential component of human nature. Historicity pertains to man's essence; it is a quality of both his being and his self-awareness. If God's eternal Word truly became a human being—*Logos sarkothentos*—He assumed a personal historicity and a reflective sense of sequence in the processes of His thought. He "grew" in wisdom.

Strictly speaking, therefore, the doctrine of the Incarnation does not refer simply to a human state, but to a full human *life*. In the words of St. Irenaeus, *Gloria Dei est* vivens *homo*—"The glory of God is a *living* man." This is why St. Cyril of Alexandria—manifestly the standard bearer of orthodox Christology—often spoke of Christ as "*one* of us" (*heis ex hemon*).

A more adequate Christology, then, should affirm that the Word's becoming flesh refers to more than the single instant of His becoming present in the Virgin's womb. He continued "becoming" (*genesthai*, as St. Gregory says) flesh and dwelling among us, in the sense that His assumed body and soul developed and grew through the complex experiences of a particular human life. To deny this is to deny the Incarnation.

He assumed human subjectivity, making Himself a subjective participant in human history, someone whose existence and experience were circumscribed by the limiting conditions of time and space. "He took not on angels, but he took on the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:6); He became, not an angel, and not simply a human being, but a Galilean Jew during a particular period of Jewish history.

In other words, the Word assumed, not only our nature, considered abstractly and in general, but also the concrete, historical circumstances of an individual

human life, including the limitations of a specific language and cultural heritage. Jesus' effective influence passed through the limiting conditions of history. The story of Jesus, as we shall reflect presently, was *framed*.

It is noteworthy that the four Gospels say relatively little about the Son's assumption of human nature (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35; John 1:14), whereas on page after page of those Gospels we witness His complete assumption of a concrete human life.

Humanity Shared

But here is a point of irony and stress: Even as we insist that the eternal Word assumed the concrete circumstances of an individual human life, becoming a subjective participant in human history, the redemptive significance of the Incarnation is rooted, not in the individuality of Jesus' life, but in the general and common humanity He shares with the rest of us.

Indeed, in the New Testament one finds no impulse to treat Jesus as an "exceptional" man, as the world understands such a one: a heroic figure who rises above his contemporaries to answer the call of destiny. Such a man is *different* from other men.

Jesus is treated, rather, as *one* of us. This narrative treatment is very different from the way their contemporaries regarded Caesar, Alexander the Great, and other "exceptional" men. Such figures were not usually thought of as mere members of the human race; they were not normally called "brothers" to the rest of humanity. They were, on the contrary, the *viri illustres et clarissimi*. Although Plutarch's *Lives* of famous Greeks and Romans was a work roughly contemporary with the composition of the Gospels, its sundry biographies bear not the slightest resemblance to the Gospels.

In fact, Jesus discouraged men from thinking about Him in that way. He even manifested a reluctance to be called the Messiah (cf. Mark 8:29–30), inasmuch as that term had come to signify military and political ascendancy. Moreover, He deliberately assumed the role of a servant among those who followed Him (John 13:4), precisely to discourage them from imitating the "rulers over the Gentiles" (Mark 10:42).

The biblical emphasis on the "common" quality of the Lord's humanity, on the other hand, indicated more than an ethical preference on His part. His complete solidarity with the rest of the human race was a condition, rather, of His ability to *redeem* the human race. Such was the force, I believe, of the reference to Jesus as "becoming (*genomenos*) from a woman" in Paul's account of the Son's coming "to *redeem* those under the Law" (Gal. 4:4–5).

This solidarity of God's Son with our humanity, in order to redeem humanity, gives structure to the argument made in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

> Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (2:14–15)

This biological and historical solidarity with the rest of humanity is what prompts the author of Hebrews to speak of Jesus as our "brother": "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will declare Your name to my brethren'" (2:11).

Our Lord's oneness with mankind, however, is more than biological. He is not called a "brother" simply as the rest of us might bear that title. On the contrary, He has identified Himself with human beings in the special sense of becoming their historical representative, their truly definitive spokesman: "Go to My brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, My God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Indeed, in the Gospel of Matthew this special sense of Jesus' "brotherhood" pertains directly to eschatology. At the end of history, all human beings—"all the nations" (25:32)—will be judged on the basis of their brotherhood with Jesus: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did to one of the least of these My brethren, you did to Me" (25:40).

This was an extraordinary claim for any human being—the claim to be the final arbiter of history—and on the basis of His having lived as a participant within history. Clearly, the early Christians appreciated the uniqueness of that

claim. St. Paul announced that God "has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man[1] whom He has appointed" (Acts 17:31). He was equally clear on the point in his epistles: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10).[2]

In summary, early Christian thinkers, even as they portrayed the humanity of God's Word as individual and personal, likewise stressed that it was of the very nature shared with all other human beings. The Word's oneness with the human race was regarded as the condition of His ability to redeem the human race. In addition, the Lord's shared humanity provided the criterion for the final evaluation of human history itself.

Adam and Humanity

A special circumstance of the Incarnation is the biblical record that Jesus had no biological father. The New Testament is not theoretical on the point; it does not argue, for instance, that Jesus *could* not have had an earthly father. It simply records that Jesus *did* not have an earthly father. In making that assertion—in no way regarding it as evidence of a defective humanity in Jesus—the New Testament simply states it as a fact. It offers no theory on the matter.

Indeed, it is passing curious that both the New Testament authors who assert this fact (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35) also go to some length to trace the lineage of Jesus, not through His Mother, but through Joseph, whom neither writer regarded as Jesus' father (Matt. 1:2–16; Luke 3:23–38).

To speak of the Lord's not having a human father, the Church early adopted the adjective *apator*, "fatherless." The first Christian use of this term appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which compares Jesus and Melchizedek. Of the latter, the author of Hebrews observes that in the Old Testament, he is portrayed as "without father (*apator*), without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." In these respects, says Hebrews, Melchizedek, "like the Son of God, remains a priest continually" (7:3).

Thus, *apator* became a common expression to speak of Jesus in His humanity. Used in this sense, one finds the term in countless liturgical texts, as

well as in the Fathers of the Church.[3]

As applied to Melchizedek, of course, the expression *apator* was only figurative, whereas with regard to Jesus, it is understood literally. In fact, in His not having a human father, Jesus resembled only one other man recorded in the Bible: Adam.

This shared feature may have inspired the beginning of Christian reflection on Jesus as the New Adam or Second Adam. Adam and Jesus, both of them fatherless fathers, represented distinct "beginnings" in the history of the human race.

To appreciate the sense in which Jesus is called the Second Adam in the New Testament, it is useful to reflect on the significance of the first Adam in the Old Testament.

The very name "Adam" is the noun normally used in the Hebrew Bible to mean "mankind" or "the human race." In the instances where *'adam* refers to individuals, those individuals tend to be representative of humanity as such. Thus, we are told, "Blessed is the *'adam* to whom the Lord imputes no guilt" (Ps. 32[31]:2).

Because it has this generic nuance, *'adam* is never pluralized in Hebrew. For the same reason it is never used in what grammarians call "construct." This means that the noun is never modified by a genitive. For example, if the Bible wants to describe someone as a "man *of* mercy," some other noun for "man" must be employed. *'Adam* has too general a sense to be used in such a case.

Rather often the Hebrew Bible is popularly portrayed as exclusively Hebraic in its sympathies. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The ubiquitous appearance of *'adam* in the Hebrew Bible—562 times and in every major source and era—is convincing evidence of the Old Testament's abiding interest in the entire human race, and not simply the Jews.

The most sustained underlying question in the Old Testament may be summed up as "What is man?" Indeed, it is arguable that antiquity provides no equal example of another literary culture so consistently preoccupied with the phenomenon of the human experience: What does it mean to be a human being?

The radical unity of the human experience is the presupposition, not only of

the Psalms, Job, and the other Wisdom literature—where we might expect to find it—but also of the Chronicler, the Priestly and Deuteronomic writings, the Prophets, and even the earlier Pentateuchal sources. Fritz Maass described this common biblical anthropology, shared over so long a period and among such varied literary works, as "unique in the history of ideas."

It is important to make this point, because the "universal" anthropology of the New Testament might otherwise seem to represent a discontinuity between the two Testaments. Indeed, there are ancient (and, alas, ongoing) heresies that make exactly that mistake, dividing the testaments by the breadth of their sympathies. In the Church's first centuries this split characterized both Marcionism and Manichaeism.

The New Testament's teaching of God's universal redemptive will is continuous with the Old Testament's appreciation of the unity—biological, psychological, and historical—of the human race.

On the other hand, there is also a very dark side to this human unity—namely, the Fall. The use of '*adam* as the proper name of the original man (Gen. 4:25; 5:1–5; 1 Chr. 1:1) indicates that the whole human race was embodied and signified in his person. Adam was humanity in its wholeness.

For this reason, the disobedience of Adam was in truth the Fall of the human race as such. When humanity fell, it fell *head* first. Human nature and human history, transmitted from the person and flesh of that first father, were heavily burdened with the heritage of death, rebellion, and alienation from God, and bondage to demons. We *all* fell in Adam. We absolutely needed a new beginning. The entire Old Testament is a sort of cry for God to make it happen.

Pauline Development

Arguably among the earliest themes of Christian theology was a contrast between Christ and Adam. The letters of Paul are an obvious source of this contrast, chiefly in two places, the earlier being 1 Corinthians 15, and the second Romans 5. These two texts differ, however, in emphasis and application.

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15, which may be called cosmological, has to do with the quality of created matter, the "dust" of Genesis 2—3. Paul's case

here is largely centered on Adam's legacy of death and corruption, to which the apostle contrasts the immortality of the body through the Resurrection of Christ. Adam was formed of dust, to which he returned. Because of Christ's Resurrection from the dead, nonetheless, this inheritance of corruption from Adam is not the final word about the human prospect, says Paul. Although humanity certainly shares in Adam's corruption, in Christ it is made to share in the incorruption of the Resurrection: "The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption" (15:42). Thus, "as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man" (15:49).

In the later text, Romans 5, Paul returns to the contrast between Adam and Christ, but now with a different emphasis and application. He here develops the theme from an historical rather than a cosmological perspective. Whereas in Adam, Paul argues, "sin entered the world, and death through sin," through the obedience of Christ "many will be made righteous" (5:12, 19). In short, "if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many" (5:15).

Each of these Pauline contrasts between Adam and Christ serves the general concern of the specific epistle in which it appears. In 1 Corinthians, it is the Paschal Mystery ("Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us," says 1 Cor. 5:7), and in Romans it is justification. The second, which treats of the obedience of Christ, reflects the theology of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. The first, which is based on the Resurrection, pertains to the theology of Pascha.[4]

New Headship

The early Christians had already recognized between Christ and Adam some structure of analogy that prompted them to compare the two. As I argued earlier, Paul himself apparently inherited this contrast between Adam and Christ from the hymnography of early Christian worship. For this reason it should be regarded as coming from the most primitive theological insights of Christians.

It is not difficult to discern other, earlier points of comparison. The Gospel accounts, I believe, testify to those points of comparison.

Thus, an early story transmitted in Mark, precisely in the context of Jesus'

Thus, an early story transmitted in Mark, precisely in the context of Jesus' temptations, preserved the tradition of our Lord's companionship with the animals (1:13). This story, of course, puts the reader in mind of Adam in the midst of the animals in Genesis. Jesus' victory over His temptations by Satan thus inaugurates a new state of Paradise, as it were, in which the friendly relations of men and beasts, disrupted since the Fall, are restored.

In Luke the Adam/Christ analogy is subtler, and we discern it in the way the Lord's genealogy is arranged. To detect this, we may observe two differences between the genealogies in Matthew and Luke.

First, unlike Matthew, Luke traces the Lord's lineage all the way back to Adam, not just to Abraham. This format emphasizes Jesus' relationship to the whole human race and not just the Jews. For this reason, in citing the famous Isaian text that begins the ministry of John the Baptist in all the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4–6), Luke alone quotes the words, "and *all flesh* shall see the salvation of God."

Second, whereas Matthew's genealogy of Jesus comes at the beginning of his Gospel, Luke places it after the Lord's Baptism and right before the account of His temptation. This arrangement prompts the reader to make the comparison that Luke has in mind to imply, the temptations of Jesus and the temptation of Adam.

More significantly, perhaps, St. Paul, even as he contrasted Adam and Christ, called Adam "a type of him who was to come" and went on immediately to speak of "the one Man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:14–15). That is to say, the perceived analogy between Adam and Christ was the basis for *contrasting* them. They are both "Adam," wrote Paul: "The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). And he went on, "The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven" (15:47). What Adam and Christ share is the designation "man," *anthropos*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *'adam*. This is the foundation of the type that Paul perceived in Adam with respect to Christ.

Christ, according to the apostle, is not only the "second Man," He is also "the last Adam"—*ho eschatos Adam*, "the final Adam," the Adam by whom the

world's last age comes to be.

This eschatology pertains to the Incarnation, of which Paul had written earlier, "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, *become* (*genomenon*) from a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The "fullness of time" is the world's last age. Although all of biblical history was a period of preparation for the Son's assumption of our flesh, that assumption radically altered the direction and destiny of history. Adam was replaced.

Moving from history to cosmology, Paul later adopted another metaphor to express this replacement: Christ as "head." For Paul this expression meant more than Christ's headship over the Church. It included also His headship over all the powers of creation (Col. 2:20). Thus, Paul spoke of God's plan to "*re-head* all things in Christ," *anakephalaiosasthai ta panta en Christo* (Eph. 1:10). This rather long verb, which means "to sum up or concentrate under one heading," is Paul's way to describe Christ's relationship to creation as a whole. Adam's cosmic dominion (Gen. 1:28) was replaced and enhanced in Christ (Col. 2:9–10).

Recapitulation

To explore this theme, let us return to Irenaeus of Lyons, whose understanding of this subject came directly from the Asian churches to whom Paul wrote. He further elaborated the apostle's understanding of the Christ/Adam analogy and its particular reference to the re-heading of creation.

Irenaeus explicitly joined together two Christological themes from different periods of St. Paul's ministry: Christ as the new Adam (1 Corinthians and Romans) and Christ as the Head (Colossians and Ephesians). In constructing this organic presentation, Irenaeus proved himself to be our first major Pauline theologian; he integrated the teaching of St. Paul into an original theological synthesis, "a complete and organized image in the mind of faith" (*eine vollständigen Abspiegelung in der Glaubensvernunft*—Von Balthasar).[5]

Thus, Irenaeus adopted Paul's concept of "the re-heading of all things in Christ" (*anakephalaiosasthai ta panta in Christo*—Eph. 1:10) and made it the

unifying center of his theology. Like Paul, Irenaeus saw the “recapitulation” in Christ as both cosmic and historical.

Since both human existence and all of nature fell in Adam, God sent His Son to be the New Man, who would restore and transform all things. By the Incarnation,

> the Word saved that which really existed—the humanity which had perished—effecting by means of Himself that communion which should be held with it, and seeking out its salvation.

Because man fell in the flesh, it was proper that he should be redeemed in the flesh:

> But the thing which had perished possessed flesh and blood. For the Lord, taking dust from the earth, molded man; and it was upon his behalf that all the dispensation (*oikonomia*) of the Lord’s advent took place. He Himself, therefore, had flesh and blood, *recapitulating* in Himself not just anybody, but that original handiwork of the Father, seeking out the very thing which had perished.[6]

What humanity lost in Adam, it regained—transformed—in Christ. When God’s Son became man,

> He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us with salvation in a succinct, inclusive manner, so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to exist according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus.[7]

Among the heresies chiefly refuted by the early Christians (as early as the Johannine literature and Ignatius of Antioch) was docetism, the heresy which contended that the divine Christ was human only in appearance. Irenaeus continued the refutation of that heresy. Were the docetic thesis true, Irenaeus explained, Christ could not have saved us, because our restoration had to be

effected in the same flesh that fell. If the Word only *appeared* to be human, He could only *appear* to save us. Any theory that diminishes the humanity of Christ puts orthodox soteriology at risk.[8] That is to say, if God's Word,

> not having been made flesh, only appeared to be in the flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He appeared to be is exactly what He was: God *recapitulated* in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.

Irenaeus speaks of three major moments of our redemption: the Word's initial assumption of our humanity, His death to liberate us from sin, and His victory over death by the Resurrection:

> For it was fitting for Him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man from under the power of death, that He should Himself be made that very same thing which He was, that is, man; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death.

For Irenaeus, however, the Word's assumption of our humanity included, not only His initial adoption of human nature, but also His taking up the full process of a concrete human existence, from birth to death. In other words, the recapitulation of humanity was not completed solely in the Word's becoming flesh in the Virgin's womb, but in every moment of Jesus' life and experience. At every point in His earthly existence, and nowhere more than in death, the Word was becoming flesh and dwelling among us. God's Word, Irenaeus wrote, "passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God."[9]

Hence, Irenaeus described the Incarnation as a biographical sequence:

> He came to save all through means of Himself—all, I say, who through Him are born again to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age.

The Incarnation, for Irenaeus, was an historical process, a full human growth, in which a concrete human being, Jesus of Nazareth, took obedient possession of His destiny and vocation, as the Father revealed it to Him in the course and arrangement of His life.

The tragic stage of that human vocation was His death on the Cross, a death from which God raised Him up, utterly victorious:

> Then, at the last, He arrived at death itself, that He might be the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence, the Prince of life, existing before all, and going before all.[10]

Adam and Systematic Christology

Some Christians, meditating on the Pauline contrast between Adam and Christ, discovered further points of corresponding opposition between them. They perceived that each defect of man's fallen existence was matched by a specific remedy introduced into human experience by the life of Jesus, the incarnate Word. This came to pass, wrote Gregory the Theologian (330–390), when "the new was substituted for the old." This happened, he went on, "because of philanthropy toward the one who had fallen through disobedience."

Gregory reveled in demonstrating how each of the various Christological "moments" recorded in the Gospels corresponded to some feature of Adam's Fall: "each property of His, who was above all, was interchanged with each of ours."

Thus, the tree connected with the first sin was matched by the tree on which Christ paid the price for sin, and

> hands were set over against hands: in the one case, hands extended in self-indulgence, and, in the other, hands spread out in generosity; the first put forward without restraint, the second restrained by nails; hands driving Adam from the garden, and hands extended to the ends of the earth.

All of these things took place, wrote Gregory, for our training (*paidagogia*) and our healing (*iatreia*),

> restoring the old Adam to the place from which he fell and leading him to the tree of life, from which the tree of knowledge had estranged him, because it was partaken of unreasonably and improperly.

Thus, too, the Virgin Mary, who introduced God's Word to the human race, takes the place of Eve, who introduced the human race to sin. Bethlehem supersedes Eden, and the manger replaces the ancient garden. Indeed, Gregory continued,

> this is the reason the angels glorified first the heavenly, and then the earthly. For this cause the shepherds beheld the glory over the Lamb and the Shepherd. This is why the star led the Magi to adore and make offerings, in order that idolatry might be destroyed.

The healing of the ancient Fall proceeded through the life and ministry of Jesus, the incarnate Word:

> This is the reason Jesus was baptized and received testimony from on high, fasted and was tempted, and conquered him who had formerly been victorious. This is why devils were cast out, and diseases healed, and powerful preaching was entrusted to men of low degree, who proclaimed it fruitfully.

In all of these moments of the Incarnation, Christ was bringing remedy to Adam's Fall:

> This is what the Law, our schoolmaster (*paidagogos*), intends for us. This is what the Prophets intend, who are placed between the Law and Christ. This is what Christ intends, who fulfills the spiritual law. This is the reason for the emptied Godhead and the assumed flesh. This is the intention of the new union between God and man, one thing composed of

> two, and both existing in the one. This is the reason . . . the economy, because of philanthropy toward the one who had fallen through disobedience, became a new mystery.

Gregory extends this comparison to consider the very nature of the Incarnation. He reasons: It is precisely because Christ is the replacement of Adam that Christ can be no less human than Adam, composed of both soul and body. As the whole human being fell in Adam, the whole human being was restored in Christ.

In the Incarnation, in short,

> God was united to the flesh through the mediation of the soul, and such disparate natures were knit together by an affinity of each to the component that mediated between them, so that one became all for the sake of all, and for the sake of one—our forefather—the soul for the sake of the disobedient soul, and the flesh, because the flesh cooperated with the soul and was condemned with it. Christ, who was transcendent and beyond the reach of sin, did this for Adam, who had become subject to sin.[11]

The studied contrast of Adam and Christ, therefore, served another important function in the history of Christological dogma: Although the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon in the fifth century first gave dogmatic expression to these formulas of Christology—the unity of Christ in the duality of His natures—in the previous century we find the identical grammar and logic already in Gregory the Theologian. For him, the complete humanity of Christ was an inference of His being the new Adam, the head of the human race.

The One Mediator

All seven of the Church's ecumenical councils were concerned with a single question: "Who is Jesus?" Indeed, according to the Gospels, Jesus Himself posed this question several times in various forms: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matt. 22:42).

(Matt. 22:42).

The reason this question is important has to do with certain claims of Jesus, which indicate that the answer touches on the nature of God. When Jesus declares, for instance, that He and the Father are one (John 10:30), when He affirms that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (14:6), when He claims that those who see Him see the Father (14:9); in all such assertions, Jesus of Nazareth forces Himself on the conscience of every human being who has ever lived.

The radical nature of these claims implies that their validity concerns the very being of God and, hence, the meaning of human existence. If these assertions are true, then there really is no God except the God revealed as the Father of this Palestinian carpenter. This is extremely important, because it implies that all other religions are intrinsically idolatrous. The others are but thieves and robbers (John 10:8). Every other religion is idol worship.

What, after all, is idolatry but the worship of a false divinity? If the true God is known only in Jesus, then only Jesus can save mankind from bondage to false gods. Truly, if Jesus of Nazareth is who He says He is, then He is history's *only* safeguard against idolatry. It is either Jesus or the idols. There is no other choice. Hence, the Apostle John, at the end of his brief treatise on the theme of Jesus' identity, abruptly sums up the alternative: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Taking seriously the claims of Jesus, the New Testament four times speaks of Him as our "Mediator," our *Mesites*. Thus, the Apostle Paul calls Him the "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 2:5), while the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as "the Mediator of the new covenant" (9:15; 12:24), the "Mediator of a better covenant" (8:6).[12]

Unfortunately, it is currently common to impoverish the meaning of this important word. One even hears nowadays, for example, the claim that it is wrong to ask the saints to pray for us because such a request is at odds with the unique mediation of Jesus. This objection is clearly unfounded, because in the New Testament we constantly find the saints praying for one another and asking one another for the grace of their prayers.

I do not question for a moment, of course, that our one Mediator "always lives to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25). The mediation of Jesus, however, is more radical than what He *does*; it pertains to *who He is*, which brings us back to the original question: Who is He?

Following the lead of the New Testament, the Church answers this question by saying that Jesus is God's Son who assumed our humanity and became thereby the one Mediator between God and Man. This is to say that in the person of Jesus, both God's nature and man's are fixed forever in a unity that prompts us to speak of the God-Man. He joins both forms of existence in His own person. Jesus' title of Mediator, wrote Bonaventure of Fidanza, "refers to the mystery of the Incarnation."[13]

Jesus' mediation means that He is both God rendered visible to man and man rendered acceptable to God. For our salvation, the Church insists, He *must* be both. Were He only a man, His death on the Cross would be unavailing. Were He only God, His Resurrection from the dead would have no significance. If we are truly redeemed, He must be both. This argument, inchoatively outlined in 1 John and the Epistle to the Hebrews, was consistently taken up by the seven ecumenical councils and the bishops who attended those councils.

The Church loves to express Jesus' mediation in a rhetorical form known as the "communication of idioms," which means that, because the person of the God-Man is one, it is theologically proper to speak of what He does in terms of ironic exchange. Thus, we say that God slept in the back of Peter's boat, and that a man rose in that boat to command the wind and waves (Mark 4:38–39). God walked into Capernaum, and man forgave the sins of the paralytic who lived there (2:1, 9). All that we see Jesus doing in the Gospels, He does as both fully God and fully man, because in Him divinity and humanity are forever joined. He *mediates* them (in Greek, *mesitevo*).[14]

This is the reason Christians insist on the *wholeness* of the two natures in Christ; sacred theology must diminish neither, as though Jesus would be seen as more divine by being portrayed as less human, or vice versa. The orthodox view of Christ can be neither "too human" nor "too divine," because he is *wholly* both. There is no logical or rhetorical way around this union.

Moreover, we dare not diminish the humanity of Christ, because His humanity is the revelation of who He is: God's eternal Son. Nothing in His assumed and integral humanity diminishes that identity.

Isaiah's Vision

Strictly speaking, human history has had only one "saint." At least, that is what I infer from the Church's statement on the subject. When we chant the Great Doxology at the end of Orthros, we declare to Christ our Lord, "Thou alone art holy" (*Sy ei monos hagios, Tu solus sanctus*). I think that text rather settles the point.

But the point is also a starting point, because more needs to be said on the subject. When we speak of Christ, among all human beings, as "alone holy," the expression is not one of simple degree. It is not a quantitative assertion, declaring that Christ, being holier than the rest of us, is said to be the "only saint." He is not only holier than the rest of us. He is holy in a sense very different from the rest of us. His is not a derived holiness. It is the very holiness of God, "for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

The first person in history to perceive this, I suppose, was the Prophet Isaiah, who in a mystic vision in the temple "saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." Isaiah, being a man of unclean lips and coming from the midst of a people with unclean lips, might not have perceived the holiness of this enthroned Lord, but the voices of the seraphim left him little room for doubt. "Holy, holy, holy," they cried, "the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

There is a sense in which this scene in Isaiah 6 is our first treatise in Christology. Indeed, the New Testament writers perceived in this call of Isaiah a prophetic adumbration of the mystery that they themselves were called to proclaim.

The explanation of their insight requires what may seem at first a digression, but we must make it anyway.

An important component of the work of the New Testament writers was to address the singular, dark mystery of the Messiah's rejection by the Chosen People, and they had recourse to Isaiah 6 in order to throw light on this matter.

Had not Isaiah been ordered to preach with such clarity that only hardness of heart would explain the rejection of his message? The Lord instructed him,

> Go, and tell this people:
> "Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
> Keep on seeing, but do not perceive."
> Make the heart of this people dull,
> And their ears heavy,
> And shut their eyes;
> Lest they see with their eyes,
> And hear with their ears,
> And understand with their heart,
> And return and be healed. (Is. 6:9–10)

This same hardness of heart met by the preaching of Isaiah, the New Testament writers saw, was the key to the Jews' refusal to recognize their Messiah, the same Messiah foretold in unmistakable terms by that ancient prophet. (More on this in chapter 11.)

Because Jesus was rejected for the same reason the preaching of Isaiah was rejected, the New Testament writers quoted these very words of Isaiah's prophecy in order to explain the matter (Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:26–27). That is to say, the people who rejected the prophecies of Isaiah could hardly do other than reject the One whom Isaiah prophesied.

The Evangelist John, who also cites these words from the Book of Isaiah to make the same point (John 12:39–40), goes on to elaborate on the original context of those words: "These things Isaiah said when *he saw His glory and spoke of Him*" (12:41). In this very important text, John recognizes Jesus as the "Lord" Isaiah had seen "high and lifted up." Jesus was that "Lord" of whom the seraphim cried, "Holy, holy, holy." And to this day, this Isaian text prompts us to pray to Christ our Lord, "Thou alone art holy." Indeed, during the Divine Liturgy, we take up again the cry of the seraphim to chant to the Lord Christ, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

If Christ alone is holy, it is also His glory that fills the earth. “The whole earth is full of His glory,” chanted the seraphim. Holiness is God’s glory hidden and unseen. Glory is God’s holiness openly revealed. Hence, it is the holiness of Christ that causes the glory of God to shine forth from His face (John 1:14; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; 2 Pet. 1:17–19). It is His face that conceals and reveals the mystery.

When Isaiah describes this “Lord” as “high and lifted up” (*ram wenissa*—6:1; 57:15), he employs the same expression that later portrays the Suffering Servant (52:13). The Lord and the Suffering Servant are, in fact, the same Person, the One who alone is holy. Our Lord, both God and man, is the only “saint.” All holiness comes into humanity through Him, not only by way of channel but also by way of font.

The holiness ascribed to human beings, therefore, is derived from their union with Jesus Christ, for there is no holiness apart from Him. This is the reason why, notwithstanding the great diversity among the saints, there is an essential oneness among them. They are all branches joined to the one Vine.

Cosmology, Epistemology, and Christ

Among the doctrines of the New Testament most neglected these days, I submit, is that of Christ as Mediator. Well, perhaps “neglected” is too strong. Let’s say, “severely reduced.”

An indication of this reduction, I believe, is the widespread failure of contemporary Christians to mention or even to think of the mediation of Christ when they speak of creation, either of its structure or of human understanding of that structure. In other words, I believe that many Christians nowadays rarely think of Christ with respect to cosmology and epistemology. Since, however, we are to love God with our *whole mind*, it is surely not legitimate to remove Christ from either concern.[15]

First, let us consider cosmology, which addresses the question, “How are things put together?” Several places in the New Testament provide starting points for a Christocentric cosmology, I suppose, but 2 Corinthians 4:6 will do as well as any: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." In this text, we observe that Paul identifies the Creator in Genesis as the same God whose light shines out from the face of Christ.

To enter into the mystery of this text, we may first consider the light of creation as presented in Genesis. Just what is that light of which God, in His first recorded words, said "let there be light"? This biblical verse certainly does not mean the light of the sun, for this was the very first day of creation, and the sun would not be created until the fourth day, Wednesday.

This light in Genesis is, according to the ancient commentaries—both Jewish and Christian—the intrinsic intelligibility of all God's handiwork. This verse is the Bible's first assertion that creation is full of, and formed by, the divine thought. It is not chaos; it is structured in light and permeated with meaning, *logos*.

Now it is Paul's thesis that this very light of creation is disclosed on the face of Christ. He contends that it is through Christ that the mysterious, otherwise invisible light of creation is rendered manifest. The knowledge of God in Christ reveals this light "in our hearts."

This, I submit, is one of the very important but often neglected senses in which Christ is the Mediator. It was with reference to Christ, too, that St. John asserted, in his own remarks on cosmology, "He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him." John, then, agrees with Moses about the light in creation. Accordingly, we should begin with Jesus, "the One from whom the two greatest Wise Men began: Moses the originator of Wisdom, and John, its consummator."[16]

In sum, according to the theology of Paul and John, Christ is our Mediator even in the sense of the world's formal composition. In addition to the uncreated light that emanates from His divine person, there shines also the creative light that gives structure and essence to the universe.

And this thesis brings us to the epistemological question, "How can I know this meaning, this *logos*, at the heart of creation?" Paul and John address this question as well. For them, Christ is not only the Mediator of creation, the Word in whom all created things subsist and have their being; He is also the intelligible

light by which His own mediation is perceived. That is, Christ is not only the cosmological foundation but also the epistemological principle through whom all things created are known to God and may, in divine revelation, be understood by men. Coming into the world, says John, He enlightened every man (John 1:9).

For this reason, it is the thesis of the Bible that the true and ultimate intelligibility of the world is concealed from those who do not know Christ. On this point, let us stay with St. Paul, who prays that we may

> reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are *concealed* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)

Observe that in Christ the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are said to be "concealed," *apokryphoi*. Jesus too spoke of this concealment: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have concealed (*ekrypsas*) these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (Matt. 11:25). God's *Logos* within the world is first a work of cryptography and then of disclosure.

The lens of Christ, then, provides the "correct vision"—the "orthodoxy"—of the world, including its origin out of nothingness and its final transformation unto immortality. The meaning of all things created is concealed in the person and life of Jesus and revealed to the little ones who entrust themselves to His sole mediation.

The structural principle and the final destiny of creation, then, are manifest at a specific point in history, which point is known by the name "Jesus Christ." Ultimately, no view of the world is really correct, truly *orthodox*, except through the lightsome lens of faith in the mediation of the Man Jesus Christ.

Notes

1 "Man" in the specifically male sense: *en andri*.

2 Compare many manuscripts, versions, and patristic quotations of Rom. 14:10: *toi bemati tou Christou*.

3 For instance, Gregory the Theologian, *Orationes Theologicae* 30.21; John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Hebraeos* 12.1.

4 The contrast between Christ and Adam, however, does not appear to have been original with Paul. I have already argued for the presence of that contrast in what is apparently an ancient hymn verse cited by St. Paul in Phil. 2:5–11.

5 For many centuries Christians tended to read the Pauline Epistles through the synthesis lens crafted by Irenaeus. This tendency fell on hard times at the Reformation, when readers started interpreting Paul mainly through Romans. In more recent times, the denial of Pauline authorship to the Captivity and Pastoral Epistles represents yet another step away from the vision of Irenaeus.

6 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 5.14.2.

7 *Op. cit.*, 3.18.1.

8 I fear docetism is more common than we imagine. One discerns it, for example, in the nervous disposition to imagine that Jesus, in the Gospel stories, was only *feigning* ignorance in such passages as Mark 13:32, Luke 8:30, and John 11:34. I addressed this kind of docetism in *The Jesus We Missed*, chapter 6.

9 Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, 3.18.7.

10 *Op. cit.*, 2.24.4.

11 Gregory the Theologian, *Orationes* 2.23–25.

12 On Christ as our *Mesites*, see the Alexandrian theologians: Clement, *The Teacher* 3.1; Origen, *On John 2.34*; Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 22.

13 Bonaventure of Fidanza, *Commentary on Luke*, Preface, 17.

14 See Clement of Alexandria, *The Teacher* 12; Origen, *On John* 6.15; Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 45.22; Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 9; Cyril of Alexandria, *The Treasury* 15.

15 As the priest of an Orthodox Christian congregation, I am much aware of a pastoral problem respecting the mediation of Christ: So many Orthodox Christians unfortunately limit their church attendance to the Liturgy of St. John

Chrysostom, a pre-Chalcedonian rite in which the worshipper gains almost no sense that Christ is the one Mediator between God and men; in the texts of this service Jesus is invariably “one of the Holy Trinity,” virtually never “one of us.” That is to say, Orthodox Christians *should* also be present and pray in the services where the mediation of Christ is better expressed in the Chalcedonian hymnography: Vespers and Matins.

16 Bonaventure of Fidanza, *Collationes in Hexaemeron* 1.10.

CHAPTER 6

Becoming Flesh

The Incarnation was total and forever. When our humanity was seized, the seizure was without reservation, save sin; no holds were barred, nothing was held back. This means that God's Son flung Himself completely into our humanity, including the human processes of thought and resolve. The "single subject" Christology of Ephesus and Chalcedon necessarily affirms the unity of Jesus' self-awareness.

Consequently, there was not the scantest part of internal disguise or pretense in Christ. He did not peep, slyly but approvingly, over His own shoulder. He was not inwardly divided into actor and spectator, the one putting on a show and the other watching it. If we believe that the embrace of the Incarnation—a concrete humanity—was complete and without reserve, there could not have been a trace of the "docetic" in the inner life of Jesus. He did not work on appearances, not even on how He appeared to Himself.

When, as a man, Jesus committed His life and destiny to the Father, the obedience was utterly pure and unalloyed with self-regard. There was no "self-fulfillment" here. The only "fulfillment" was that of prophecy. His was a holocaust, in the original sense that God received the *entire* victim; the priest had nothing left over on which to feed. Love for the Father and for us was His sole motive, and it was selfless in a way unparalleled in the history of mankind. Jesus suffered and endured all things, guided by no narrative except the demands of biblical prophecy. He told Himself no story separate from His own existence.

Rudolf Kassner expressed, perhaps, the most eloquent conviction on this point: "I remain convinced that the God-man never, at any time, not even for a

point: "I remain convinced that the God-man never, at any time, not even for a moment, however brief, saw or attempted to see His own face in a mirror."

Jesus did not *look* at Himself. He looked only at the Father and at us. For this reason it is quite impossible to think of Jesus composing an autobiography. What we know of Him, we know from the apostolic witnesses who testified and wrote of Him.

Perhaps it is time to consider exactly *what* they wrote.

Christ the Kingdom

Since John is the evangelist who traces Jesus back the furthest—into eternity!—it is not unreasonable to look at John before the other Gospels.

In comparison with the Synoptic Gospels, John's is perhaps most distinctive by including relatively little of the Lord's preaching about the *Kingdom*. This very noun, *basileia* in Greek, appears in John only in the discourse with Nicodemus (3:3, 5) and the trial before Pilate (18:36).

In the latter setting, Jesus calls Himself a King (18:37), a detail consonant with earlier parts of the Gospel (1:49; 6:15; 12:13, 15). In the fourth Gospel, the theme of the Kingdom, so dominant in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is shifted to Jesus Himself, an implicit recognition that *He* is the Kingdom. Under John's pen, this theme becomes more immediately personal; the Kingdom is not conceptually separable from Jesus.

"He is the King of heaven," wrote Origen in the third century,

> and as He is wisdom itself (*avtosophia*), and He is righteousness itself (*avtodikaiosyne*), and He is truth itself (*avtoaletheia*), no less is He the kingdom itself (*avtobasileia*).[1]

For this reason, in John's Gospel Christology embraces what the Synoptic Gospels call the Kingdom.

John begins by identifying God's Son as the "Word," a term used in this Gospel only within its first fourteen verses. This restrained use is significant, because it leads to the culminating assertion, "and the Word became (*egeneto*)

flesh and dwelt among us." That is to say, the identification of the Word is relevant for John only with respect to the Incarnation, the Word's becoming flesh, the eternal becoming temporal, the transcendent becoming spatial, and the divine becoming human.

Everything else that follows in John's account—all the words[2] and signs[3] of Jesus—rests on the foundation of this "becoming" (*egeneto*), the radical event of the Incarnation.

This is the basis for all the revelation that comes through Jesus: "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (2 John 7). For John this is the most fundamental affirmation of the Christian faith: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). The Incarnation is, moreover, the root of man's new life, because the Word's birth from man is what makes possible man's birth from God (John 1:13; 1 John 5:18).

John's identification of Jesus Christ as God's Word, then, is not only metaphysical but also soteriological. He is the Savior (4:42) because He is the Word made flesh. The Word's life "was the light of men" (1:4). In Him God was revealed (1:14), and in this knowledge of God consists eternal life (17:3). This knowledge of God is conveyed in the living person of the Word made flesh. The signs that He enacts reveal the divine glory (2:11; 11:40; 12:41). God's word is truth (17:17); the Word Incarnate is the same truth (14:6).

For this reason, John identifies Christ as "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (1:9). It is impossible, perhaps, to exaggerate the importance of the image of light (*phos*) in John. Indeed, a simple word count is instructive here. In the fourth Gospel this noun is found twenty-three times, as compared to only fifteen times in the other three Gospels combined. It is also worth remarking that John does not use the noun "light" after chapter 12, prior to the account of the Passion; this "light" pertains directly to the Lord's public ministry, the manifestation of the divine glory in His words and signs.

This image of the light is soteriological as well as metaphysical. That is to say, Jesus is the Light with specific reference to man's salvation: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light

of life" (8:12). Hence, just prior to the Passion narrative Jesus warns,

> A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. (12:35–36)

And shortly later Jesus declares, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (12:46).

This entrance of the Divine Light into the world, nonetheless, required an initial acceptance—an act of obedient faith—on the part of one other human being. The Father's Gift had to be voluntarily received by a representative of humanity and human history. At this point, therefore, we must say something about that woman through and in whom the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It is time—perhaps past the time—to speak of Jesus' Mother, because without her reception of the Word's entrance into the world, none of these things would have come to pass.

Abraham's Daughter

As she celebrated the regard that God had shown to the lowliness of His handmaiden, the Mother of the Lord explicitly recalled His mercy when "He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever" (Luke 1:55). The mention of what God said to Abraham is especially significant in this context, because it is directly related to what God said to the Mother of Jesus. There are several points of parallel.

First, the content of what God "spoke," in each case, had to do with Abraham's "seed." Both instances, that is to say, involved the assurance of the birth of a child of Abraham. Just as the history of the Chosen People began with such a promise, so did the era of the Christian Church.

Thus, God promised Abraham, "one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" (Gen. 15:4). This promise was paralleled in the words of Gabriel, as he announced the coming Messiah: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son" (Luke 1:31).

your womb and bring forth a Son" (Luke 1:31).

Second, there is a further point of correspondence between the two cases in what we may call a "difficulty" standing in opposition to the promise. Nothing is really difficult for God, of course, but from a merely human perspective both promises appeared improbable of fulfillment. In the instance of Abraham, the difficulty had to do with the advanced years of both him and his wife. This thought, we are told, crossed Abraham's mind at the time: "Shall one be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah yet give birth, who is ninety years old?" (Gen. 17:17).

The Mother of Jesus, for her part, mentioned a similar consideration to the angel of promise: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34). In both instances, we observe, the "difficulty" was raised in question form.

Third, in each case—Abraham and Mary—Sacred Scripture ascribes the conception of the promised child to the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, St. Paul, contrasting the promised Isaac with Ishmael, said the latter "was born according to the flesh," whereas the child of promise was born "according to the Spirit" (Gal. 4:23, 29). With respect to the promised Jesus, the angel declared to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). Both the barrenness of Sarah and the virginity of Mary provided the occasion for the outpouring of God's power on human inadequacy. The Holy Spirit, that is to say, is the "Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13).

Fourth, in each case a true faith received the promise of God. Abraham's response to God in faith is much celebrated in God's Word, which says, "he believed the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6; cf. 1 Macc. 2:52; Rom. 4:3, 9; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). With regard to Mary, her cousin Elizabeth first discerned her faith when she proclaimed, "Blessed is she who *believed*, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

Fifth, in the stories of Abraham and Mary, attention is paid to the form in which each of them sought further information when they received God's promise. Commenting on the two stories, St. Augustine observed a similarity that joined them. He remarked that Abraham's question—"How shall I

know?”—came *after* the assertion that “Abraham believed the Lord” (Gen. 15:6, 8). That is to say, Abraham’s query did not arise from doubt but from a desire for further information with respect to God’s will.

This feature is also found in the story of Mary, inasmuch as she, too, requested more information about her responsibilities in the future living-out of her faith: “She was certain (*certa erat*) what the future held, though she sought how it would happen (*modum quo fieret*).” Neither of them doubted the promise, wrote Augustine, but both needed more enlightenment. They did not ask in unbelief but within the context of their faith.[4]

Both Abraham and Mary, each at the beginning of a new era in the history of salvation, received the humanly improbable promise of the child whose conception and birth would inaugurate that era. Abraham’s daughter, joining both Testaments, thus appears as the new and outstanding example of that same faith through which Abraham himself was reckoned righteous.

The last time Mary speaks in the Gospel of Luke is in the scene where she questions the twelve-year-old Savior in the temple. This scene pertains to the theological significance of the temple in Luke’s narrative. Indeed, Luke begins and ends his Gospel in the temple (1:5–9; 24:52–53).

The Messiah and His Temple

The presentation of our Lord in the temple is an account found only in the Gospel of Luke (2:22–40). This is the Messiah’s first visit to the temple in Jerusalem, a site that Luke makes a foundation stone of his literary structure.

Moreover, near the end of Jesus’ first visit to the temple, Luke remarks that the prophetess Anna “spoke of Him to all those who looked for the redemption in Jerusalem” (2:38). The real “redemption in Jerusalem” takes place, of course, in the last pages of Luke, describing the sufferings, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. These are the events included in what Luke’s original Greek text calls Jesus’ *exodos*, “which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (9:31).

Luke’s story takes for granted the full significance of the temple. He presumes that the reader is familiar with the Lord’s assumption of “residence” there shortly after its completion (1 Kings [3 Kg.] 8). His departure from it at the

there shortly after its completion (1 Kings [3 Kg.] 8), His departure from it at the time of its destruction (Ezek. 10), and His return there when the temple was rebuilt (Hag. 2:1–9; Zech. 8—9).

Luke especially presumes the prophecy of the Messiah’s coming appearance at the temple, an oracle found near the end of the last prophetic book of the Hebrew Scriptures:

> And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal. 3:1)

According to that same prophecy, the purpose of the Messiah’s coming to the temple was to purify its priesthood: “He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Mal. 3:3).

It was those very priests, however, who failed to recognize the Messiah’s arrival. On His final recorded visit to the temple, in fact, Luke tells us, “the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him” (20:1). Their confrontation came in response to the purging of the temple in the scene immediately preceding (Luke 19:45–48).

Those sons of Levi wanted nothing to do with any purging. They had no use for what Malachi called the “refiner’s fire” and “launderers’ soap” (3:2). What, then, resulted from their confrontation with the Messiah? Luke tells us, “the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him” (20:19). The temple was the site where this messianic drama was decided.

It is surely significant, therefore, that Luke, in describing Jesus’ words about Jerusalem’s coming destruction, places that prophecy—unlike the other gospel accounts—in the temple itself.[5]

Such is the full literary context of Luke’s story of the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple. It is a prophetic preparation for the redemptive events that will culminate at the end of the Gospel. The Lord is met by Simeon, an elderly man whom Luke describes with references to the Holy Spirit in three successive verses (2:25–27). Cast in the role of a prophet by these references, the

inspired Simeon, after a canticle of praise, prophesies the drama that will ensue in the temple toward the end of the Gospel: “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that will be spoken against” (2:34).

It was “in that instant” that Simeon was joined by “Anna, a prophetess,” who spoke of this Messiah “to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (2:36–38). This too, as we have seen, was a prophecy of the Lord’s death and Resurrection, for those things brought about that “redemption in Jerusalem.”

Such, at the beginning of Luke, is the small company that welcomes the Messiah on his first visit to the temple. Upon these two old people comes an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, much as Luke describes in the beginning of Acts. Here too the Spirit descends upon a son and a daughter, a manservant and a maidservant, and they prophesy (see Acts 2:17–18). Israel is well represented by these two figures who foster in their hearts the ardor of ancient hopes. But Simeon and Anna, even as they give thanks to God for the Messiah’s arrival (2:28–29, 38), dimly foretell the drama that will later unfold in the courts of the temple.

Emmanuel

The missionary mandate received by the Apostles in the closing verses of Matthew’s Gospel is the best key to understanding that Gospel as a whole. That is to say, after reading Matthew all the way to its memorable ending, it is most instructive to take that ending as an interpretive guide and go back through the Gospel again, considering everything else in the light of it. An easy way to do this, I suggest, is to reflect on Matthew’s missionary mandate with respect to structure, theme, and imagery.

First, in regard to structure, we observe that Matthew employs a method called *inclusio*, by which he begins and ends his work with a common element. Thus, the Jesus who is first declared in Matthew to be “God *with* us” (1:23) declares in the Gospel’s last verse, “Behold, I am *with* you always, even to the end of the world” (28:20 KJV).

Similarly, Matthew treats of baptism at both the beginning and the end of

Jesus' ministry. Following an inherited apostolic format that describes that ministry as "beginning from the baptism of John to the day when [the Lord Jesus] was taken up from us" (Acts 1:22), Matthew portrays the revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit when Jesus is baptized by John (Matt. 3:16–17).

Then, at the end of the Gospel, Jesus Himself speaks of baptism "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (28:19). Thus, the Trinitarian structure of baptism provides Matthew with the two end posts of his narrative frame.

Second, in regard to theme, Matthew finishes his work with the conversion of the world: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." This call to the nations (*ethne*) summarizes a motif found often in Matthew (6:12; 12:18, 21; 21:43; 24:14; 25:32). Even at Jesus' Birth the Magi, personifying those nations, came to *adore* Him (*proskyneo*—2:2, 8, 11). At the end, while His disciples are on the mountain *adoring* Him (*proskyneo*—28:17), Jesus sends them out to make disciples of those very nations.

Third, with respect to imagery, we observe that the missionary mandate is given on "the *mountain* which Jesus had appointed for them" (28:16). In Matthew the mountain is preeminently the place of authoritative revelation (15:29–30; 17:1–5; 24:3). Indeed, Jesus' first major sermon in Matthew is delivered on a mountain (5:1; 8:1).

On an even earlier mountain, Jesus is portrayed as rejecting Satan's offer to give him "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (4:8). Those same kingdoms appear at last on Matthew's final mountain, where the Lord sends out His Apostles with the mandate to "make disciples of all the nations" (28:19).

On Matthew's first mountain, Satan offered Jesus universal *exsousia*, "authority." On his last mountain, Jesus commissions the Apostles to a universal evangelism founded in His own authority as the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel: "*All exsousia* has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go *therefore* and make disciples of all the nations."

Furthermore, this mountain, from which the nations (*ethne*) are to be evangelized, is found in Galilee (28:16; see 28:7), the very region Matthew

earlier identified as “Galilee *of the nations*” (*ton ethnon*—4:16). It was in that “Galilee of the nations” that Jesus began His own ministry (4:12), an early promise of the apostolic commission to extend discipleship to the whole world.

The Prophet

One has the impression that Christians nowadays—unlike Muslims—do not often speak of Jesus as a prophet. Indeed, except that the remark might be considered irreverent, one would almost say that Jesus is not honored as a prophet in His own country (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44).

It is not hard to see why this is the case. After all, “prophet” did not become a defining title in the classical development of Christology, probably because in the Bible the term is more commonly used of others besides Jesus. Although I suppose no Christian would deny the prophetic ministry of Jesus, the title “prophet” is not usually considered specific enough.

Indeed, even when the New Testament calls Jesus a prophet, this title sometimes represents a lower stage, as it were, in the progress of Christological affirmations. This progression is perhaps clearest in the Gospel of John. For instance, when the Samaritan woman at the well calls Jesus a prophet (John 4:19), this is only an initial step toward His being called the Messiah (4:25–26) and the Savior of the world (4:42).

Again, when the multiplication of the loaves prompts the confession of Jesus as a prophet (6:14), it is simply a preparation for His being confessed shortly afterwards as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (6:69). The same is true of the man born blind, who begins by affirming Jesus a prophet (9:17) and ends by believing in Him as “Son of God” (9:35–38).

Indeed, in the Gospel of John, people are divided between those that give Jesus the title of prophet and those that confess Him as Messiah (7:40–41), and John is in no doubt which title represents the superior profession of faith.

The mention of Jesus as prophet in the New Testament is, however, more subtle than it may at first appear. Close attention to that last Johannine reference, for instance, shows that Jesus is not called “a” prophet, but “the” prophet, and

recourse to the definite article is found elsewhere in the New Testament with the same specific reference. Thus, when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd exclaims, "This is Jesus, *the* prophet from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matt. 21:11). That is to say, Jesus was not only misunderstood to be one of the ancient prophets raised to life again (Matt. 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:8, 19), but He was also taken to be *the* Prophet in a more specific sense.

As a matter of fact, the Jews of that period were expecting not only the coming of the Messiah foretold by Isaiah but also the appearance of the Prophet predicted by Moses: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deut. 18:15). That expectation was demonstrated by the fact that John the Baptist was queried on the matter (John 1:21).

The earliest Christians were clear in their identification of Jesus with that Prophet foretold in Deuteronomy. Thus, the Apostle Peter, exhorting the Sanhedrin to repentance in Jesus' name, went on to quote the same passage in Deuteronomy as a proof text:

> For Moses truly said to the fathers, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever he says to you." (Acts 3:22)

Stephen later cites these same words of Moses in reference to Jesus (Acts 7:37).

Moreover, the Book of Revelation, in addition to the rich and varied titles by which it refers to Jesus, also portrays Him as dictating prophecies to the seven churches of Asia (1:18—3:22).

I suppose the Muslim custom of calling Jesus a prophet may suggest why Christians eventually stopped doing so. For Christians that title was simply not enough. "Prophet" was insufficient to express what Christians most believed about Jesus. Indeed, already in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews contrasted the prophets with the Son (1:1–2).

It is no wonder, then, that the name "prophet" came to be somewhat neglected among the standard Christological titles common in the Church,

especially in those liturgical texts that determine how ordinary Christians think about our Lord. The title “prophet” did not entirely disappear as a Christological title, nonetheless, particularly in reference to Moses’ prediction in Deuteronomy.[6]

Jesus, then, is the fulfillment not only of Isaiah’s prediction of the definitive king, but also of Moses’ promise of the definitive prophet. He remains the true Prophet of the Church, God’s authentic Spokesman, who deeply addresses the future and the final destiny of the human race.

The Self-Consciousness of Jesus

Jesus, as He appears in the Gospels, resists man’s efforts to comprehend Him. There is a sense in which this is true of all human beings, I concede, but in the singular case of Jesus this resistance to interpretation is marked in a unique and special way. The “who” of Jesus, which He pointedly put in question form, remains utterly elusive apart from a special revelation (Matt. 16:15–17).

With respect to other men, we have at least some chance of understanding them “from within” by recourse to the principle of intersubjectivity, the assumption of the common structure of self-awareness in all human souls. Each of us goes inside and finds a “self,” nor does this experience differ essentially from person to person. This is what allows us to talk to one another. It is the premise of all rational discourse, the implicit starting point of all conversation, the necessary basis of all argument.

Thus, no one attempts to convince me of anything except by first supposing that his consciousness and mine share an identical shape, a radical “who,” of which to be “*self*-aware.” No matter how separate we are, we have at least this much in common—that we are self-conscious in the same way. Hence, no matter how individual the two of us remain, the other person is able to enter into his own soul, examine his own experience, and through a process of analogy (which I suggest we call the “analogy of subjectivity”) gain some idea of what is going on in *my* soul. What is human and therefore native to him is also human and native to me. He can interpret me by self-reflection.

Biographical efforts proceed along this path. Those studies presume that the

Biographical efforts proceed along this path. Those studies presume that the inner content of their chosen subject—that is to say, the person's subjectivity—is in some measure accessible by a consideration of what makes all human souls "tick." It is probably impossible to write biography without some recourse to this process of analogy, which often enough produces a psychological portrait of its subject.

Now a great deal of contemporary biblical scholarship is convinced that it is possible to do exactly the same thing with Jesus. Exegetes of this persuasion, basing their efforts on the analogy of subjectivity, attempt to understand Jesus by recourse to the same sorts of internal information that are used to interpret other individuals in history. They study the social, environmental, and educational influences by which they believe the man Jesus can be rendered intelligible. They discover what made Him "tick." Psychology provides them a foundation for exegesis.

It must be said that these modern efforts to interpret Jesus through the analogy of subjectivity are problematic at best. The reason for this is simple: The "subject" in the subjectivity of Jesus is the eternal Son of God. According to the conciliar theology of the hypostatic union, there is no human person in Jesus that is distinct from the divine person. The soul of Jesus, His *psyche* that these historians want to analyze and interpret, is the *human* soul of the *divine* Son. The "self" of Jesus' humanity is not someone distinct from the "who" of His divinity.

Thus, that saddened subject weeping at the tomb of Lazarus is God, and the voice that summons the dead man to come forth is the same that Moses heard from the burning bush. The transfigured Lord of Tabor is identical with the one Isaiah saw, high and lifted up (see John 12:37–41). That weary person who sits at the well and sleeps on the stern sheets of the fishing boat is the Creator of the universe.

What is there in Jesus that renders Him so impossible to analyze? He tells us: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Again, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son" (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22).

The identity of the man Jesus is rooted in this eternal relationship of the Son to the Father. Self-awareness in Jesus is indivisible at every point from the

consciousness of His eternal relationship to the Father. He has no personal identity apart from that relationship.

Now I submit there is nothing else in any human soul even remotely comparable, and this is the reason why psychological analysis, based on the analogy of subjectivity, is an inadequate and even misleading path to the interpretation of Jesus. Jesus, while possessing a human psyche, transcends psychology for the same reason that He, partaking fully in created being, transcends metaphysics.

Certainly, Jesus' human awareness of this relationship to the Father grew and developed as He matured. Otherwise, it would not be true that the Word really did become flesh. However, the analogy of subjectivity provides no adequate developmental line by which to trace this conscious development in Jesus. Inside our own consciousness, there is nothing that affords us even the slightest hint of what it means for a human being to be conscious of Himself as God's eternal Son. We cannot even begin to imagine it.

Conciliar dogma teaches that the man Jesus and the Son of God are the same person. They are "one reality" (*mia physis*), said St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Leo of Rome spoke of *una persona, divina et humana*. This respect for the "mystery" of the Incarnation has always been the orthodox approach of the Church.

Not until the early decades of the nineteenth century, as far as I know, did Christians attempt to "get inside" Jesus, by the analogy of subjectivity, or even, like Schweitzer, to psychoanalyze Him. For my part, I believe such efforts to be Nestorian at best but often enough only a species of Arianism. On this matter of the self-consciousness of Jesus, I am persuaded, sacred theology must be resolutely apophatic in order to remain orthodox.

Can *anything* valid be affirmed on this topic? Yes, I believe so, and in the pages that follow I will try to indicate ways in which—it appears to me—Jesus gave active, conscious thought to His vocation in this world. I will suggest that He did so by way of understanding the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Vocation and Biblical Understanding

We are told that Jesus, returning to Nazareth at age twelve, "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:51–52). Surely we are right in supposing that an essential component of His increasing wisdom was a deepening concern for His "Father's business," a point rather prominent in His mind on that recent trip to Jerusalem (2:49).

We are likewise correct, surely, in supposing that Jesus' increasing wisdom had something to do with His further exploration of the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures were publicly read in the synagogue, where Jesus regularly attended —"as His custom was," *kata to eiothos avtoi*. Those same Scriptures, furthermore, were readily available for anyone who visited the synagogue to read them, and we do know that Jesus could read (4:16). He gained a proficiency in quoting the Bible, showing an early preference for Deuteronomy (4:4, 8, 12).

All of this goes to say, of course, that Jesus grew in familiarity with and understanding of Holy Scripture, specifically as it addressed His life and mission. He *knew,* from His own self-consciousness, the meaning of the Scriptures: They had to do with *Him*. We are certain of this, because on the first occasion when we know our Lord publicly read the Scriptures—a passage from Isaiah—His striking comment was, "Today this Scripture is *fulfilled* in your hearing" (4:21).

I suggest there are two premises and two inferences especially to keep in mind with respect to Jesus' understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures.

First, there is what we may call a *vertical* premise, having to do with Jesus' personal relation to God. In the Scriptures, Jesus perceived His identity as the One sent forth by the Father to do His work on earth. The Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus knew, held the key to *who* He was and *what* He was about. Called upon to declare whether He was "the Coming One," *Ho Erchomenos,* our Lord answered by referring to the scriptural fulfillment rendered visible in His ministry: "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke 7:19–22).

Jesus' understanding of the Bible was thus formed in the depths of His awareness of His vocation—the conscious knowledge of His identity in relation to the Father: "You are My beloved Son" (Luke 3:22). Our Lord's interpretation

of Holy Scripture was inseparable from the knowledge of Himself as God's Son and the Savior of the world.

It is difficult to exaggerate the important inference to be drawn from this premise. To wit: Inasmuch as the correct understanding of the Bible—Christian theology!—comes to us from our Lord (Luke 24:27, 32, 45), our own biblical exegesis is rooted in and flows from His understanding of it. His knowledge of the Father, directing Him through the Scriptures, is the source of our theology. The Christian faith itself is an extension of "the mind of Christ," *nous Christou* (1 Cor. 2:16).

Second, there is what we may call a *horizontal* premise, having to do with history. Jesus perceived Himself as the point of biblical "fulfillment." This fulfillment was not to be found in some metaphysical, non-historical message, but in the drama of His own life and work. In His life He fulfilled, furthermore, not only the meaning of the Sacred Writings, but also the revelatory history recorded in and further created by those Writings. In addition, Jesus' fulfillment of Israel's history was of whole cloth with that history; it took place during specific years within the continuity of that history.

From this premise we Christians infer that the correct understanding of biblical history comes from Jesus' awareness of fulfilling it. Indeed, within the "mind of Christ" it is not entirely possible to distinguish between sacred theology and the theological interpretation of history. To understand biblical history except through the Christological lens is a sure way to misunderstand it. Thus, Jesus' theological understanding of that history is the root of our history of theology, as well as the foundation for our theology of history.

Multiple Images

Saint Luke, about halfway through his account of the public ministry, tells us that Jesus raised the question with the disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" The varied answers, if we look at them carefully, are very curious. Some identified Him as a revivified John the Baptist, while others thought Him to be

the returned Elijah or one of the ancient prophets raised to life (9:18–19). Evidently everyone who addressed the subject thought Jesus was *someone else*.

This was a most extraordinary phenomenon, without exact parallel, as far as I know, anywhere else in history: Jesus' contemporaries apparently were not content to say that Jesus of Nazareth *was*, plainly and simply, Jesus of Nazareth. They were determined to identify Him with someone else from Israel's past.

The disciples, for their part, confessed Him to be the long-awaited Messiah (Luke 9:20). Although Jesus recognized the publication of this identity would be seriously misunderstood (9:21), He did not deny it. It is clear He already knew Himself to be the promised Heir of the Davidic covenant.

Our Lord went on, however, to join this messianic identification with two other biblical figures: Daniel's Son of Man and Isaiah's Suffering Servant. Combining these images, He immediately told the disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22).

Clearly Jesus had come to understand Himself as identified with these prophetic figures—Messiah, Suffering Servant, and Son of Man—all of whom the Bible associated with the advent of God's Kingdom and the fulfillment of Israel's historical destiny. These three biblical figures were existentially fused in the consciousness of God's Son. It was through them that in some sense Jesus "grew" to know who He was and what the Father expected of Him.

Luke, as though to preclude any lingering doubts on the point, immediately went on to emphasize it again. Taking the traditional story of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:1–8; Matt. 17:1–9), Luke gave a substantially larger and more defined role to the two Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah, as they appeared with Jesus. He wrote, "Two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His *exodus* which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:31–32). It was during this prophetic discussion with Jesus that the divine voice once again proclaimed, "My Son" (9:35).

This section of Luke (9:18–36) rests on a single preoccupation—Who is Jesus? This is why Luke places the Transfiguration—with its declaration, "This is My beloved Son"—within this section. Luke repeatedly stresses the Old

Testament figures and prophecies through which Jesus took stock of His identity and vocation: Messiah, Suffering Servant, Son of Man. As God's Son, He is identified in all of these ways through the mysteries of His birth and life, His suffering and death, His Resurrection and exaltation at God's right hand.

Having fulfilled all the prophecies inherent in these biblical images, and having "learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and having been perfected" (Heb. 5:8–9), Jesus revealed to the Church the mystery of His identity through the exegesis of Holy Scripture. His disciples, inasmuch as "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures," now know Him through a gracious, internal participation in His own self-understanding. The Church thus comprehends the Sacred Scriptures through the eternal Word's human, historical subjectivity, the innate knowledge of Himself identical with the understanding of those Scriptures. Christology and biblical exegesis form a single study.

Christian Faith and the Identity of Christ

When I argue that the Christian Faith begins with—and, consequently, all theological reflection must be rooted in—the identity of Jesus, I do not mean that either the creedal Faith or the theological pursuit simply adheres to revealed propositions objectively known. Inasmuch as divine revelation is the self-communication of *God*, I wonder if we can even use the adjective "objective" when discussing it. In any case, faith in the self-revealing God must adhere to the *res ipsa*, the very reality of God, not merely to propositions *about* God.

The God revealed in Jesus Christ is revealed as the Father of this unique Son. If we can speak of a "what" in this revelation, it is the relationship joining this Father and this Son. And this relationship is revealed, first, in the self-awareness of the Son. The whole of the Christian Faith is based on Jesus' knowledge of who He knows Himself to be.

Perhaps we should pursue this consideration by reflecting that self-knowledge cannot really be called "objective"; the self cannot be known

impartially and from without. It is, rather, an extension and activity of the self. It is, by definition, *sub*jective.

Also, self-knowledge has a tautological quality, inasmuch as it contains its own predication. The consciousness of one's self is inseparable from *being* oneself. Jesus' *human* consciousness of His *divine* identity comes *from* that identity; it cannot be separated from His face-to-face relationship with the Father who eternally begets Him.

The identity of Jesus is what the Father discloses to believers: "Blessed are you, Simon Johnson, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but My Father who is in heaven." The revelation given by "*My* Father" is the ontological and experiential basis for Peter's creedal proposition, "You are the Son of God." Faith's quest of theological understanding—*fides quaerens intellectum*—begins at that conjunction, the very point of faith itself.

For this reason, Christian theology must include the very experience, the *sensus*, of divine revelation. There can be no *what* of revelation apart from the living event of revelation. The content of revelation is inseparable—even conceptually—from the living event of revelation. Theology starts when the regenerated mind embraces the Father's revelation of His Son.

Nothing human—flesh and blood—adequately prepares the mind for this revelation. It comes entirely from *within* God. Only the Father discloses the Son's identity, because the Father is the eternal source and origin of that identity. Whatever the Son has, He receives from the Father. Of Himself, the Son can do nothing (John 5:19, 30). Of Himself, He has no authority even to speak (7:17; 12:49; 14:10). Although the Son has a will of His own (5:21; 17:24; 21:22), He is careful not to do His own will (5:30; 6:38). These negatives indicate something essential to the Son's relationship to His Father: its receptivity. He is "begotten *of* the Father."

This Son, whose being (*ousia*) is eternally received from the Father (17:5), is the one who became the incarnate instrument of the divine salvific will in this world. The Son's eternal knowledge of His Begetter took on human form in the man Jesus Christ. Remaining the eternal Word, He adopted the historical process

of a human subjectivity. The "I" of the Son assumed existence and self-consciousness in a human mind—the *nous* of Christ.

Thus, the eternal Word's new existence as a human being replicated, manifested, and translated into earthly form His eternal engendering from the Father. Neither in heaven nor on earth has the Son anything not received from the Father. In the ongoing event of the Incarnation, the Son's eternal reception of His engendered being acquired an earthly, fleshly expression. Jesus' existence in this world, as a *part* of this world, was a human translation of the Word's eternal generation.

This is what the Church means by the insistence that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). To "be saved" means to become a child of God, and there is no other person in history fully conscious of himself as the child of God. The Word alone *knows* the One who begets Him.

But because He knows this Father within the structure and horizon of a human mind—in human self-awareness—a new potential arises for the whole human race. The fully knowing Son may choose to share this personal knowledge of the Father with those who come to Him in faith: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:27-28).

Notes

1 Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Matthew* 14.7.

2 John 2:22; 4:41, 50; 5:24, 38; 7:36, 40; 8:31, 37, 43, 51, 52; 10:19; 12:48; 14:23, 24; 15:3, 20; 17:6, 14, 17.

3 John 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14, 26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30.

4 Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* 16.24.

5 Contrast Luke 21:20–24 with Matt. 24:3 and Mark 13:3.

6 See the *Clementine Homilies* 3.15, 53; John Chrysostom, *On Matthew* 17.4; *On John* 2.3; Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 66.72; Isidore of Pelusium, *Letters* 3.94; Cyril of Alexandria, *On John* 1.10.

CHAPTER 7

From Scroll to Page

At the beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel was shown a scroll, on which he beheld writing “on the inside and on the outside” (2:10). The prophet was commanded to eat the scroll, which was, of course, God’s Word of revelation.

Now God’s Word, according to St. John Chrysostom, “is ever eaten yet never consumed,” so the scroll of Ezekiel was not destroyed when he ate it. Indeed, John the Seer later described his own memorable encounter with that same document (Rev. 5:1).

I suggest we look more closely at that revelatory scroll and inquire, more specifically, why it is written on both sides and what this means.

Since the scroll is God’s Word, the inside of it, if I am not deceived, is the Father’s eternal Logos written from within. The Father writes inasmuch as He begets the Word, God from God, light from light. Also, in order not to be taken for Arians, let us surely and promptly insist that at no point did God *begin* to write this Word; He is, rather, the unbegotten Scribe, *ho Grammateus ho anarchos*, who pens His composition in the grammar of eternity.

As for the Scroll, it is the eternal inscription of the Father, His only begotten Son, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. Indeed, according to the Creed, the Scroll is of one being (*homoousios*) with the Scribe. The written message, therefore, is absolutely complete and sufficient, though no one but God can read it; no one knows the Son but the Father.

For reasons having to do with goodness and love, however, the Father is not satisfied with keeping this eternal Word on the inside, all to Himself, as it were.

He determines, rather, for the Scroll also to be written *ad extra*, on the *outside*, so that the goodness and love of the Scribe and the Scroll may be shared with a multitude of readers—so that the love with which the Father loves the Son may be in them, and He in them.

Therefore, with the willing (but necessary) cooperation of a second writer, a young Galilean woman, the Scroll is inscribed on a second side, when the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. The Scroll remains, nonetheless, one and the same, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. It is a single Scroll inscribed on two faces, positioned in the two directions that constitute salvation history: *homo Deo, Deus homini*.

These two directions—man to God and God to man—indicate that the Scroll is the medium of a transmission, and not the medium only, but also the Mediator, the single link between God and all that is not God. Those on the outside have no access to the inside except through that Scroll, for the simple reason that the Father has no dealings with *any* creature, not even in the act of creation, except through His Son.

The Scroll, moreover, is wonderfully translucent, so the glory that shines through it is "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is truly luminous, a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Man was created, in fact, for no other purpose than for the study and enjoyment of this Scroll.

Nor was the Incarnation a kind of divine afterthought. Indeed, the first lineaments on the Scroll's second side were already penciled in, as it were, in creation itself, when man was formed *capax Dei*. This expression (for which, I apologize, there is no real English equivalent) means, not only that human nature was so constructed as to be capable of elevation to the divine nature by grace; it also means that man's nature was so formed, in the act of its creation, as to be capable of assumption by God's Word. Humanity was *designed* with a view to the hypostatic union.

Moreover, truly to affirm the Incarnation we should say—with all the reverence we can muster—not only that man is *capax Dei*, but also that God must in some sense be *capax hominis*. There is something about God's eternal

Scroll that makes it capable of receiving an inscription on a second side. The translucency of the Incarnation thus teaches us something also of the inner life of the Scroll—just enough, in fact, to produce trembling.

Our only source of the knowledge of both God and man is the place where they two are joined forever, that Parchment penned on either side. This is the Scroll that Ezekiel, rapt in mystic vision, was told to take and eat. We too, sitting by the Chebar of our exile, are told to do the same—to take the Word into ourselves, making it our food and inwardly digesting it.

Continuity and Newness

When the New Testament uses the expression "Scriptures," it normally refers to the Old Testament.[1] The earliest Christian preaching appealed to that body of literature as a necessary component in the Gospel itself. For example, in the Church's first recorded sermon, the Apostle Peter quotes both the Psalms and the prophecy of Joel as integral to the Christian message.[2] Philip explains to an Ethiopian pilgrim how a prophetic book prophesied the Passion of Christ (Acts 8:26–40). Apollos, in the synagogue at Ephesus, demonstrates "from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah" (18:28), and Paul appeals to both "the Torah of Moses and the Prophets" to persuade his visitors at Rome "with respect to Jesus" (28:23).

This feature of the apostolic preaching is carried over to the Gospels. Thus, the Evangelist Matthew constantly indicates how something or other in the life of Jesus happens in fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy.[3] The same interest is obvious, too, in the Gospels of Luke and John.[4]

Sometimes the Old Testament is said to relate to the Christian Mystery through some form of symbolism, whether designated as allegorical (*allegoroumena*, Gal. 4:24), or figurative (*typikos*, 1 Cor. 10:11), or parabolic (*parabole*, Heb. 9:9; 11:19). This vocabulary passed quickly into Christians' understanding of the Old Testament by recourse to its "types"[5] and "allegories."[6] (In spite of modern efforts to distinguish them, by the way, the Church Fathers used these two terms interchangeably.)

It is significant, however, that not a single Church Father, whether Greek or Latin, ever uses the word *typology* to describe a Christian reading of the Old Testament. The complete absence of this term in patristic literature is a pretty good indication that what modern scholars call "typology" has little to do with the exegetical understanding of the Church Fathers. Fidelity to those Fathers will prompt us never to abstract the "types" of the Christian Mystery in the Hebrew Bible from the historical narratives of which they are a part. Christian readers severely limit their understanding of the Old Testament if they read it simply to find poetic analogies with the New.

What is currently called "biblical typology," if it divorces the Old Testament types from the original narratives of which they are integral parts, reduces Bible-reading to an ahistorical form of poetic contemplation. The biblical "types," "parables," "figures," and "allegories" are integral to the Bible's historical continuum, and fidelity to the Sacred Text should preclude their abstraction from the biblical story.

Christian understanding of the Old Testament must never separate its figurative images from the sequential and literary contexts in which they appear. There is no adequate substitute for the narrative reading of Old Testament history, and the omission of such reading deprives the Christian of a serious measure of his birthright.

As the *paidagogos eis Christon* ("tutor to bring us to Christ," Gal. 3:24), the Old Testament provides the narrative properly foundational to Christian theology itself. The sequential format of biblical history and literature is an essential component of our faith. When St. Jerome said that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ, he was talking about the *Old* Testament.

Consequently, when the apostles went forth to preach the Gospel, they regularly placed it in the context of Old Testament history. Thus, Stephen commenced his testimony to Jesus by declaring, "the God of glory appeared to our Father Abraham in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2). Paul, probably taking his cue from the daily assigned synagogue reading, began his discussion of Jesus, "The God of this people chose our fathers and exalted the people when they lived as sojourners in the land of Egypt" (13:15).

Indeed, the New Testament itself starts with a synopsis of Old Testament history. It famously begins:

> The book of genesis (*biblos geneseos*) of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. (Matt. 1:1–2)

Here the story of Jesus commences with the Law and the Prophets. These opening verses of the Apostolic Scriptures inaugurate the account of our redemption by introducing two covenants with God: that with Abraham, positioned in the nucleus of the *Torah*, and that with David, established at the core of the *Nebi'im*. These two covenants associated with the Law and the Prophets provide the structure for "the genesis of Jesus Christ," who appears in this world to fulfill the promise conveyed in each covenant.

Implementing the historical transmission of these covenants, "Abraham begot Isaac" and "David begot Solomon." Then, when the Babylonian Captivity put all God's promises in peril, "Jeconiah begot Shealtiel." It is important not to overlook Shealtiel, the first of David's progeny not to inherit his throne. David's earthly throne had disappeared; now Israel could look forward to a greater fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

The New Testament does not neglect Shealtiel for the same reason it does not neglect Abiud, and nor should we. These figures are part of the ancient field in which God buried the Mystery He planned to reveal in Christ. To attain that treasure we have to purchase the *whole* field. Christians must never succumb to the impression that Jesus is available to them without Shealtiel and Abiud. They must never repeat the mistake of Marcion. There is no serious understanding of the Gospel apart from the history and narrative presented in the Old Testament. A Christ without the Hebrew Scriptures is not the authentic Christ.

However, in the outline of biblical history at the beginning of the New Testament, the attentive reader will also notice the abrupt grammatical shift attendant on the introduction of Jesus Himself. During Matthew's threefold list of the fourteen generations of that outline, verse after verse declares that So-and-

so begat What's-his-name; the sequence takes on a rhythmic quality. But then, dramatically, this cadence is broken when Jesus appears on the scene. *No one* is said to beget Jesus; He is the object of no verb. On the contrary, He jumps from the page in the nominative case, the *subject* of a new verb: "Mary, of whom *Jesus was born*" (Matt. 1:16).

He is not just the next step in the older sequence. Jesus is not simply an extension or "product" of the Old Testament. As He enters human existence, He is not just the progeny of another "begot." He is, rather, a new entity, and His birth represents a fresh, unaccountable intrusion into salvation history.

When He appears, consequently, both in history and on the biblical page, we know that a greater than Jonah is here, and a wiser than Solomon; we are presented with someone greater than the temple and counted worthy of more glory than Moses. When He meets us at the well, we recognize that He is greater than our father Jacob, who dug the well. Indeed, God's Son is the one whose day Abraham rejoiced to see. He is the Mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises. And it really is a *new* covenant, because its Guarantor is God's very Son. In short, Christ came as High Priest of the good things that have come, and He is the minister of a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands. The first page of the New Testament really is written on a *new* leaf.

Christology and the Gospels

When we affirm that the Word Incarnate redeemed the human race, it is instructive to reflect how both the subject ("Word") and its modifier ("Incarnate") function in that affirmation. First, the subject—the Redeemer—is the Word Himself. This affirmation was the intent of Cyril of Alexandria's expression, *mia physis*—"a single reality," when he spoke of our Redeemer. There are not two persons in Jesus Christ. Such is the meaning of "single-subject" Christology.

Cyril had in mind to deny (against Nestorius) that the divinity and humanity in Christ constituted two personal or grammatical subjects. It is not as though God's Son was looking over the shoulder and observing the thoughts of the man Jesus. On the contrary, there is in Christ a single acting subject—one thinker,

one consciousness, one reflective being, one feeler, one speaker, one doer—a single "I," a single "you," a single "he." This affirmation of a "single-subject Christology" was proclaimed as dogma at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Second, the modifier, "Incarnate," identifies the means through which the Word redeemed us: the *debarim*, the words and deeds, of the Word in His full human existence. The dogma of the Incarnation affirms that we were saved through the personal experiences of God's Son in human history—the very things the Word did and underwent—from the instant of His conception, through His birth and infancy, through the events and phases of His life, through His ministry and teaching, through His obedient sufferings and death on the Cross, through His Resurrection and entry into eternal glory. Human redemption "happened" in the humanity of the eternal Word, as He passed through, transformed, and deified our human existence.

Although various Christological heresies have obliged the Church to defend the dogma of the Incarnation by recourse to abstract concepts like "nature" and "essence," in the four Gospels we find a more dynamic and existential way to speak of this same Mystery. It is a narrative style, which better corresponds, I submit, to the actual historical experience (St. Gregory of Nyssa's *genesthai*) of the Word Incarnate.

For this reason, no Christology should attempt to supersede the translucence of the Gospel stories, as though to point a handheld flashlight at the sun. The Mystery of Christ appeared in history with full clarity. Neither the ecumenical councils nor the Fathers of the Church sought to *clarify* anything of the Mystery.

Nor should any theory of dogmatic development pretend that the Incarnation has ever attained an expression superior to, or more transparent than, that of the Gospels—as though later generations of Christians could grasp the Mystery of Christ more clearly than the four Evangelists. The Fathers of the ecumenical councils would have been horrified by such a suggestion! On the contrary, we judge later expressions of Christology by the standard of the Gospels, not vice-versa.

Indeed, we may say that the chief purpose of the Church's Christological dogmas is to provide a protective hedge around the narrative presentation of the

Mystery proclaimed in the Gospels. The creeds and dogmatic formulations are exegetical illustrations of the Gospels. For this reason, before we recite the Nicene Creed (which also has a narrative structure) at the Holy Eucharist, we first attend to a living word proclaimed from a page of the Gospel book. This is the book held high in liturgical processions. This is the book laid open—pages down—on the heads of our bishops as the Church presses ordaining hands upon them.

In the narrative transitions of the Gospel stories, we encounter the literary replica—the rhetorical icon—of the unique incarnational history: the living experience of the Word as He assumed and sanctified the passing phases of our humanity.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria loved to reflect on this appearance of the eternal in the Christological moments of history. "We affirm," he wrote,

> that God's Son, while visible to the eyes, a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, nestled at the breast of His Virgin Mother, filled all creation as God, and was seated at the Father's right hand.[7]

This truth was equally clear to Cyril's Latin contemporary, Augustine of Hippo. "Imagine," Augustine wrote of Jesus,

> that the Almighty did not create this Man—however He was formed—from the womb of His mother, but abruptly introduced Him before our eyes. Suppose He passed through no ages from infancy to youth, or that He neither ate nor slept. Would that not have proved the heretics correct? . . . But now a Mediator has appeared between God and men, so that, binding both natures in the unity of His person, He might elevate the ordinary to the sublime, and temper the sublime to the ordinary.[8]

From Incarnation to Historiography

When God's Son assumed the form of flesh and entered history, a kind of logic called for His life to assume, as well, the form of *letters*—*grammata*—and,

eventually, to enter the realm of historiography. The four Gospels were literary extensions, as it were, of the Incarnation. Indeed, for St. Bonaventure, the writing of the Gospels is so "logical" an inference to be drawn from the premise of the Incarnation that he believed exactly four (and only four) Gospels were required. Why? Because they were applications of Aristotle's four causes!

That inference was not drawn at once, of course, and we are able to trace certain steps in the canonizing process. Oral transmission came first. The story of Jesus, before it was recorded on parchment, was told by word of mouth, as we see in the sermons in the Acts of the Apostles (e.g., 10:36–37; 13:23–25).

St. Mark's work was the decisive point, apparently, where the proclaimed Gospel was transformed into a written narrative. Indeed, an indication of this transition is the fact that the chronological limits of Mark's account are identical to those in the apostolic sermons, namely, "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism by John to the day that He was taken up from us" (Acts 1:21–22). Mark began with John's baptism and ended with the empty tomb.

In addition, we have early testimonies linking Mark's Gospel directly to the apostolic preaching. Papias of Hierapolis, about AD 140, quoted an anonymous elder who called Mark the "interpreter of Peter,"[9] a description repeated within a generation by both the Roman *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* and Irenaeus of Lyons.[10]

The testimony of Papias is particularly instructive, because it lists in detail the implications of Mark's relationship to the preaching of Peter. He tells us that Mark "did not compose an orderly account of the things concerning the Lord." Mark left out nothing of what Peter had remembered, insisted Papias, and he wrote nothing untrue. Still, Mark composed with "the needs of his readers" in mind, as did Peter in his preaching. It was the written expression of a homiletic impulse.

Now not for a minute, let me say, do I think this description of Papias does justice to the literary merits of Mark. I cite it only because it clearly points to the oral transmission of his material and its sermonic setting. Mark's narrative reflected, and was closely tied to, the Gospel as preached. It was not yet

historiography in the sense of a work studiously researched and set out in a critically constructed sequence. Mark was, rather, the point of transition when preaching became literature.

With regard to Matthew (whom Eusebius, significantly, named after Mark), the testimony of Papias is shorter, but it still reflects the same setting. He tells us simply that Matthew arranged "the sayings" (*ta logia*) of Jesus.[11]

As in the case of Mark, let me mention that Matthew's literary accomplishment seems to me much subtler and far more complex than the description of Papias indicates. I cite it only as a testimony that in Matthew we do not yet have a closely researched historical study of the subject. The Gospels of both Mark and Matthew were developments in that direction, however—steps moving from preaching and toward historical literature in a stricter sense.

Among the Evangelists, it is in Luke that we first meet a real historian, in the full sense of someone who explicitly and consciously thought of himself as "doing" history. In the first prologue affixed to his double work, Luke described his enterprise in exactly this way, saying, "it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account" (Luke 1:3).

Aware that he was about to do something different, Luke spoke of the earlier efforts of those who had "taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us." Of this group, which certainly included Mark, Luke was not critical, because they too had relied on "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:1–2). Nonetheless, Luke was aware he was embarking on a venture new to Christian literature, and I believe a close, critical study of his work will show what he had in mind to do.

Isaiah and the Ministry of Jesus

When the Evangelist Luke began his account of Jesus' public ministry with the reading of Isaiah (Luke 4:18–19), he also used that prophetic text to provide a literary synopsis of the Gospel story.

The passage begins, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me." Here Luke conveys Jesus' sense of the significance of His

Baptism in the Jordan, when "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him" (3:21–22). To indicate the change wrought by the Baptism, Luke afterwards wrote, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (4:14). Since Jesus, even before His Baptism, "grew and became strong in the Spirit" (2:40), this reference to His return to Galilee is particularly striking.

Luke's is the only one of the four Gospels that relates this enhanced reception of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' prayer. He writes, "While He prayed, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him." Luke suggests, that is to say, that this new outpouring of the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus in response to His prayer. This interpretation is consistent with Luke's version of Jesus' instruction on prayer: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13; contrast Matt. 7:11).

In the Isaian text Jesus read in the synagogue are other clear references to the larger story told by Luke. It declares, for instance, that Jesus was anointed "to preach the gospel to the poor." This is precisely what we find shortly afterwards, when Jesus "lifted up His eyes toward His disciples and said, '*blessed are you poor*, for yours is the kingdom of God'" (Luke 6:20). Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, Jesus emphasizes that the message of salvation is directed to the poor (12:13–41; 16:19–31; 18:18–23).

Isaiah's continuing list of those to whom the Messiah ministers—the captives, the brokenhearted, the blind, and the oppressed—corresponds closely to the message sent to the very man who had baptized Jesus:

> "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them." (7:22)

It corresponds, likewise, to the Lord's catalogue of those summoned to the great banquet: "Bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind" (14:21).

(14:21).

In Luke's narrative, the ministry of Jesus illustrates all the details of the Isaian prophecy. Thus, when the prophet declared that the Messiah would "heal the brokenhearted," Luke believed their number included the ostracized leper (5:12–16) and the parents bereaved of their children (7:11–17; 8:49–56). Isaiah's promise that the Messiah would "proclaim liberty to the captives" was fulfilled in the repentant woman (7:36–50) and those set free from demonic possession (4:41; 8:26–39; 9:37–49). Isaiah's pledge of liberation for the oppressed was amply redeemed in the paralytic (5:17–26), the man with the withered hand (6:6–11), the centurion's servant (7:1–10), the bleeding woman (8:40–48), the crippled "daughter of Abraham" (13:10–17), and the ten lepers (17:11–19). And the prophecy of sight for the blind was fulfilled along the road through Jericho (18:35–43).

Finally, Isaiah also foretold that the Messiah would "proclaim the year acceptable to the Lord." Luke, for his part, was in no doubt what year was intended. The "year acceptable to the Lord" was "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (3:1). Alone among the Evangelists, Luke fixes the year Jesus was baptized and His public ministry commenced. Like the Hebrew prophets before him, Luke identifies the exact political setting in which God's Word enters history. The Lord of the prophets takes the political order very seriously.

According to Luke, then, everything was ready: Tiberius was on the throne at Rome, Pontius Pilate represented him in Judea, Herod governed Galilee, his brother Philip was in charge of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. This was the determined setting in which "the word of God came to John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness" (3:1–4).

This was the year foretold by Isaiah; this, truly, was "the year acceptable to the Lord." Everything was now prepared for the manifestation of the Messiah, who confessed the fact when He arose and declared, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Teacher and Savior

Teacher and Savior

The Bible regards as inseparable two things many of our contemporaries can hardly imagine are related—namely, love for one another and faith in Jesus as the Son of God: “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23).

Why both things together? Indeed, to not a few people nowadays they appear to be at odds. After all, love for one another is a value of manifest, unquestioned, and universal appeal. It is a common, comprehensive, unconditional blessing, favorable to humanity everywhere and always. No person of good will can take a rational stand against love for one another. Pursued seriously, in fact, it insinuates a promise of world peace.

In the view of our contemporaries, however, hardly any of these considerations are true with respect to faith in Jesus. The confessional claims of such faith, far from being self-evident, are hard to argue and impossible to verify, a condition that explains why, for no necessary or useful purpose, faith in Jesus tends to *divide* men from one another. It appears to be dogmatic and narrow, determined by the restrictions of a particular and questionable history (patriarchy, messianism, and all that) that even Jesus failed to escape. Pursued seriously, in fact, faith in Jesus insinuates a threat of sectarian disputation, strife, and religious wars.

This alleged dilemma poses for Christians, of course, an apologetic task. Some apologists, by way of response, contend that the dilemma comes not from Jesus but from His witless, unworthy followers. Jesus, we are told, is not responsible for the sundry sectarian views adopted by the narrow-minded dogmatists that invoke His authority.

On the contrary, we are told, Jesus was comprehensive and sympathetic. He affirmed people; He even said that He did not come to condemn the world. Indeed, the only individuals Jesus refused to affirm were narrow-minded, unsympathetic bigots, the sort who opposed universal benevolence, a non-judgmental attitude, and world peace. Jesus, for His part, actually commanded love for one another, and if we have not yet attained world peace, maybe the

principal reason is that Christians themselves have misunderstood the claims of Jesus.

Let me say that a key problem with this line of apologetic reasoning is that it diminishes Jesus, and this in two respects. The first has to do with fact and the second with presupposition.

First, with respect to fact, I cannot think of any Christian who has been more dogmatic about faith in Jesus than was Jesus Himself. I mean, for instance, what adjective other than "narrow" should we use to describe the statements, "*I am* the way, the truth, and the life" and "No one comes to the Father *except through Me*"? This is hardly what our apologists can call broad-minded and tolerant.

If comprehensiveness is always to be thought a merit and particularity ever to be judged an offense, what shall we say about the claim,

> "I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers." (John 10:1, 7–8)

It seems pretty obvious that if Jesus had committed no offense beyond telling people to love one another, He would hardly have suffered so much at the hands of those who knew Him and wanted to get rid of Him.

Jesus was not, however, an early version of Gandhi. He was not murdered because He taught a doctrine of universal benevolence and world peace. He endured the Cross, rather, precisely because He crossed people, asserting things about Himself that were particular, rigorously confessional, and unreservedly dogmatic.

Second, with respect to its presupposition, the aforesaid line of apologetic argument implicitly advances the priority of a universal ethical interest—namely, love for one another—over Jesus Himself. This priority a Christian will categorically reject. We believers do not receive Jesus because He measures up to a mark that we ourselves draw. The personal claims of Jesus are not validated because they conform to some already known set of ethical standards universally accepted. We do not hand our lives to Jesus because He meets certain spiritual

and moral qualifications that we recognize apart from Him.

All of this is to say that Jesus did not save the world by teaching men to love one another. He is the Savior of the world because he is God's unique and eternal Son, who assumed our flesh, and in that flesh laid down His life as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and then, in that flesh, rose from the dead.

I do not intend, of course, to deny that Jesus is also our Teacher. What I have in mind to reject, rather, is the notion that we are qualified to give our Teacher any "student evaluation," even a favorable one. I am saying Jesus is not the world's universal teacher in the sense that He teaches truths of a universal, self-evident appeal. The importance of Jesus does not lie in His being the most brilliant member of the faculty.

Teaching with Authority

Up front in every Orthodox Christian temple stands an icon called "Christ the Teacher." This fact suggests that "teacher" is one of most important images of our Christology.

This idea permeates the Gospels. The Semitic expression *Rabbi* appears to have been a title most readily applied to Jesus during His public ministry. This usage is best preserved in John's Gospel, where "Rabbi" (or "Rabbouni," my Rabbi) is a standard way for people to address Jesus. The word essentially means "Teacher."

The first time John wrote "Rabbi," he made a point of translating it into Greek—*didaskalos*—probably because not all his readers were familiar with the Semitic term. This was the early occasion when

> two disciples heard [John the Baptist] speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to him, "Rabbi (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), where are You staying?" (1:37–38)

The equivalence of *Rabbi* and *Didaskalos* was likewise indicated in the first words Nicodemus spoke to Jesus: "*Rabbi*, we know that you are a *didaskalos*

come from God" (3:2). John also provides the Greek translation of "Teacher," when Mary Magdalene calls Jesus "Rabbouni" (20:16). Sometimes John simply sticks with the Greek *Didaskalos*, instead of the Semitic word (8:4; 11:28; 13:13–14).

Mark preserves "Rabbi" or "Rabbouni" as a title by which the disciples addressed Jesus (9:5; 10:51; 11:21; and, alas, 14:45). More often, however, Mark simply gives the Greek noun (5:35; 14:14), especially in the case of direct address.[12] In Luke[13] and—on the whole—in Matthew,[14] the Greek word for "Teacher" replaces the Semitic "Rabbi." Thus, in one form or another—and constantly by implication—the first disciples thought of Jesus very much as "Teacher." It was surely His first title.

If His contemporaries were impressed that Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29), we modern folk should observe that He also does not teach like the scientists, the political philosophers, and the economists. Let me suggest, indeed, that if the teaching of Jesus is true, then there is something seriously wrong with the teaching of the scientists, the political philosophers, and the economists. I cite simple examples.

It has been a long time since I studied botany, but I do not recall a single botanical text urging me to "consider the lilies of the field" and compare their lot favorably with "Solomon in all his glory" (Matt. 6:28–29). And, although I know rather little of ornithology, I suspect that few authorities on the subject of birds would support the thesis that the "heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt. 6:26). Ornithologists are persuaded that birds feed themselves. Botanists, too, rarely mention haberdashery in connection with plants. Science, when it comments on the nourishment of the one and the adornment of the other, treats birds and flowers under the heading of "survival."

If Jesus, as Teacher, is radically out of step with scientists, He is scarcely less so with political philosophers. Who among them, for instance, would accept the proposition that we must turn the second cheek to the assailant who strikes the first (Matt. 5:39)? Name one political philosopher who thinks we should love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). Political philosophers will reject the teaching of Jesus for the same reason scientists do—it is a matter of survival. Non-resistance to

immediate threat is patently incompatible with survival.

Nor is the teaching of Jesus much in accord with economics. Several economic textbooks burden my shelves, but not one of them mentions the wisdom of donating my cloak to the man who absconds with my tunic (Matt. 5:40). Once again, the economist thinks in terms of survival. Those devoid of cloaks and tunics don't do well in a hostile environment, any more than the bird that sits around waiting for a heavenly Father to feed him.

By the usual modern standards, in short, Jesus does not have much going for Him. His teaching appeals to no otherwise obvious truths—truths that human wisdom would recognize by its own lights, truths that could stand without reference to Jesus.

A Parable about Authority

A life-long proponent of the "*Q* Hypothesis," I believe Matthew and Luke relied on the same (lost) literary "source" (German *Quelle*) for the material their Gospels have in common but do not share with Mark.

Like other proponents of this hypothesis, I have also been puzzled that this supposed *Quelle*, which mainly contained didactic material, also included the account of the centurion who appealed to Jesus on behalf of his ailing servant (Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10). Why would that single narrative be included in a document that otherwise embraced only didactic material?

It occurs to me that there is a very simple explanation for that inclusion: It is the presence of a genuine "parable" in the account of the centurion's servant. This parable, this didactic *mashal*, would explain the inclusion of the centurion story in the hypothetical *Q*.

The most striking feature of this parable, found in both versions, is the fact that the centurion—not Jesus—is the one who tells the parable. He says to Jesus,

> "I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Plainly put, what the centurion says is a real parable—a traditional biblical *mashal*, symbolic speech in which the meaning is conveyed through metaphor, simile, and/or allegory. In this case, the metaphor is military.

The centurion's parable has to do with authority, *exsousia*: "I also am a man placed under authority." That is to say, the centurion, in order to understand what Jesus is about, has recourse to what in military terms is called the "chain of command," because he recognizes in Jesus a source of authority—the ability to make things happen by way of simple, even monosyllabic, command. This is something the centurion understands.

Indeed, it is possible that no one in the New Testament understood better than this centurion the proper function of Jesus' parables. He tells this parable to explain to Jesus *why it is not necessary* for the Savior to come and visit the sick man in person. The proper word of authority is all that is needed. Jesus' presence is no more necessary to the situation than the presence of a military officer is necessary in every place where his authority extends.

In his short declaration about authority, then, it is easy to discern that the centurion faithfully copies the style of Jesus' own parables. Just as our Lord sent His listeners to their own labor and occupations to discern the inner mysteries of divine grace—just as He directed the farmer, for example, to inspect the spiritual aspects of both the sowing (Luke 8:4–15) and the harvest (10:2)—just as He encouraged the shepherd (15:4–15) and the fisherman (Matt. 4:19) to consider the religious dimensions of their labor—so this centurion proposes the circumstances of his military profession in order to illustrate the spiritual quality of a truth. He examines the conditions of his own calling in order to convey a specific quality of the ministry of Jesus.

And what does the centurion communicate in this parable? He expresses the unseen but effective power of authority. He knows himself "subject to authority"; he recognizes his subordination to the government of Rome and to Herod Antipas, from whom he received his commission, and he knows how to delegate that authority to others.

First, the centurion is a man who does what he is told, because he acknowledges the claims of that unseen spiritual reality called "authority." In

addition, he extends some measure of that authority; he speaks a command, and others obey him. His word is effective. To borrow the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, this authority, to which the centurion refers, is "not seen," but there is no doubt about the "evidence" of it.

The centurion is manifestly familiar, not only with the Lord's parables, but also with His miracles. He may not have seen those wonders firsthand, but he knows about them from others. Word has reached him already that Jesus' "word was with authority" (Luke 4:32).

Because it is a spiritual reality, authority is essentially invisible but is expressed in signs. Yet no one reasonably doubts the real and very consequential existence of authority; there is overwhelming witness to it everywhere, and the centurion knows this from his own life and vocation. Consequently, he is able to recognize the evidence of authority in Jesus.

The centurion's faith, then—declared greater than any in Israel—is based on hearing and then thinking through what he has heard; he weighs well the evidence to which there is witness. And that evidence testifies to something any sensible centurion can detect at a glance: the authority of lordship, the ability to hold complete sway by a direct command.

Panels, Windows, and Pages

In describing Luke as the Church's first "historian," I mean to tie his Gospel—and, of course, the Acts of the Apostles—to the great historical sweep of the Old Testament sagas: Judges, Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Maccabees.

Still, the actual construction of the Gospel according to Luke is not structurally different from the work of the other Evangelists—in the sense that the dominant format in all of them is the individual "scene." The Gospels have an episodic quality. Each is mainly a series of what the Greeks called *epeisodos* or *epeisodion*.

The Gospels are made up of *short* stories; although each narrative is an integral literary composition, anyone can see that the Gospels were intended to be read story-by-story, as the Church has, in fact, always read them in the

inherited lectionaries. These small narratives go by the Greek name *pericope*, which means “a rounded section.”

Christians assimilate the mystery of redemption in bite-size stories. The life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus are mediated to the Church in reasonably enclosed frames of narrative. Each account represents a window, as it were, through which believers contemplate the *apologos katholikos*, the “story as a whole.” Indeed, the impression of a door into a larger setting is conveyed in the word “episode”; an *epeisodion* is literally an “available entrance.” An episode gives access to a picture larger than itself.

Let me suggest that the episodic quality of the Gospels prompts a comparison with both framed art and the stage. Indeed, I submit that all these forms take their rise from the same impulse: the need for a concentrated regard of a *part* in order to contemplate the *whole*. G. K. Chesterton perceived this need when he remarked on “the boundary line that brings one thing sharply against another.” He went on to explain, “All my life I have loved frames and limits; and I will maintain that the largest wilderness looks larger seen through a window.”

A *framed* gazing at reality—whether in a window, or in the theater, or in panel art, or in episodic narrative—enjoys a twofold advantage. First, recognizing that limitation is necessary to form, it draws contemplation to a focus. Whether in a scene of *Macbeth* or a seascape of Turner, one receives the whole truth in a size not too big to ingest.

Only a measured form—and every form imposes a limit—can produce freedom. This principle is as true in narrative and theater as it is in art and music. There is no freedom apart from form. Freedom from restriction, or from limitation, is not freedom; it is chaos. In respect to this principle, every good storyteller will agree, I believe, with the jazz saxophonist Branford Marsalis: “You don’t play what you feel. There’s only freedom in structure, my man. There’s no freedom in freedom.”

Second, the restraining lines of a frame or a window indicate an appropriate humility in the presentation. The framework announces, even before the story begins, that the composition strives to be no more than an outline. Perhaps the German equivalent, *Grundriss*, better insinuates what I have in mind: both the

foundational aspect of the enterprise and the humility in which it is *grounded*. An episode accomplishes this in literature.[15]

The Gospel itself declares the benefit of this narrative humility: "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." In a framed presentation, the myriad elements left unspoken convey an internal and luminous exaltation, an intimation of the unused energies of truth. The cataphatic components of a scene implicitly disclose a greater glory.

Ironically, the limitations imposed by a recited, theatrical, or artistic frame are not negative but positive. Sometimes one sees more by seeing less. Take the sun, for instance. The worst possible way to see the sun is to look at it. Neither in life nor on canvas does a viewer gaze straight at the sun. Also, a direct attention to the sun effectively precludes the sight of anything else. The sun's true exaltation is discerned, rather, in the humbler contrast of lights and shadows.

The wind, too, abases itself on the canvas; its exaltation is conveyed in the bent branches and the turbulence of the wave. Art of any kind humbles itself in order to be exalted.

In the theater, the energy and exaltation of a given scene come largely from off-stage, being derived from the discerned plot and context of the whole story. Indeed, few theatrical scenes are intelligible except within an act and the entire production. Plot and assumed context provide the sun and wind, as it were, of the narrative portrayed in the immediate scene.

Framed Openings into Truth

We may further reflect that windows are usually quadrangular.[16] Quadrangles are far more stable—and, therefore, dependable—than circles, inasmuch as circles have a tendency . . . well, to roll away. The quadrangle, by holding everything steady, favors an analytic consideration of the content in the figure. Angles encourage discourse and rationality. Because of the angles and lines facing one another, the viewer—or reader—is disposed to trace trajectories and pose questions.

Indeed, we might think of the quadrangle as a bold effort to hold a circle in place. Its straight lines deliberately sunder the fluidity of the curve, for the purpose of a more careful consideration arranged in angled stages. The quadrangle, parsing the 360 degrees around the circle's center, dispatches them into four corners, from where they turn around and confront one another. The scene becomes a true "*present*ation," a rendering present of the truth. The viewer is inspired to come at a subject from dialectically contrasted points, where progressing lines dramatically change direction and "bend back." Angles—literally—re*flect*. This is important; no one appreciates a work—a story, a play, a painting—that just runs around in circles.[17]

A similar angularity contours the stories in the Gospels—a feature, I suggest, favoring critical reflection on their content. Look at the Gospel scenes. Taut lines are drawn between angled points. Sundry tensions are strung from contrasting corners of the story. The stress of oppositions is everywhere: Jesus and His enemies, a rich man and Lazarus, deformity and healing, stormy waves and a calm sea, Mary and Martha, before and after, life and death, heaven and hell, "You have heard it said" and "*but* I say unto you," and so on. The concentrated energy in each scene discloses the drama of the whole story.

Every scene in the Gospels, whatever its length, is set within humbling limits that confer both form and freedom; nothing in the narrative is allowed to fly out into space. Each component in the presentation holds its place, and the reader is summoned to take his own place within the scene.

Recall, by way of illustration, those four friends suspending the paralytic from the penetrated roof into the presence of Jesus, the equally penetrating gaze Jesus fixes upon them, His unexpected declaration to the suspended man, the silent hostility and damning accusation of His enemies, and Jesus' apodictic reply that forms the final word. The sundry narrative tensions in the scene are represented in the gravitational pull that holds taut the angled ropes attached to the paralytic's pallet. One finds something of this pattern in virtually every story in the Gospels.

New Technique

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Another historical development—not obviously related—strengthened the impression of an "angular" quality of the Gospel stories; this was the growing popularity of the *codex*, the connected collection of pages we now call a "book." Although the most ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures have survived in the form of scrolls (*volumina*), there is no evidence that the works of the New Testament were either composed or copied in that more ancient form. The Christian Church and the codex both emerged in the Mediterranean Basin in the first century, and, as far as we can discern, Christians adopted the new style right away.[18]

This form, developed from the Roman wooden-and-wax tablet, was described at the time by the Latin poet Martial, who drew attention to its reader-friendly advantages: The reader could hold the work with one hand and quickly go through the written material if he needed to find a particular passage.[19]

The pages of a codex—whether of vellum, papyrus, or paper—were originally folded concertina-style and attached at one edge to a thicker substance, usually wood or bark. [20] With the arrival of the codex, in short, the page replaced the scroll.

It is challenging to calculate the resultant influence on the reader's experience. I am prepared, nonetheless, to suggest this much: In the case of the Gospels' narrative passages, the physical separation of the pages abets the reader's sense of the *mis-en-scène*, the episode-quality of each account. Every story in Jesus' public ministry is physically aided to stand on its own.[21] The individual story has its particular salvific, theophanic quality. On every page the energy issuing from the person of the Savior acts within the confining lines (*fines*) of a format, as though on a plain geometric surface. The translucent face of the page, in turn, beckons the mind; it invites the reader to enter the scene, to find his place—here and now—within the Gospel encounter; it summons him to a narrative transfiguration.

Indeed, every Gospel scene potentially carries the grace of our Lord's Transfiguration. In that special encounter on the mountain, wrote Maximus the Confessor, both creation and all the Holy Scriptures are transfigured. These are

the glorified garments of Christ; the *logoi* inscribed in creation and in the Bible are transfigured in the *Logos* who stands in prayer before His Father.[22] These garments of the Word become translucent—"thin"—in the effusion of the divine glory.[23]

Notes

1 The exception is 2 Peter 3:16, which places St. Paul's letters among the "Scriptures." This is our earliest inclusion of New Testament works in the body of Sacred Scripture.

2 Acts 2:21, 28, 35; Joel 2:28–32; Ps. 109(110):1; 15(16):8–11.

3 Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17–18; 8:17; 12:16–21; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54; 27:9.

4 Luke 4:17–21; 21:22; 24:44; John 12:37–41; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:9; 19:24, 38.

5 E.g., Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 90.2; 140.1; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 4.26.1.

6 E.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.3; Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.48; 6.29.

7 Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters* 17.3.

8 Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 137 [to Volusianus] 3.9.

9 Eusebius of Caesarea, *History* 3.39.15.

10 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* 3.1.2.

11 Eusebius of Caesarea, *History* 3.39.16.

12 Mark 4:38; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1.

13 Luke 7:40; 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11.

14 Matt. 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 26:18.

15 I wonder if any writer has perfected the episodic form more convincingly than Rafael Sabatini. Observe, for instance, the economy, translucence, and

restrained energy in each chapter of *Scaramouche*. Significantly, even the *name* of the work is drawn from the theater! Sabatini tries never to give us—at one time—more people, activities, or ideas than a modest stage can support.

16 Contrast the rectangle to the proscenium's arch (an imitation of vaulted sky) and the circularity suggested by the noun "pericope."

17 The sum of its angles gives the quadrangle a unique affinity to the circle. No triangle or pentagon need apply.

18 Hebrew biblical manuscripts from the Middle Ages were copied in the codex form, the Aleppo Codex and Leningrad Codex being the most important and famous.

19 All along, of course, and centuries after giving up the round *volumen*, we continue to *turn* pages! On the other hand, with the spread of the Kindle phenomenon, we modern people have now reverted to the ancient scroll format; we may have no idea which page we are reading, but we are supplied with a material calculation of how far along we are!

20 *Codex* was originally *caudex*, meaning a tree trunk or a block of wood.

21 The clear exception is the more complex account involving Jairus's daughter and the woman with the issue of blood.

22 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10. Irenaeus of Lyons was, I believe, the first Church Father to tie the Transfiguration to the task of prophetic exegesis; cf. *Against the Heresies* 4.20.9–12.

23 Maximus the Confessor, *Theological Chapters* 2.14.

CHAPTER 8

Jesus' Public Ministry

When Jesus, in response to His Mother's query in the temple, said that He must "be about the things of My Father," He indicated that His responsibilities in this world were multiple. "To be about" is a reasonable approximation of the Greek expression, *einai en*, which literally means, "to be in." Perhaps closer is the recent American informal idiom, "to be into" something, in the sense of being engaged in—or taken up with—something.[1]

"The things of My Father" comes as close as English style will allow as a translation of *ta tou Patros mou*. "The things" in Greek is only one word, the neuter plural form of the definite article: *ta*. These are the sundry "things" the Father has charged His Son to accomplish.

Human existence is composed, in fact, of myriad moments, each burdened with unique opportunities and/or particular responsibilities. These are discrete. The continuity of "time" (*chronos*) does not preclude the phenomenon of "times" (*kairoi*). The texture of life may be likened, in this respect, to the water in a bay: In addition to the large, scheduled motions of ebb and tide, there are smaller waves and thousands of eddies, each of which—no matter how slight the size or brief the moment—reflects the light from a distinct and particular slant. The physical continuity of the water in no way diminishes the particularity of its waves and undulations.

Human life is lived in moments. For "every purpose under heaven" there is what Ecclesiastes calls its "time," its *'eth*. Human existence is made up of these sundry *'ittim*, the diverse "occasions" of man's many and diverse activities

(Eccl. 3 *passim*). These individual occasions no more obstruct the flow of life than the variety of notes and chords in a melody impedes the flow of the music. This is how a human life is structured.

Now, the Christian faith contends that the salvation of the human race was accomplished through the passage of a specific human life. The continuity of Jesus' resolve, His singleness of purpose—the "one thing necessary" that governed His soul—was worked out through myriad distinct moments. Apostolic preaching summarized them, saying that Jesus of Nazareth "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

The single "will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30) was pursued in the great diversity called "these things"—*tavta* (1:28; 2:18; 5:16; 6:1; 7:1; etc.). The Apostle John, who identifies himself as "the disciple who testifies of *these things* and wrote *these things*" (21:24), assures us that "these things (*tavta*) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31). Both aspects of Jesus' life—its unity of intent and its multiplicity of concerns—are contained in the expression, "the things of My Father." This is what accounts for the narrative multiplicity of the Gospels.

The Church and the Teaching of Jesus

We are accustomed to thinking of the teaching of Jesus as unfiltered, so to speak. I mean by this, we tend to read it as directly addressed to us in our own time and in our own circumstances; it is *eternally* applicable.

However, to think of the teaching of Jesus as "eternal"—eternal, plain and simple—runs the risk of separating it from the actual ministry of the Teacher, because His was a teaching conveyed *in the flesh*. An important inference drawn from the declaration that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" is, I believe, the thesis that the Lord's teachings were circumscribed by time and space—the limiting factors of His own culture and circumstances.

For this reason, Christians from the earliest times have been obliged to make creative adjustments to those teachings, often through applications to analogous circumstances. Sometimes those adaptations of what Jesus taught reveal great insight into other aspects of the Christian Mystery.

An easy example of such an adjustment is found in the case of the Lord's command regarding sacrifices in the temple. Jesus directed His contemporaries, we recall:

> Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matt. 5:23–24)

After AD 70, however, there was no longer a temple in which the offering could be made. Indeed, during the forty years prior to the temple's destruction, the original context of this injunction was quite alien to the actual circumstances of those thousands of Christians who lived nowhere near Jerusalem nor would ever set eyes on the temple.

For this reason, the Lord's injunction about reconciliation and offerings was applied to a new context, as we see in the *Didache*, a Syrian document from probably the late first century. There we read:

> But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. (*Didache* 14)

Indeed, to this very day, Christians still understand the Holy Eucharist as the appropriate context in which to apply Jesus' teaching about fraternal reconciliation prior to the offering of sacrifice. We adhere to this injunction all the time, with never a conscious thought of the temple. That is to say, we long ago accepted this "adjustment" in Jesus' teaching.

In taking this example, in which the temple is the original context of the Lord's command, we touch on another theme of His teaching: the coming destruction of the temple. The Gospels provide evidence that Jesus spoke on this subject. In fact, the point was raised at His trial before the Sanhedrin, albeit by

false witnesses (see Matt. 26:60–61). We read these prophecies nowadays with hardly a thought to the political context in which they were spoken.

However the Lord's prophecies about the destruction of the temple were understood prior to the year 70, the context for their understanding altered dramatically after the temple was actually destroyed in that year. We see this change in perspective in the Gospels, where the Lord's predictions of the destruction of the temple (at least in Matthew and Mark) are set within His teaching about the Last Times and the end of the world.

During the first decade or so of the Church's history, nonetheless, what the Lord had to say about the coming destruction of the temple was largely understood in the political context of that time. For this reason, it was certainly a point of friction between Jesus' disciples and the other Jews. We see this friction in the case of Stephen, about whom his accusers said:

> This man does not cease to say things against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses delivered to us. (Acts 6:13–14)

Stephen himself, far from denying the charge, gave it extra weight in the course of his examination, insisting, "the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands" (7:48). Rather early, that is to say, what Jesus had to say about the coming destruction of the temple prompted some Christians, such as Stephen, to think more deeply about the transitory nature of any shrine or sanctuary men might build.

Those Christians, in their reflections on this point, went on to review the biblical teaching that even the tabernacle constructed by Moses had been modeled on a heavenly type revealed to the prophet on Mount Sinai. That sanctuary on high—in the very heavens to which Jesus had ascended—was the authentic model. Such reflections, derived from the Lord's prophecies about the temple's coming destruction, form much of the argument advanced in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Thus, various things the Lord said about the temple became seeds, as it were, planted in the creative thought of Christians. Memory became imagination,

Though the temple itself disappeared, what Jesus affirmed of it continued to grow and develop in Christian understanding.

Gospel Sequences

We already considered, at some length, that the Gospels are mainly composed of particular pericopes, discrete episodes, describing a scene in the life of Jesus, and we further reflected that attention to these individual stories provides the structure of the Church's traditional lectionaries.

These observations should not be understood in an absolute sense, however, because it is often the case that the Evangelists have deliberately linked these discrete stories, in various ways, in order to highlight certain points within them. Sometimes this is accomplished with a measure of subtlety.

For instance, the Evangelists not only juxtapose the incident of the Gadarene demoniac with the stilling of the storm on the lake, they also link the two stories thematically. Thus, when Jesus stills the storm, the astonished disciples ask, "Who is this?" Their query is answered just a few verses later, when the Gadarene demons inquire, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, *Son of the Most High God*?" (Mark 4:41; 5:7; Matt. 8:27, 29; Luke 8:25, 28). Question posed in one story, question answered in the next.

Sometimes two Gospel stories placed in sequence serve to illustrate an irony. Long recognized as an example of this style is the juxtaposition of the Lord's Transfiguration on the mountain with his healing of the little boy at the base of the mountain (Mark 9:1–29; Matt. 17:1–21; Luke 9:27–42). Perhaps the most famous observation of this parallel is found in Raphael's portrait of the Transfiguration, where the bottom half of the canvas depicts the chaotic scene of the little boy and his distressed father, surrounded by a crowd and the disciples, who are unable to help them.[2]

Sometimes we find an abrupt transition of a contrasting scene in order to convey an irony fundamental to the Gospel itself. For example, strength made perfect in infirmity, or the wisdom revealed to the simple. Observe, for instance, the following sequence:

> [Jesus says,] “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” At that time Jesus went through a field of grain on the Sabbath. His disciples, being hungry, began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. (Matt. 11:28—12:1)[3]

The first part of that transition comes at the end of what is arguably the loftiest, most spiritual section of Matthew’s Gospel. It began:

> I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to infants (*nepioi*). . . . All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. (11:25–27)

From that sublime height, including Jesus’ invitation to come to Him, there is an abrupt declension to the mundane walking of hungry men through a sown field. This sequence illustrates the actual experience of the Christian life, the concrete existence in which “we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11).

These disciples, to whom the Son transmits the intimate knowledge of His Father, labor and are heavy laden in this world, confessing, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Matthew heightens this contrast by commencing each scene with the same formula. Both aspects of the Christian life are revealed, he declares, *en ekeino to kairo*, “at that time.” This expression, used only twice in his Gospel, serves to bind these two ironically complementary scenes.

First, there is the conveyance of the divine Mystery to the infants:

> *At that time* Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to infants.” (Matthew 11:25)

Second, there is the concrete earthly situation in which the Mystery is conveyed to those infants:

> *At that time* Jesus went through a field of grain on the Sabbath. His disciples, being hungry, began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. (12:1)

"That time," therefore, refers to the Sabbath, symbolizing the "rest" Jesus gives to those who come to Him and receive the revelation of the Father.

Matthew's coupling of these two scenes is vital, inasmuch as the walking, the hungering, and the plucking of the grain illustrate what Jesus means when He speaks of those "heavy laden." To such as hunger and labor in this world, He promises an easy yoke and a "light" burden—that is to say, in rabbinical terms, a load that can be carried without violating the Sabbath rest.

This is the "rest for your souls" Jesus provides for those who come to Him. It consists in the knowledge of the true God revealed in and through His Son. The true Sabbath, therefore, is the presence of Christ, who walks with His disciples through their field of hunger. Having become a human being in order to reveal the Father, He shares their condition in the field.

Matthew goes on to speak of the "wise and prudent" who accuse those infants when, on the Sabbath, they "began to pluck heads of grain." "Look," they tell Jesus, "Your disciples are doing something not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

These accusers know nothing of the Sabbath rest. Rather, they "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders but will not, themselves, lift a finger to adjust them" (23:4). These are the "wise and prudent," to whom the knowledge of the Father has not been revealed. For them the Sabbath itself is a burden.

In order to defend these infants, the Lord of the Sabbath, the One promising "rest for your souls," responds to their accusers, summoning to mind great David, who "entered the house of God and ate the Bread of the Presence, which was not legitimate for him to eat, nor for those who were with him" (12:4).

Matthew conveys a great deal with this sequence. By ending it with Jesus' exegesis of the Torah (by an appeal to the "former prophets"), he indicates that the wisdom concealed from the wise and prudent has to do with the proper

understanding of Holy Scripture. That is to say, these two scenes in Matthew address exactly the point made by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3—4: The glory revealed in the face of Christ transfigures the Torah and the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Church's Confession

Among the three New Testament versions of the Lord's walking on the water (Mark 6:43–52; Matt. 14:22–33; John 6:15–21), Matthew's is perhaps the most unique and distinctive, because he alone tells of Simon Peter attempting the same thing.

This story in Matthew begins very much as it does in Mark and John; in all three narratives, the walking on the water immediately follows the multiplication of the loaves. After that event, the Lord compels the Twelve to depart by boat, while He Himself ascends, alone, a nearby hill to pray. Night falls, and the rest of the story takes place in the darkness.

The disciples' boat, going westward across the Sea of Galilee toward Gennesaret, about five miles away, encounters strong headwinds that stir the tossing waves. Hour by hour the boat's progress is very slow, and by the fourth watch of the night, between three and six o'clock in the morning, the disciples are still a great way from land.

Suddenly Jesus appears in the darkness, walking on the waves of the sea. The startled disciples, conjecturing the figure before them to be an illusion (*phantasma*) but nonetheless frightened at the sight, cry out in panic. In response, the voice of Jesus comes to them through the darkness, borne on the whirling courses of the wind: "Take heart, it is I. Be not afraid."

In the Gospels of Mark and John, the drama of the scene ends at this point, and Jesus enters into the boat. Thus, these two accounts climax with Jesus' self-identification: "It is I," or more literally, "I AM" (*ego eimi*). Indeed, in John's Gospel this is one of several places where Jesus utters those very words that resounded of old from the Burning Bush (see John 8:24, 28, 54; 13:19; 18:5). The theophany on the sea involves words as well as vision.

These theophanic components of the story are likewise found in Matthew's

These theophanic components of the story are likewise found in Matthew's account, but in this Gospel they do not form the story's climax; they are but the first half of the scene. In Matthew, when the voice of Christ calls to the disciples out of the darkness, someone in the boat replies to Him. Here the Lord's proclamation, "It is I," is not answered with silent acquiescence, but with an expression of doubt, or perhaps even of challenge. "Lord," says the ever-surprising Peter, "if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

"Come," said Jesus, and Peter in obedience stepped over the side of the boat. Still looking at the Lord, he planted his foot solidly on a wave and began to walk across the sea. We are not told how many steps Peter took, but as he moved away from the boat his attention became diverted by the storm. "But when he saw that the wind was boisterous," we are told, "he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out saying, 'Lord, save me!'"

"Stretch out Your hand from above," prayed the psalmist, "rescue me and deliver me out of great waters" (Ps. 144[143]:7). The prayer was heard. "And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him." Jesus and the embarrassed apostle climb into the boat.

Peter's name means "rock," and it is ironical that his sinking in the water was the only occasion on which he demonstrated a truly *rock*like quality. This man "of little faith" serves in Matthew's version as a symbol of every believer who walks toward Jesus in darkness and turmoil. Even in his failure, he is not condemned; he is saved by the extended hand of Jesus.

Although Mark and John tell this story as a theophany, it is curious that neither of them ends it with an explicit act of faith on the part of the disciples. Indeed, in Mark's account we are told, "their heart was hardened."

In Matthew, however, the story ends with the confession of faith by the disciples in the boat: "Truly, You are the Son of God." That confession of the apostolic faith, toward which the whole narrative builds, seems to call for three further comments.

First, it is substantially identical with Peter's Christological confession at Caesarea Philippi, two chapters later (Matt. 16:16). The two stories, both of them about Peter, are bound by that same confession of faith.

Second, Matthew makes an explicit point of the fact that the confession of

Second, Matthew makes an explicit point of the fact that the confession of faith took place "in the boat," a detail rather superfluous unless there is a special symbolic meaning in the boat. We are surely correct in seeing the confessing Church symbolized in Peter's apostolic fishing boat.

Third, when they make this proclamation of faith, the disciples are prostrate in adoration (*prosekynesan*). This is the same posture in which they will later receive the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel (28:17–20). Ultimately, then, it is not sufficient to describe Matthew's story of Peter on the water solely as one man's walk in faith. It is an account, rather, of the faith of the confessing Church.

The Adoration of the Christ

Among the several ways of confessing what we believe about Jesus, not least important, I think, is our posture when we pray to Him. To be sure, we can pray to our Lord in any of several postures, and it may be the case that each of them expresses some distinct aspect of our faith.

Standing before Christ, for instance, intimates a readiness to do His will. That, we recall, was the posture of John the Baptist (John 3:29). Again, sitting in the presence of Christ suggests a humble submission of ourselves to His tutelage. Such was the case with Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:39). Again, prayer on bended knee is a very special posture of love and supplication to Christ. Peter (Acts 9:40) and Paul (20:36) preferred to pray that way, and we know that Stephen died on his knees in the presence of Christ (7:60).

Even lying down on our beds, moreover, may express the confident faith that our Lord makes us dwell in peace and safety (Ps. 4:8). Indeed, that was the position in which the waking daughter of Jairus first encountered Him (Mark 5:41).

Among the bodily postures expressive of faith in Christ, however, the most solemn is that of prostration or adoration (*proskynesis*). This is especially obvious in the Gospel of Matthew, which rather habitually pictures various people encountering Jesus in that posture. Indeed, in Matthew, prostration is a supreme expression of the Christological faith.

We may note, for starters, that Matthew both begins and ends his account of Jesus' life by describing believers as prostrate before Him in faith. Thus, near the beginning of Matthew, the Magi from the East came "to adore Him"—*proskynevsai avtoi* (2:2). Nor were these distant Gentiles frustrated in their quest. "And when they had come into the house," wrote Matthew, "they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and adored Him"—*prosekynesan avtoi* (2:11).

At the other end of that same Gospel, just before the Eleven are sent out to make disciples of the Gentiles, Matthew says of them, "When they saw Him, they adored"—*prosekynesan* (28:17). In Matthew's presentation the whole life of Jesus is framed, as it were, in adoration.

For Matthew this prostration before the Lord Jesus is a ritual confession of His divinity. This interpretation is very clear if we compare several scenes in Matthew with their parallels in Mark. Thus, when the leper met Jesus in Matthew, he "adored Him" (*prosekynei avtoi*—8:2), a detail not found in Mark (1:30). In Mark's account of Jairus meeting Jesus, he says that "when he saw Him, he fell at His feet" (5:22), whereas Matthew says that he "came and adored Him" (*prosekynei avtoi*—9:18).

It is the same for the disciples after the stilling of the storm. Mark writes, "they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled" (6:51). In Matthew, however, we read, "then those who were in the boat came and adored Him (*prosekynesan avtoi*), saying, 'Truly, you are the Son of God'"(14:33).

We distinguish the same feature in two accounts of women approaching Jesus. According to Matthew, the wife of Zebedee (who does not appear in the parallel scene in Mark) "came to him with her sons, adoring (*proskynousa*) and asking something from Him" (20:20). In the case of the Canaanite woman, Mark says, "she came and fell at His feet" (7:25), whereas in Matthew we read, "she came and adored Him" (*prosekynei avtoi*—15:25).

In Matthew this verb *proskyneo* describes a properly Christian act of adoration. To see that this is so, it is instructive to examine an instance where Mark uses the verb but Matthew does not. It is the case of the Gadarene

demoniac, of whom Mark says, “When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and adored Him” (*prosekynesen avto*—5:6). Matthew (8:28) omits the word in this instance. Reserving this verb for specifically Christian acts of worship, Matthew declines to use it of a man possessed by demons.

Matthew’s use of this verb, in short, illustrates the Christology of the (apparently Syrian) church for which he writes. Matthew describes all these various characters in his Gospel as falling down in adoration before Jesus, because he recognized in them the content and structure of the Church’s faith in the full divinity of God’s Son.

The Good Shepherd

The Gospels, speaking of Jesus’ compassion, twice do so with the image of Him as the Shepherd.

Except for the Lord’s Prayer itself, it is arguable that the Good Shepherd Psalm is better known among more Christians than any other memorized prayer. I suspect that this may always have been the case. At least this much is clear: The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has been among the most popular since the earliest days of Christian history.

The strong support of this ancient popularity, of course, were the records of Jesus’ explicit references to Himself as the Good Shepherd, and in this respect the Gospel of John holds the primary place. At the very end of that Gospel, Jesus referred to Christians as “My lambs” and “My sheep” (John 21:15–17), but the longer development of that idea was found in chapter 10.

In that chapter several aspects of the image were treated: the sensitivity of the sheep to the Shepherd’s voice (vv. 3–5, 8, 14, 16, 27), the utter uniqueness of the Shepherd in contrast to the hireling or the robber (vv. 1, 2, 8–10, 12, 13), the Shepherd’s giving of his life for his sheep (vv. 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18), the gathering of the lost sheep into a single flock (John 10:16), and their total security (vv. 28, 29). In all of these Johannine examples the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is based on explicit statements of the Lord Himself.

This is not true everywhere in the New Testament, however. In two cases, the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is not based on what Jesus *said*, but on the Gospel writer's mention of how Jesus *felt*. In these two instances the evangelists were endeavoring to get *inside* Jesus, as it were, and lay hold on His emotion. In both cases the emotion described was compassion. I propose now to consider these passages.

The Compassionate Shepherd

The first text is found in Matthew, where we read:

> But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" (9:35–38)

There is a curious feature immediately evident here—namely, the evangelist uses a metaphor completely different from the metaphor used in Jesus' own words. Whereas Jesus speaks of laborers and a harvest, the evangelist writes of a flock. Strictly speaking, of course, there is no "mixing of metaphors" in the text, because each metaphor comes from a different source: Jesus and Matthew. They are juxtaposed, but they are not confused. The pastoral metaphor in this text is inserted by the evangelist to provide a kind of "psychological explanation" for what Jesus said. This is the sole intent of the shepherd imagery in this passage.

Since the pastoral reference in this passage does not come from Jesus' words, from where does Matthew get it? A simple glance at a concordance at this point sends us to the books of Numbers (27:17), 1 Kings (22:17), Ezekiel (34:5), Zechariah (10:2), and Judith (11:15), all of which speak of God's concern that the Israelites not be like "sheep without a shepherd." Matthew's appeal to this image, therefore, signifies that the compassion of Jesus, His sympathy for the people, fulfills the prophetic content of these several biblical texts.

The Evangelist's reference here is unusual, in this sense: Matthew is interpreting Holy Scripture by describing, not Jesus' actions or words, but His *motive* and *emotion*.

While it is no rare thing for a New Testament writer to see the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in something Jesus did and said, what we find in the present text is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in a description of how Jesus *felt*.

Jesus' compassion for the people in front of Him is identified with God's mercy manifest throughout Israel's history. Matthew explains Jesus' feeling by referring to a biblical theme: "He was moved with compassion for them, *because* they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."

In this text of Matthew, then, the compassionate feeling of Jesus has a "because," inasmuch as that feeling is placed in a context of biblical history. Specifically, it identifies Jesus' compassion with that demonstrated to the Israelites during the desert wandering (Numbers), during the age of the monarchy (1 Kings), during the Babylonian Captivity (Ezekiel), and during the post-exilic period (Zechariah). The human compassion of Jesus is seen to be of whole cloth with the divine mercy that unifies biblical historiography as the continuous narrative of God's flock. In the eyes of Matthew, Jesus represents the defining and most recent historical intrusion of that mercy.

The Good Shepherd and the Eucharist

In addition to Matthew 9:35–38, one other place in the New Testament speaks of Jesus' compassion in terms of the people being sheep without a shepherd. This is a passage in Mark, which reads:

> And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things (6:34).

Like the text in Matthew, this pastoral metaphor is not directly related to anything Jesus actually says; it is, rather, the Evangelist's interpretation of how

Jesus *feels*. Also as in Matthew, the metaphor is clearly drawn from an Old Testament theme.[4]

These similarities render all the more striking the major difference between the contexts of Matthew and Mark with respect to this theme of the compassionate shepherd. Whereas in Matthew the context is the missionary vocation of the Church, in Mark it is the multiplication of the loaves.

It is most instructive to examine the theme of the shepherd in this context. In fact, Mark's observation about Jesus' pastoral compassion here serves to introduce his first account of the multiplication of the loaves (6:35–44). That is to say, it is precisely as the Good Shepherd that Mark describes Him as feeding the people with bread in the wilderness.

Mark accomplishes this, moreover, by alluding to the imagery of the Good Shepherd Psalm in connection with the multiplication of the loaves. Thus, we observe that the event takes place at the waterside (6:45) and that He makes the people recline on the green grass (6:39), even though it was in the desert (*eremos* —6:35).

By introducing the imagery of the Good Shepherd into his first account of the multiplication of the loaves, Mark gives that image a eucharistic dimension, because his description of the event has a pronounced eucharistic tone. We observe, for instance, that the action of Jesus is heavily concentrated on the bread, rather than the fish. We observe also that Mark uses the four "eucharistic verbs" to describe how Jesus "took" the loaves, "blessed," "broke," and "gave them to His disciples to set before them" (6:41). This ritual action, in Mark's account, is rooted in the compassion of Jesus, "because they were like sheep not having a shepherd."

To appreciate the significance of Mark's joining of these two themes, we may look at Mark's account of the Last Supper, where "Jesus *took* bread, *blessed* and *broke* it, and *gave* it to them" (14:22, emphasis added). One observes here the same four verbs with which Mark describes the multiplication of the loaves by the compassionate Shepherd.

Furthermore, immediately after the Last Supper in Mark, Jesus is once again called the Shepherd. Mark quotes Him: "All of you will be made to stumble

because of me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, / And the sheep will be scattered’” (Mark 14:27, quoting Zech. 13:7).

It is clearly significant that the multiplication of the loaves and the setting of the Last Supper are the only two places where Mark uses the noun “shepherd.” In each place Jesus provides bread. In our extant literature, then, Mark’s Gospel is the first work that testifies to a eucharistic understanding of the Good Shepherd Psalm.

This eucharistic association with the Good Shepherd Psalm and Mark’s account of the multiplication of the loaves was recognized fairly early in Christian history. It is clear, for example, in two features of the ancient and traditional eucharistic rite of the church at Rome.

The first of these is found in the consecration of the bread, which says that Jesus,

> the day before He was to suffer, took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and having raised His eyes to heaven (*elevatis oculis in coelum*) to You, God, His Almighty Father, giving thanks to You, He blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples.

We observe here that the Roman rite inserts an entire phrase, “His eyes raised to heaven,” which is not found in a single New Testament account of the Last Supper, into its eucharistic narrative. This inserted phrase is lifted entirely from Mark’s narrative of the multiplication of the loaves: “And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He *looked up to heaven*, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples” (6:41, emphasis added).

The insertion of this phrase, “having raised His eyes to heaven,” points to a perceived link between Mark’s multiplication narrative and the ancient Roman eucharistic rite. This perception is all the more intriguing if we bear in mind that Rome, according to the earliest testimonies of the Church Fathers, was the place where Mark composed his Gospel.[5]

The second distinctive feature comes in the classical Roman form of the consecration of the eucharistic chalice. It says that Jesus,

> when the supper was ended, taking also *this illustrious chalice* (*hunc praeclarum calicem*) into His holy and venerable hands, again giving thanks to You, He blessed it, and gave it to His disciples.

The rite's reference to "this illustrious chalice" is drawn directly from the Latin version of the Good Shepherd Psalm: "my chalice which inebriates me, how *illustrious* it is," *calix meus inebrians, quam praeclarus est.* The *praeclarus calix* of Psalm 22(23) becomes the very cup that contours the eucharistic blood.

The binding text that holds together these images of the Roman eucharistic liturgy is clearly Mark's first account of the multiplying of the loaves, where Jesus appears as the compassionate Shepherd described in the psalm.

The Samaritan and the Priest

Luke, the only Evangelist to tell us of the ten lepers cleansed by Jesus, tells the story succinctly, but with enough details to make it unforgettable (17:11–19).

Jesus is apparently passing through the border territory shared by Galilee and Samaria. Consequently, those around Him are a somewhat mixed crowd, predominantly Galileans but with some Samaritans in the group. Jesus comes to a village.

Standing afar off, a handful of lepers shout out to Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" These lepers are standing afar off because they are not permitted to enter into the village itself. These lepers are standing just outside the city limits. They can approach no closer, but their voices reach the ears of Jesus. They plead with Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Jesus could walk over and touch them, as He did the other leper, twelve chapters earlier (Luke 5:12–16). Instead, He instructs these lepers, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

Now, this is curious. The lepers ask for mercy, and Jesus responds by instructing them to *do* something. He simply gives a command; He does not heal them right away. He does not even promise to heal them. He just says, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." The lepers ask for mercy; He gives them a

podvig, an obedience, a duty, a task they are to perform. That is Jesus' last word to this group.

The burden of this command, however, is not bare obedience, or obedience for the purpose of raw submission. The command is, rather, a summons to personal trust. When Jesus tells the lepers, "Go, show yourselves to the priests," the order really means, "Show Me that you trust Me! Obey Me as your Lord because you trust Me as your Savior."

Why show themselves to the priests? Unless the reader is familiar with the Old Testament, the significance of this gesture is probably not self-evident. In fact, however, Jesus gave the same command to the leper cured in Luke 5. This referral to the priest meets the requirements of the Levitical code about this disease. Since leprosy renders a person ritually impure with respect to Israel's common worship, a priest must certify the actual healing of a leper (Lev. 14).

Along the way, says Luke, these lepers are all cleansed. The story touches a constant pattern in the Gospel stories of Jesus. He heals people—He restores people—by telling them to *do* something. The purpose of this is invariably to test their trust in Him. He says to a crippled man, "Rise up and walk!" He tells a blind man, "Go, wash your eyes in the Pool of Siloam!" He instructs the waiters at Cana, "Fill the pots with water!" He commands the citizens of Bethany, "Roll away the stone from the door of the tomb!" And now He tells the ten lepers, "Go, show yourselves to the priests!"

Then comes the irony: One of these cleansed lepers, seeing what has happened to him, gains a new insight, and this insight forms a large part of the story: Instead of going to one of the local priests (evidently at his Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim), this man returns *to Jesus*!

When this cleansed leper does return, what does he do? Luke tells us, "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on *his* face at [Jesus'] feet, giving Him thanks."

There is an important paradox here. At first it appears that this leper has disobeyed the command of Jesus. It is the major point of the story, however, that Jesus does not see it that way. Far from reprimanding the man for not doing exactly what he was told, Jesus commends him: "Arise, go your way. Your faith

has made you well."

In the singling out of this leper, Luke perceives that the history of salvation has been dramatically changed by the appearance of Jesus. The Old Testament priesthood is truly a thing of the past. The prescriptions of the Torah no longer set the standard. The new standard is Jesus Himself. This cleansed servant of God, a sort of *double* outcast (outcast as a Samaritan and outcast as a leper), lays hold on the new direction of God's ways with men.

This Samaritan, in the view of Luke, is given the grace to recognize the *new* priest, the *true* priest. So he returns to Jesus, "inasmuch as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

Notes

1 Were I to write all I am disposed to write about the ministry of Jesus, the present work would run to far more than three volumes. As I must content myself, in this chapter, with treating only a half-dozen or so episodes in that ministry, I hope I will be forgiven for mentioning that more of the relevant material is covered in my earlier book, *The Jesus We Missed*.

2 Cf. <http://totallyhistory.com/transfiguration/>

3 The division of the Bible into chapters, a product of the Middle Ages, easily disguises the irony in this narrative transition.

4 Cf. Num. 27:17; 1 Kings (3 Kg.) 22:17; Ezek. 34:5; Zech. 10:2; Judith 11:15.

5 I will discuss the Markan composition in some detail in the next volume of this work.

CHAPTER 9

The Transfiguration

Every year on a Sunday in July, the Orthodox Catholic Church sets aside a day to reflect yet again on an event that transpired in the year 451, when our bishops gathered at Chalcedon, a city of Bithynia, across the channel from Constantinople. Those 600 or so bishops, who were convened from October 8 to November 1, 451, did not assemble to enjoy a sunny vacation on the shores of the Bosporus. There was business to attend to.

They were obliged to deal with a respected monk named Eutyches, a famously ascetical man, who had for thirty years served as the abbot of a monastery near the capital. Widely reverenced for his piety, Eutyches was also influential; he had a large following in the theological world. This influence was unfortunate, because the popularity of Eutyches was supported by neither an adequate education nor an ability to think straight. The German historian Albert Hauck described him as "unfamiliar with the laws of thought."

Twenty years earlier, the Council of Ephesus had declared that Jesus of Nazareth was a "single being," *mia physis*, and Eutyches had interpreted that conciliar declaration to mean that Jesus, because He is a divine being, is *not* a "human being" in our usual sense. His humanity was different from ours, Eutyches taught; the humanity of Jesus is not *homoousios*, or "of the same being," with the humanity of other men. He is not fully at one with us in our humanity.

The fathers meeting at Chalcedon, guided by an official letter of Pope Leo I of Rome, *The Tome*, adopted a formulation of the Christian faith concerning

Jesus of Nazareth.[1] In response to the question, "What do you think of the Christ?" the bishops of Chalcedon solemnly proclaimed,

> Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father as regards His divinity, and at the same time of one being (*homoousios*) with us as regards His humanity; like us in all respects apart from sin; as regards His divinity, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards His humanity begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the Theotokos; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of Him, and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

The Significance of Chalcedon

Three points are suggested by this proclamation of the Fathers of Chalcedon. First, the intent of the council was soteriological; the fathers at Chalcedon were concerned with salvation. In this respect they quoted the Council of Nicaea to the effect that God's Son became incarnate "for us men and for our salvation." They reasoned that the eternal Son's assumption of our full humanity was essential to our salvation; Christ had to suffer, die, and rise again in total solidarity with the human race.

On this point the reasoning of the council followed that of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

> Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death—that is, the devil—and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not take on [the nature of] angels, but He takes on the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (*hilaskesthai*) for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (2:14–18)

The Chalcedonian Fathers went on to reason that in the Incarnation all of the constitutive parts of a human being had to be assumed by the eternal Word, because whatever was not assumed was not redeemed. This idea became a rallying principle for orthodox Christology.

Second, our attention is also drawn to the council's use of the expression "at the same time." In Jesus, that is to say, there is a constant "simultaneity." He is the only person in heaven or on earth who can *at the same time* relate to God as man and to man as God. Once again, the inspiration for Chalcedon on this point was the Epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks of Jesus as the "Go-between," *mesites*, "mediator" (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; see 1 Tim. 2:5).

The mediation of Jesus is not primarily an activity but a condition of His existence. That is to say, Jesus is not our Mediator because He intercedes for us; He intercedes for us, rather, *because* He is our Mediator. The very condition of the Incarnation is that of mediation.

Chalcedon did not deny that Jesus is "one being," as the Council of Ephesus had proclaimed. In its own way, rather, it reaffirmed that earlier proclamation. But Chalcedon went on to insist that this *oneness* of Jesus' being makes Him, not only fully divine, but also fully human. In a stunning declaration, the council used the identical Nicene term, *homoousios*, to speak of both aspects, describing the Son as

> consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father as regards His divinity, and *at the same time* of one being (*homoousios*) with us as regards His humanity.

How should one express this union of divinity and humanity? An earlier bishop, Methodios of Olympus, had spoken of our Lord's "God-manhood" (*theandria*),[2] and Gregory of Nyssa had described Him as "God-manly" (*theandrikos*),[3] an adjective that became common in the Church after Chalcedon. The expression "God-Man" (in Russian *Bogochelovek*) has long been normal among Chalcedonian Christians.

These latter are also careful *not* to define the manner of this union of the divinity and the humanity in the Incarnation, except to speak of "the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence." It is significant that all the descriptions of this union are entirely apophatic, or negative: "*without* confusion, *without* change, *without* division, *without* separation." Chalcedon refused to speculate on *how*—by what metaphysical *mechanism*—divinity and humanity are joined in the one person of Christ.

Third, this annual liturgical commemoration of the Council of Chalcedon each July prepares the Church for the Feast of our Lord's Transfiguration, which falls about three weeks later, on August 6. That event of the Transfiguration was a supreme manifestation of this God-manhood of the Savior, the glory of His divinity shining forth through the very flesh of His humanity.

The Council of Chalcedon gave expression to the truth revealed in the Lord's Transfiguration. This event, recorded in 2 Peter and the three Synoptic Gospels, will occupy our attention in the pages that follow.

Elijah

In the biblical narratives of the Transfiguration it is easy to discern different points of inclusion and emphasis peculiar to each writer. Only Luke, for instance, mentions that Jesus was praying when He was transfigured, and only Matthew remarks that the disciples "fell on their faces."

In Mark's account (9:2–10), one of the most notable features of the Transfiguration is the curious way this evangelist speaks of the arrival of Moses and Elijah. Whereas Matthew and Luke say simply, "Moses and Elijah appeared" on the scene, Mark lays a special stress on Elijah. He writes, "Elijah appeared to them with Moses."

Not only does Mark mention Elijah before Moses here, but the verb he employs, "appeared" (*ophthe*), is singular, not plural. The predicate of the sentence directly modifies Elijah; Moses is included by way of a prepositional phrase. Mark's, then, is an account of *the arrival of Elijah*, Moses playing a distinctly secondary role.

So why is Elijah so prominent in Mark's story of the Transfiguration? This emphasis can hardly be insignificant, I think, and to throw light on the question I suggest three steps of literary analysis.

First, let us observe that Mark's account of the Transfiguration is followed immediately by a question about the return of Elijah. Speaking of the three disciples who had just witnessed the scene, Mark writes, "And they asked Him, saying, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?'"

As it stands in Mark, this question strikes the reader as curious, a bit odd, in the context. Why, right between the Transfiguration and the healing of the little boy at the bottom of the mountain, do the disciples suddenly—and without obvious explanation—become inquisitive about the return of Elijah? It is rather strange.

Second, if their question seems odd in its context, perhaps we should look more closely at that context. I suggest an experiment. What I propose to do here is *remove* the Transfiguration from the sequence of Mark's narrative and have a look at the overall context *without* it.

If this procedure seems unusual, let me explain. I do not intend to alter or rearrange the biblical passage; I am not attempting to reconstruct the biblical text. On the contrary, I simply want to understand how the Transfiguration story is set *within* its context in Mark. This is why I propose to examine the Markan context *without* the Transfiguration. This is something on the order of examining

a ring or brooch apart from its central gem—a perfectly reasonable thing for a jeweler to do.

Now, if we remove the story of the Transfiguration from Mark's narrative sequence for a moment, we notice something very peculiar and interesting. Without the Transfiguration, here is how the passage reads:

> And He said to them, "Amen, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Then He responded and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him."

Immediately we observe that this adjusted narrative sequence flows more logically than the actual story as it stands in Mark. The disciples' question about the return of Elijah no longer seems odd or abrupt; it appears, rather, as a natural and expected response. The Lord predicts, "There are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power," and the disciples promptly answer, "Well, all right, but isn't Elijah supposed to come first?" That is to say, the narrative sequence makes perfect sense *without* the Transfiguration.

Third, if the sequence is completely logical without the Transfiguration, then what does the Transfiguration add to the story? That is to say, why did Mark introduce the Transfiguration at this point in the narrative sequence?

This question brings me to the substance of my argument; namely, in Mark's account the Transfiguration seems to have been inserted (whether by Mark himself or by an earlier source on which he relies—this question is not important to our purpose) into an earlier narrative sequence, because Elijah's sudden appearance at the Transfiguration does, in fact, directly address the question of his return. Indeed, this is exactly what Mark says with respect to the Transfiguration: "Elijah appeared!"

We see, then, how the Transfiguration story functions in the sequence of Mark's narrative. Its position serves to answer a thorny question about Elijah's return. He returned, says Mark, at the Transfiguration! In the theology of Mark, Elijah's arrival at the Transfiguration places that event into the context of a specific prophecy about Elijah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5).

Everyone, after all, *expected* Elijah to come back; they remembered that he did not, in fact, die. The last of the Old Testament's wise men, Jesus ben Sirach —Christians have traditionally called him simply "the churchman" (Ecclesiasticus)—addressed Elijah with regard to Malachi's prophecy:

> You were taken up in a whirlwind of fire,
> in a chariot drawn by flaming horses.
> It is written that you will return, at the appointed time with admonitions,
> to calm the anger of God lest it break forth in fury,
> to turn the heart of the father to the son
> and to restore the tribes of Jacob. (Sirach 28:9–10)[4]

As the story flows in Mark, moreover, this appearance of Elijah at the Transfiguration scene not only fulfills the prophecy of Malachi; it also identifies this prophet's "day of the Lord" with the Resurrection. We see this very clearly in Mark's sequence, where the question about Elijah expresses the disciples' puzzlement about the Resurrection. Mark writes:

> Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, *till the Son of Man had risen from the dead*. So they kept this word to themselves, questioning *what the rising from the dead meant*. And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

Finally we may comment that this emphasis on Elijah in the Transfiguration story renders Mark's account very different from those in Matthew and Luke.

Although Matthew (17:1–12) follows Mark in the sequence of these two stories, he does not give a special emphasis to Elijah in his account of the Transfiguration. On the contrary, he adds an explanatory note that symbolically identifies Elijah with John the Baptist (17:13). Luke, who makes the same identification (1:17), completely omits the disciples' question about the return of Elijah.

Although the full meaning of Elijah's return has never been completely settled in Christian theology, it is worth remarking that St. Ambrose of Milan followed Mark's lead in seeing the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5 in the Lord's Transfiguration.[5]

Mark

Besides its special emphasis on the prophet Elijah, Mark's account of the Transfiguration shows several other features particular to that Gospel.

Mark says, "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them." To understand the reference to "six days," we should consult Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai as recorded in the Book of Exodus: "Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud" (24:16).

This reference to the six days of waiting (a correspondence to the days of creation) provides the best reason why, in Mark's account (copied later by Matthew), the Transfiguration takes place six days after the Lord's prophetic words, "Amen, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1–2). That is to say, Mark's reference to the six days' interval begins to establish parallel lines of correspondence between Mount Sinai and the mountain of Transfiguration.

Mark says, "Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves." This inclusion of the three disciples further extends the Exodus theme, inasmuch as Moses, too, is described as taking three close companions with him when he climbed the mountain: "Come up to the

close companions with him when he climbed the mountain: "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel" (Ex. 24:1).

We observe that two of Moses' companions, Nadab and Abihu, are brothers; this is an exact parallel to the Lord's Transfiguration: the brothers James and John correspond to Nadab and Abihu.

Mark's other details of the Transfiguration, such as the mountain (9:2), the glorious light (9:3), and the divine voice coming from the cloud (9:7), correspond to identical particulars in the scene on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1–2, 15–16). In short, Mark understands the Transfiguration to be strictly theophanic, an appearance of God. In this respect, the true correspondence to Mount Sinai is Jesus Himself, who has now become the place of God's presence and revelation.

As so often in the New Testament, Peter here becomes the spokesman for the Twelve:

> Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—because he did not know what he answered, for they were greatly afraid. (Mark 9:5–6)

This "did not know" may mean that Peter was saying *more* than he knew. Two things, I suggest, pertain to this *more* than Peter knew.

First, the Transfiguration was for the sake of the three witnesses, not for Jesus. He was transfigured "before *them*" (9:5); *they* are overshadowed (9:7); it was good for *them* to be there (9:7); *they* are told to hear (9:7); Jesus was with *them* (9:8). What Mark describes here is the religious experience of the disciples. Mark's description conveys two levels of meaning: The event of the Transfiguration manifests both the deification of Christ's humanity and the transformed capacity of the disciples to discern His divinity.[6]

This "subjective" aspect of the vision on the mountain puts readers in mind of the agony in the Garden (14:33), suggesting that these same three witnesses of the Transfiguration were thereby strengthened to endure the later trial. This correspondence is noted, to the same purpose, in the Church's kontakion for the Feast of the Transfiguration:

Feast of the Transfiguration:

> On the mount You were transfigured, and Your disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Your glory, O Christ our God; so that, when they would see You crucified, they would know Your passion to be voluntary and would preach to the world that You, in truth, are the Radiance of the Father.

Second, Peter's reference to the "three tents" puts the reader in mind of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was also celebrated as a feast of lights. Indeed, it was on Mount Sinai that Moses received instructions to construct the tabernacle of the Lord's presence (Ex. 26), that same tabernacle that would be filled with the cloud of the divine glory (Ex. 40:34–38).

Mark ends the story with the uniqueness of Jesus: "Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves" (Mark 9:8). The Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah), having their full and intended meaning in the vision of the glorified Christ, disappear from the scene on the mountain. There remains only Jesus, concerning whom the divine voice, coming out of the cloud, announces, "This is My beloved Son. Hear him!" (9:7).

After all the attention given to their vision, the disciples are finally directed to return to their "hearing." Their attentive hearing is directed to the beloved Son, already introduced at the Lord's baptism (Mark 1:11; see 12:6). With Him they now come down from the mountain (9:9).

Matthew

Although Matthew's account of the Lord's Transfiguration seems at first to differ only slightly from that of Mark, closer inspection of its details, especially considered in the light of Matthew's Gospel as a whole, shows a very different presentation of the event.

We may open this inspection with what may first appear to be an unimportant difference—namely, in Matthew's narrative Simon Peter does not

address Jesus as “Rabbi” (as in Mark), but as “Lord,” *Kyrie* (Matt. 17:4). I suggest two ways in which this change is significant.

First, it conforms to a pattern found all through Matthew, who avoids the title “Rabbi” with respect to Jesus. While Jesus was surely called “Rabbi” (“teacher”) during His earthly time with the disciples, and although we do find Him addressed this way in Mark and John (never in Luke), Matthew is more circumspect in his use of this title. Indeed, in Matthew the only person to address Jesus with the Semitic title “Rabbi” is Judas Iscariot, and then only in the context of the Passion (26:25, 49).[7]

Thus, when Jesus is addressed as “teacher” in Matthew, it is always through the Greek word *didaskalos* (8:19; 12:18; 19:16, 24, 36). This is likewise the title by which Jesus refers to Himself (26:18). Here in the Transfiguration scene Matthew avoids the term “teacher” altogether.

This brings us to a second consideration: In this scene Jesus is vastly more than a teacher. He is “the Lord,” *ho Kyrios*, the name signifying the Church’s fully articulated faith in the *risen* Christ. As *Kyrios*, Jesus is the recipient of worship, and Matthew describes the Transfiguration as a scene of worship, which is why Jesus is addressed with His full, post-Resurrection title (see Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:11).

This theological intent is the key to understanding other features in Matthew’s portrayal of the Transfiguration—for example, the posture of the disciples. Only in Matthew’s account do we read, “And when the disciples heard [the voice from the cloud], *they fell on their faces* and were greatly afraid” (17:6). This is an important detail, because throughout Matthew this full prostration is the proper Christian response to the revelation of God’s Son.

Indeed, this is a distinguishing characteristic of Matthew’s Gospel, where the life of Jesus begins and ends with believers prostrate before Him (2:11; 28:17). Only in Matthew is prostration in the presence of Jesus described with respect to the leper (8:2), Jairus (9:18), the disciples in the boat (14:33), the Canaanite woman (15:25), the wife of Zebedee (20:20), and the myrrh-bearing women at the empty tomb (28:9).

Here in the Transfiguration, as the Church’s affirmation of the divinity of

Jesus, such prostration fittingly responds to the voice that proclaims, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (17:6). When the disciples respond to this proclamation by falling down in reverence, the whole Church prostrates with them. In Matthew, these are not Jews on their faces before Jesus; they are Christians who recognize the truth proclaimed by the Voice from the cloud.

This intent also explains Matthew’s omission of Mark’s comment that Peter “did not know what to say” (Mark 9:6). The omission here is consistent with Matthew’s sustained emphasis on “understanding” as a component of the Christian life. For this reason Matthew rather habitually leaves out Mark’s references to a lack of understanding on the part of the disciples (e.g., Mark 6:52; 9:10, 32).

This preoccupation also explains why Matthew leaves out Jesus’ questions found in Mark (4:13): “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” The parable in question is, of course, the parable of the sown seed, and it is significant that Matthew alone refers to “understanding” in connection with that parable:

> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not *understand*, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. (13:19; contrast Mark 4:15)

Corresponding to this emphasis, at the end of the parable Matthew writes,

> But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and *understands*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (13:23; contrast Mark 4:20)

After the long series of parables, Matthew writes, “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you understood all these things?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord’” (13:51; no parallel verse in Mark). True discipleship, for Matthew, includes the component of understanding.

It is no surprise, then, that in his portrayal of the transfigured Christ, Matthew includes no suggestion that the disciples failed to understand the

meaning of the event. They are, after all, *Christians*, who prostrate themselves in worship in response to the Father's voice.

Finally, Matthew alone mentions the gentle detail that "Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid'" (17:7). Here we are presented with another component of the Christians' relationship to the transfigured Son of God: intimacy. The disciples are not only prostrate in fear; they are reassured in faith. This combination of transcendence and communion pertains to Matthew's understanding of the Transfiguration, in which he portrays the response of the Church to God's glorious revelation of His Son.

Luke

Luke's account of the Lord's Transfiguration has several distinctive features. First is the time frame. Luke begins, "Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that he took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray" (Luke 9:28).

In fact, Matthew (17:1) and Mark (9:2) both placed the Transfiguration six days later, not eight. We should note that Luke does not say "eight" either; he says "*about* eight." Obviously, there is no historical contradiction between "six days" and "*about* eight days," but it is worth remarking on Luke's change in the wording. Why did he make this change?

It appears that the early Christians associated the event of the Lord's Transfiguration with the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*), an association prompted by Peter's suggestion, "Let us make three *tabernacles*." Indeed, the luminous cloud of which the Gospels speak in the Transfiguration is to be associated with the glorious cloud that filled the tabernacle of the Lord's presence in Numbers 9—10.

The association of the Transfigured Lord with the Feast of Tabernacles perhaps suggests why Luke changed the "six days" to "about eight days." The Feast of Tabernacles does, in fact, last one week plus another day (Lev. 23:34–36).[8] Luke thus portrays Jesus as *the* Tabernacle, the place where God and man meet.

A second distinctive feature of Luke's account is also found in that same first verse of the story—namely, the detail that Jesus "went up on the mountain *to pray*." Only Luke mentions the prayer of Jesus in connection with the Transfiguration: "*As he prayed*, the appearance of His face was altered."[9]

In other words, whereas Matthew and Mark portray the Transfiguration as a religious experience of its three apostolic witnesses, Luke begins with *the experience of Jesus* as He worships the Father on the mountain.

Thirdly, only Luke among the Evangelists refers to Jesus speaking of His suffering and death within the Transfiguration account. Luke writes:

> And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His *exodus* that He was going to fulfill (*pleroun*) at Jerusalem. (9:30–31)

In his picture of Moses and Elijah—the Law and the Prophets—discussing Jesus' exodus at Jerusalem, Luke touches a major theme of his theology—namely, the fulfillment (*pleroun*) of Holy Scripture in Jesus' sufferings and death in Jerusalem.

Jesus converses with these major Old Testament characters about His coming fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, the very subject on which He will discourse to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus symbolically correspond to Moses and Elijah here on the mountain.

Luke returns to this theme in the risen Jesus' final apparition in the upper room, where He affirms:

> These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled (*plerothenai*) which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. (24:44)

Luke's version of the great commission begins with this affirmation:

> Thus *it is written*, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (24:46, emphasis added)

In the very context of the great commission, says Luke, "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (24:45).

In Luke's account of the Transfiguration, then, the two representatives of the Law and the Prophets are described as discussing with Jesus His fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. This scene on the mountain brings to perfection Jesus' early study of the Law and the Prophets in the synagogue at Nazareth.[10]

Peter

Jesus' Transfiguration, notably portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels, is also described in the Second Epistle of Peter. The latter tells the story with less detail but with no less interest. Peter begins:

> Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my exodus. (2 Pet. 1:13–15)

Peter's reference to his impending exodus indicates that this epistle was written sometime near his martyrdom. The latter is traditionally dated during the persecution that followed Nero's fire at Rome in the summer of AD 64. After the blame for that fire was shifted onto the Christians of the city, the imperial police rounded up the Christians, along with their obvious leader, Peter, the chief of the apostles. He evidently wrote this letter while waiting to die.

Two words in Peter's introduction seem especially pertinent to our theme. First, Peter refers to his impending death as his *exodus*. This is the identical word Luke uses to speak of the conversation of Jesus with Moses and Elijah:

> And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His exodus which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30–31)

In the New Testament, the word *exodus* refers to death in only two places, Luke and 2 Peter, both texts concerned with Jesus' Transfiguration.

Second, Peter speaks of his death in terms of putting off his "tabernacle" or "tent." Perhaps the associations attached to this metaphor provided the occasion for him immediately to speak of the Transfiguration; we recall from all three Synoptic Gospels that Peter had spoken enigmatically of "tabernacles" on that occasion: "Let us make three *tabernacles*: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

In any case, the apostle immediately goes on to describe the event of the Transfiguration:

> For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice, which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet. 1:16–18)

There are several particulars to note about Peter's portrayal of the Transfiguration. First, the lack of detail is likely to be explained by the apostle's presumption that the event was already well known to his readers. He was not obliged to elaborate on the details, beyond reminding his readers that he had been a witness to the event.

Second, his quality as a witness to the vision of glory and the Father's voice established Peter's authority to refute the "cunningly devised fables" that are the object of his concern throughout much of this epistle (2:1–22; 3:3, 17).

Third, Jesus' Transfiguration confirmed the hopes of the ancient prophets, who desired to see what the apostles saw. Peter goes on to write:

> And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Pet. 1:19)

The fulfillment of biblical prophecy in Christ is a special interest of the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:2).

Fourth, the "cunningly devised fables," concerning which Peter is so alarmed, have to do chiefly with the misinterpretation of biblical prophecy. Thus, in this context of the Transfiguration he goes on to insist

> that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but men spoke of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 2:20–21)

That is to say, for Peter the Transfiguration was weighted with an exegetical significance, such as we have already seen in Luke's account of it; both versions of the story emphasize Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament. The glory of the Transfiguration casts a confirming radiation on biblical prophecy. The true meaning of the latter *comes to light* in the Transfiguration, where the apostles "have the prophetic word confirmed."

All other interpretation of Holy Scripture, for Simon Peter, consists in "cunningly devised fables." The glory of the transfigured Christ is the light of the Scriptures themselves, to which Christians "do well to attend." This is their source of illumination "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." The Bible's ultimate fulfillment comes in history's final revelation of the transfigured Lord, "the bright morning star" (Rev. 22:16; see 2:28).

Paul

Although the Apostle Paul did not write of the event of the Lord's Transfiguration on the mountain, one is forcefully reminded of that event by a passage in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Paul wrote:

> For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts unto the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (4:6)

Paul's reference to the glory of God shining on the face of Christ, which perfectly expresses what the Evangelists describe in the Transfiguration, is even more striking by reason of its immediate context. Just a few verses earlier Paul had written:

> But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transfigured (*metamorphoumetha*) into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. (3:18)

That is to say, Paul's reference to the glory of God on the face of Christ is set in the context of our own transfiguration in Christ. The verb he uses here, *metamorphomai*, appears in only three other places in the New Testament, two of them descriptive of the Lord's Transfiguration on the mount (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2).

As in Luke's account of the Transfiguration, Paul's development lays special stress on the Christian understanding of the Old Testament. Indeed, he introduced this subject of transfiguration by treating of biblical interpretation. The Jew, Paul wrote, understands only the "letter" (*gramma*) of the Old Testament, whereas the Christian understanding penetrates more deeply to "the Spirit" (*to Pnevma*). The first kind of biblical understanding leads to death, he affirmed, the second to life:

> [God] made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written—engraved on stones—was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the transient glory of his countenance, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? (3:6–7)

Paul's preoccupation here is the transforming, Spirit-given understanding of

God's Word. His reflections on this subject prompt the apostle to remember the special glory that shone from the face of Moses on the mountain. Step by step, Paul then goes from the glory on the face of Moses to the glory on the face of Christ.

That veil over Moses' face becomes, for Paul, a symbol of the Jews' failure to grasp the significance of their own Scriptures. This terrible (but also *tear*-able) veil is the exegetical impediment that divides Jew from Christian:

> But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because it is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. (3:14–15)

What, then, is the advantage of the Christian in this respect? It is Christ's removal of the hermeneutic veil to reveal the Spirit's understanding of the Old Testament. This veil is lifted when a person is converted to Christ through the Gospel. He now understands the Scriptures correctly: "Nevertheless, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (3:17).

This Spirit-given understanding of the Holy Scriptures in Christ is the context in which Paul proceeds to write of the Christian's transfiguration:

> But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transfigured (*metamorphoumetha*) into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. (3:18)

From the face of Christ, this ever-increasing glory shines into the heart and transfigures the Christian's mind. It delivers believers from those darkening forces that blind those "who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the icon of God, should shine on them" (4:4).

In terms reminiscent of the Transfiguration accounts in Peter and Luke, Paul considers the glory on the face of Christ as throwing light on the Sacred Text, penetrating beneath the *gramma*. Transfiguration has to do, then, with the

understanding of God's abiding Word. This is *orthodoxology*, the study of the correct glory, the removal of the veil of exegetical blindness. This Spirit-given glory in the heart sheds its light on the writings of Moses and the other biblical writers. It is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

John

It has sometimes caused surprise that St. John, though a witness to the Lord's Transfiguration, does not narrate that scene, as did Matthew, Mark, and Luke. More than one student of his Gospel, however, has explained the absence of the Transfiguration in John by remarking that Jesus is *always* transfigured in what John wrote.

There is much merit in this observation. If the Transfiguration is the manifestation of the glory of God in Christ, who spoke more often on this theme than John? This apostle, who saw the transfigured Lord and heard the Father's voice claiming him as His Son, is the very one who wrote, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (1:14).

The Jesus presented in John's Gospel appears as the eternal Word, in whom "was life, and the life was the light of men" (1:4). Becoming flesh and dwelling among us (1:14), He is the living revelation of God's glory on this earth. Even though "no one has seen God at any time," John says, "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared (*exsegesato*) Him" (1:18).

The divine glory manifest in Christ is not only a theme in John's Gospel; it also serves as a structural component. John records exactly seven miracles of Jesus, which he calls "signs." Seven, the mystic number of these signs, symbolizes the fullness of the revelation of the divine glory.

Leading in each case to the commitment of faith, these signs do not reveal the divine glory as *static* but as *active*. *Who* Jesus is, is revealed in *what* Jesus does. Each of these signs is *enacted*; it has motion.

The signs commence with the transformation of the water into wine at the wedding feast, concerning which John tells us, "This beginning (*arche*) of signs

Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and *manifested His glory*; and His disciples believed in Him" (2:11).

John's second sign enacted by Jesus is the curing of the nobleman's son (4:46–54); as in the case of the miracle at Cana, the man himself "believed, and his whole household" (4:53). Next comes the restoration of the paralytic at the pool (5:1–15), followed by the miracle of the bread (6:1–14), the walking on the water (6:15–21), and the healing of the man born blind (9:1–41). The final sign in John is the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1–44). It was of this culminating sign that Jesus told Martha, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would *see the glory of God*?" (11:40).

These Johannine signs are also accompanied by theological comments on their significance, either in the detailed conversations of the narrative itself (as in the raising of Lazarus and the healing of the blind man) or by the Lord's own subsequent elaboration (as in the Bread of Life discourse).

Thus, each of these events is itself a transfiguration, a revelation of God's glory in the activity of Jesus. In His life and ministry, each sign becomes a window through which believers contemplate the divine glory, and Jesus is transfigured with light throughout John's whole narrative.

In the midst of these seven signs, moreover, John inserts two lengthy conversations, one with Nicodemus (3:1–21) and the other with the Samaritan woman (4:5–42). These pursue the same theme of revelation that John elaborates in the stories of the signs.

At the end of the seven signs, John summarizes the tragedy of the unbelief with which the enemies of Jesus responded to His revelation:

> But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet, which he spoke, might be fulfilled:
>
> "Lord, who has believed our report?
> And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"
>
> Therefore they were unable to believe, because Isaiah said again:
>
> "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
> Lest they should see with their eyes

Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them." (John 12:37–41)[11]

John's summary here appeals to the prophet Isaiah, who had foretold the hardness of heart of those who refused to believe. According to John, "These things Isaiah said when he *saw His glory* and spoke of Him" (12:41). And *when* did Isaiah see His glory? In 742 BC, the year concerning which the prophet wrote, "In the year King Uzziah died, *I saw the Lord* sitting on a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1).

This transfigured Christ, in John's mind, was already contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. Christ, as gloriously revealed in the signs John records, was already the object of prophetic vision. Even Moses had spoken of Him (John 1:45; 5:46). For John, then, as for Luke, Peter, and Paul, the revelation of the divine glory in Christ is the key to the understanding of Israel's Scriptures.

In John's account, the final unbelief leads directly to the Lord's Passion. This is introduced by the great Last Supper discourse, which speaks also of the divine glory of Christ (13:31, 32; 14:13; 17:5, 22, 24). In every scene of this Gospel, then, from the Lord's appearance at John's baptismal site all the way through the Lord's death and Resurrection (7:39; 12:16, 23, 28), the divine light appears among men. John records all these things that we readers, too, may "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31).

Notes

1 We have already reflected that Pope Leo's vocabulary of the Incarnation—two natures, one person—was drawn largely from Augustine of Hippo. A major task at Chalcedon was to find the best way of expressing this theology in Greek. The task proved to be very problematic, especially for those conciliar fathers whose first language was Coptic. The ensuing confusion produced a painful schism that has lasted to the present day.

2 Methodios of Olympus, *Sermon on Simeon and Anna* 11.

3 Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on John* 3.80.

4 For a more ample treatment of this text, cf. P. H. Reardon, *Wise Lives: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Wisdom of Sirach* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press/AFP, 2009), pp. 181–182.

5 Ambrose of Milan, *De Virginibus* 1.3.12.

6 This twin interest, important to Maximus the Confessor's view of the Transfiguration, is carefully developed by Christopher Veniamin, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation: "Theosis" in Scripture and Tradition* (Mount Tabor Publishing 2013), especially pp. 115–118.

7 Matthew's consistent usage here is probably related to Jesus' injunction not to use the title "Rabbi" among Christians (Matt. 23:8).

8 Maximus the Confessor interprets Luke's eight days as symbolic steps preparatory to the vision; cf. Veniamin, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

9 We recall that only Luke mentions Jesus praying at the time of His baptism.

10 I will make further comments on Luke's version of the Transfiguration in the second volume of this work, in the chapter named "Prayer and the Passion."

11 This same prophetic text, Isaiah 6:10, is quoted often by the apostles in their near-desperation to understand the unbelief with which the Son was rejected by the very people whom the Father had prepared to receive Him; see Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:25–27; Rom. 11:8.

CHAPTER 10

The Last Things

Before we finish our reflections on the Incarnation, it seems appropriate to consider two themes treated in the Gospel stories towards the end of our Lord's ministry: His teaching on the Last Things, *ta Eschata*, and his rejection as the expected Messiah. These subjects structure the material in the two concluding chapters of this book.

The present chapter, in addition to considering the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, must also give some account of how the Church coped with the apparent delay of the Second Coming.

There was a time when it was fashionable to treat Jesus as a benign teacher of general religious theory, a Semitic humanist of sorts, whose tastes were marked by a preference for pacifism, tolerance, gentle inclusivity, sentimental benevolence, and, perhaps, liberal politics. According to this thesis, Jesus' overall religious interest, not His specific relationship to the history of the Jews, accounted for the universal appeal of His message.

Those who adhered to this theory, if they were distressed by the harsh things that occasionally escaped Jesus' lips—"unquenchable fire," "millstone around the neck," and "worm that never dies" come to mind—they were also quick to point out that the sole objects of Jesus' censure were conservatives, reactionaries, and narrow-minded religious bigots. Jesus' blessing of the children was the favorite biblical scene of the folks who held this view, and "Let's everybody try to get along and be nice to each other" was their summary of the Gospel.

Some of the folks in this group were honest enough to recognize that their

Some of the folks in this group were honest enough to recognize that their interpretation of Jesus bore but scant resemblance to the picture of Him presented in the New Testament. This dissimilarity, they explained, came from misrepresentations in the Gospels themselves. That is to say, Jesus was just fine, but the Church got the message wrong.

Thus, in 1901 Wilhelm Wrede contended that the Gospels, starting with Mark (long presumed to be the earliest), were essentially works of fiction, in which the figure of the historical Jesus was distorted to serve the diverse apologetic and theological purposes of the Church and the Gospel writers. The lost figure of the real Jesus, Wrede announced, was now recovered by the more enlightened views of modern biblical exegesis. There needed to be a "quest for the historical Jesus," who was presumed to be very different from the person depicted in the Bible.

Although this understanding of Jesus and the Gospels is still alive in some quarters, it was solidly answered five years after Wrede, when Albert Schweitzer demonstrated the impossibility of removing the person of Jesus from a religious preoccupation dominant in the Palestine of His day, namely, the apocalyptic understanding of contemporary history.

This apocalyptic reading of history was already producing those revolutionary movements that would end in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans about a generation after Jesus. Jesus was emphatically part of that contemporary picture, Schweitzer argued, and not a detached or detachable religious thinker.

Jesus and the Apocalyptic[1]

Although apocalyptic themes, such as the definitive judgment of history, are not found extensively throughout the teaching of Jesus (exceptions include the parables of the wheat and tares and the dragnet), they *do* appear strongly in the sermons the Gospel writers place during the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

An initial question comes to mind with respect to this apocalyptic material—namely, what considerations determined its narrative disposition? More specifically, why does this material immediately precede the Passion story in all three of the Synoptic Gospels?

three of the Synoptic Gospels?

It is impossible, I think, to answer this question with complete assurance, but two possibilities suggest themselves. First, it may be the case that this narrative sequence (going from apocalyptic to Passion) first appeared in the Gospels themselves or in the Church's preaching prior to the composition of the Gospels. That is to say, it is possible that all or most of Jesus' eschatological sayings were lumped into this pre-Passion sequence with a homiletic or catechetical intent, in much the same way the parables of the Kingdom were lumped together in the Sermon by the Lake (Mark 4, Matthew 13), or the lost-and-found parables were joined in a single context proper to Luke (Luke 15).

If this is the case with respect to the eschatological discourses of Jesus, they appeared together last, in His final public teaching, simply because the Church (or the Evangelists) treated them last because a certain logic suggested it. After all, these discourses are concerned with "the *last* things," *de novissimis*. Formulating a theme, they appear last in the Gospels for the same reason they continue to appear last in standard outlines of systematic theology.

There would be nothing disturbing, surely, if this were the case. After all, as early as Papias of Hierapolis in the second century, Christians have recognized that the narrative and didactic sequences in the Gospels were sometimes established, not by a concern for chronological precision, but by homiletic, catechetical, and literary considerations.[2]

Second, this sequence of eschatology to Passion may simply reflect the accurate memory of the first Christians, which found its way into the Gospels. This latter suggestion I find more appealing, frankly, because it shows greater respect for the detailed, day-by-day sequence of Holy Week, especially pronounced in Mark and Matthew (and in our Orthodox lectionary).

Moreover, only a perverse hypercriticism would insist that the Gospel writers *never* entertained a regard for chronological precision, especially in those instances (Holy Week chief among them) where they deliberately made chronology a component of their narrative structure. If this point is granted, it is logical to accept as historical the sequence presented in the Synoptic Gospels—

from eschatology to Passion. This is not a position, however, for which I am prepared to die (or, surely, to kill someone else).

The Son of Man

A peculiar feature of the Gospels is Jesus' habitual reference to Himself in the third person as "Son of Man." Several aspects of this unusual form of self-reference are worthy of remark.

First, the expression "Son of Man" is found in all four Gospels—as an auto-identification in every instance. It is invariably a title Jesus assumes for Himself, an expression of His self-interpretation. It is *never* found in the Gospels *except* on the lips of Jesus. This fact raises an adequate rebuttal, I think, to any suggestion that the early Christians—or even one of the Evangelists—devised the term "Son of Man" as a way of describing Jesus. This title certainly came from Jesus, not the Church. For this reason the expression is never found in St. Paul or the New Testament's other epistolary literature.

Moreover, the title was not destined to play a major role in the later development of Christology. Over the centuries the people of God have invoked Jesus in numerous ways, but "Son of Man" is not one of them.

Second, when Jesus used the term, "the Son of Man," it was a real title, not a mere description. The consistent presence of the definite article (*the* Son of Man) makes it unlikely that the expression is to be understood in the Gospels simply as an equivalent of "human being" (as was the case, for instance, when God addressed Ezekiel as "son of man"). When Jesus used the term, it was in the context of His activities in this world.

Third, because Jesus' use of "Son of Man" was idiosyncratic, his understanding of the expression is best determined, not by its meanings elsewhere (as it appears, for instance, in Psalm 8: "What is *man* that You are mindful of him?"), but through the specific contexts in which Jesus used it.

Fourth, those passages indicate that Jesus' understanding of this term was chiefly indebted to the Book of Daniel. Prominent among the visions of that prophet, we read:

> I was watching in the night visions,
> And behold, one like a son of man,
> Coming with the clouds of heaven!
> He came to the Ancient of Days,
> And they brought Him near before Him.
> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
> That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
> His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
> Which shall not pass away,
> And His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13–14)

The term "Son of Man," nonetheless, underwent a transformation from Daniel to Jesus. Although the Gospels invariably use the definite article (*ho*) to modify *the* "Son of Man," Daniel did not. On the lips of Jesus, "Son of Man" is a real title, whereas in Daniel the expression was simply descriptive: "*like* a son of man" (Aramaic *kebar 'enesh*; LXX *hos huios anthropou*). Daniel's emphasis was placed on the common humanity—even the "humane" quality—of the messianic kingdom, which was contrasted with the beastly character of the earlier and worldly empires: Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece (7:3–8).

Nonetheless, Daniel certainly understood the son of man—a truly human figure who approaches the Ancient of Days and receives "authority"—as a reference to the Messiah, whose reign is to be the proper goal and fulfillment of world history.

Fifth, except as a quotation from Psalm 8, "Son of Man" appears in only two New Testament books outside the four Gospels. In each of these cases the context is a vision of Jesus enthroned and glorified.

Thus, when Stephen "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," he announced to his murderers, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:55–56). In addition to Stephen, John saw "one like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band" (Rev. 1:13).

Sixth, Daniel's vision of the end of history would later be replicated by John the Seer, who used Daniel's identical expression (*hos huios anthropou—without* the definite article):

> Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat one *like a son of man*, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. (Rev. 14:14)

Seventh, slightly later than Daniel—but prior to John—the expression "son of man" was used in certain apocalyptic books of the intertestamental period to designate the Elect One, who would prevail over mighty kings and become the final arbiter of history. Those texts, which expressed an identical messianic hope, demonstrate that speculation about the Danielic "son of man" was of lively interest at the time.

The Passion and the Second Coming

In addition to its apocalyptic sense, Jesus used the term "the Son of Man" also in the context of His sufferings and death. Whereas the first usage was clearly drawn from Daniel, the reference in the second case is more complex.

This complexity is suggested by the Lord's comment respecting His betrayer: "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed" (Mark 14:21). Now, this is a striking assertion: Jesus refers to the Sacred Scriptures—"it is written"—but where in the Sacred Scriptures was it written that the Son of Man must be betrayed to suffering and death? There is nothing of this in Daniel.

The "it is written" here refers, rather, to the many Old Testament prophecies regarding the afflicted just man (in Psalms), the suffering servant (in Isaiah), the meek king (in Zechariah), and so on—in short, all those godly figures persecuted for the sake of righteousness, whom God will vindicate. Jesus perceived that all those prophecies pertained to Himself. Even as He knew Himself to be "the Son of Man" foreseen by Daniel, He became aware that those other biblical texts likewise pertained to Him.

I contend that the themes of "the Son of Man" and the Passion were brought together, not in the minds of the Gospel writers or the theological speculations of the Christian Church, but in the self-interpretation Jesus was obliged to undertake in the actual circumstances of His life and ministry.

The Gospels were not crafted in a way that permits us to trace that development, but it is reasonable to surmise that Jesus' assessment of those prophecies was prompted largely by the animosity and threats of those who opposed Him. Even as He considered His vocation as the Son of Man, His enemies' hostility caused Jesus to foresee the Cross that lay ahead.

We may consider Mark's account of the healing of the paralytic to illustrate this connection. In Mark's very careful literary sequence, this incident is portrayed as the first occasion on which Jesus calls Himself "the Son of Man." He asserts: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority (*exsousia*) on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10).

There is a clear allusion here to Daniel's vision in the reference to the *exsousia* of the Son of Man:

> Then to Him was given authority (*exsousia*) and glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His authority is an everlasting authority (*he exsousia avtou exsousia aionios*). (Dan. 7:14)

Now it is significant to Mark's theological intent that Jesus' initial claim to the authority of the Son of Man provides the context in which His enemies accuse Him of blasphemy: "Why does He speak blasphemies like this?" (Mark 2:7).

In the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin—the final occasion when Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man (Mark 14:62)—blasphemy is the charge that leads to His death sentence:

> "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. (14:63–64)

Mark thus ties together these two scenes of fierce hostility against the claims of

Mark thus ties together these two scenes of fierce hostility against the claims of the Son of Man, one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the other at the end.

However these themes—the Son of Man and the Passion—came together in the self-interpretation of Jesus, we find them united everywhere in the Gospels. This pattern is common to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.[3]

Nor can these many instances be explained on the hypothesis of common sources. Mark is the obvious source for some of the sayings in Matthew, but not all of them. Matthew certainly relies on another and independent source (apparently not shared by Luke). As for John's two references to the Passion of the Son of Man, they are not connected to the synoptic tradition in any way.

In other words, the association of the Lord's Passion with His self-awareness as the Son of Man goes back much earlier than any intermediary sources discernible in the Gospels. In addition—as we have already reflected—there was nothing of it in the New Testament epistles. In short, the association of the Son of Man with the Passion certainly rests on the earliest stratum of Christian memory and doctrine: the very words of Jesus.

Coming to Judge

What was new in Jesus' claim before the Sanhedrin was its public and official setting, because He had already used the same apocalyptic language in discourses to His disciples. He had said, for instance,

> Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:38)

Again, He declared, the Father "has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:28). Or again,

> When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matt. 10:23)

Similar examples abound.[4] This apocalyptic sense does not exhaust the meaning of the term "the Son of Man" as Jesus used it. His allusions to Daniel's vision, however, centered on a lively point at which Jesus addressed the expectations of His contemporaries, are the easiest to grasp.

That apocalyptic dimension of Jesus' self-understanding defies every attempt to "de-historicize" Him—to abstract His teaching from the existential setting of His life and death. Although many writers, especially in recent times, have engaged in such attempts, they have invariably changed the Gospel into some theory of ethical and religious philosophy—a theory quite separable from the person of Jesus Himself. Whatever else may be said of "the historical Jesus," He was certainly motivated by apocalyptic concerns.

Moreover, it is perhaps the case that a renewed attention to this apocalyptic dimension of the Gospel—"a special and extreme mode of presenting the drama of saving history" (Von Balthasar)—is particularly needful today by way of response to the secular messianisms, utopian hopes, and revolutionary impulses of modern culture and politics.

I make this suggestion in spite of two risks. First, those secular efforts may co-opt the Gospel itself, because many Christian activists are marvelously naïve. Attention to the apocalyptic dimension of the Gospel may easily be confused with recent efforts by some Christians to clothe secular efforts with a veneer of theological respectability. I have in mind, not only the more obvious examples like Liberation Theology, but also a currently popular confusion of material prosperity with moral improvement. Confusions like this, however, can be avoided by directing adequate attention to other aspects of "the Son of Man," especially the theme of the Cross.

Second, apocalyptic imagery and language readily lend themselves to fanaticism and unbridled speculation. As we see in contemporary examples of preaching and publication, this danger is real, but it is hardly insuperable. Understanding and critical discernment are required. The most apocalyptic book of the New Testament testifies that apocalyptic images require special discernment: *Hode ho nous ho echon sophian*—"This requires a mind that has wisdom" (Rev. 17:9).

The apocalyptic should be approached as a branch of dogmatics. Holy Scripture, in not isolating eschatology from other aspects of doctrine, provides the model. So does the Creed, which, after listing the other essential dogmas of our confession, goes on to proclaim, “He will come again in glory to judge.”

The Son of Man and the Mind of the Church

The great variety of contexts indicates that “the Son of Man” became Jesus’ normal expression of self-reference, the equivalent of “I.”[5]

For all the attention the title receives in the Gospels, “the Son of Man” did not much appear outside those four books, either as a confessional title for Jesus or as a way of invoking Him. By reason of its eschatological meaning in Daniel, the expression pertained, as we have seen, to the self-interpretation of Jesus in the immediate context of His life and death, but that meaning rarely carried over to the development of Christology.

Indeed, with the decline of apocalyptic concerns—as church membership became more Gentile than Jewish—the expression “the Son of Man” was used less frequently. Inasmuch as the term never appears in the epistles of Paul, this decline certainly happened very early.

We see this in the Church Fathers. When they spoke of “the Son of Man” in an eschatological sense, they were usually just citing the Gospels or Daniel. Thus, Justin Martyr wrote, “He shall come on the clouds as the Son of Man, as Daniel foretold, and His angels shall come with him.”[6] Or again, Cyril of Jerusalem: “He is called the Son of Man, not because He had His generation from this earth, but because He is coming on the clouds to judge both the living and the dead.”[7]

Even this usage was rare, however. More often, when the Fathers called Jesus “the Son of Man,” the term was employed to refer to His human nature. We find this development very early. For example, referring to our Lord’s descent from the root of Jesse, Ignatius of Antioch spoke of Him as “the Son of Man and the Son of God.”[8]

Irenaeus of Lyons is particularly interesting in this respect: When he cited Daniel's vision of Jesus, he did so in order to argue for the integrity of Jesus' humanity.[9] That is to say, his interest in "the Son of Man" lay in the Incarnation rather than in the Final Judgment.

Irenaeus, when he returned to the expression somewhat later, left out Daniel altogether, concentrating entirely on the Incarnation in the economy of salvation:

> The Lord professes Himself to be the Son of Man, comprising in Himself that original man—from whom was fashioned the composition of the woman—so that, as our race went down to death through fallen man, we might ascend to life through the One who was victorious.[10]

Thus, "the Son of Man" came to describe the Word as incarnate, rather than Jesus as the destined heir and judge of history. The term was thus loosened from its apocalyptic origin in order to bolster the orthodox faith against Christological heresies.

Especially was this the case during the Arian controversy. Jesus is called the Son of Man, wrote Athanasius of Alexandria, "according to the flesh and His human appearance."[11] Gregory the Theologian expressed the same thesis: "He is Son of Man on account of Adam and of the Virgin, from whom He was born."[12]

The title "Son of Man," however, even as referring to the Word's assumed humanity, was understood to embrace His whole person. Commenting on the "lifting up" of the Son of Man in John 3, John Chrysostom wrote, "In this place He did not call only the flesh 'Son of Man,' but He named His entire self, as it were, from what was His lower being (*apo tes elattonos ousias*)."[13]

Notwithstanding this doctrinal development of the expression "Son of Man," Jesus' understanding of Daniel's vision remains prominent in the evangelical mission of the Church. Even as He bade us go forth and make disciples of all nations, our Lord based that mandate on the premise, "All authority (*pasa exsousia*) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Matt. 28:18).

Intimations of Delay

The last of Matthew's five great discourses, which treats of the final days of the world, provides hints of a delay before the end. Before the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31–46), there are three parables that contain such hints: the faithful steward (24:45–51), the five wise maidens (25:1–13), and the talents bestowed on three servants (25:14–30). We may look at them in turn.

The first account contrasts the faithful steward with an evil employee who "says in his heart, 'My master is delayed (*chronizei*).'" Deceived by this apparent postponement of the master's return, the scoundrel proceeds "to beat his fellow servants" and generally get himself into mischief. The faithful steward, however, wiser and more vigilant, does not grow weary in the labor entrusted to him. The point of the trial of these two men is their experience of a delay in the master's return.

In the second story, ten maidens await the coming of the bridegroom. Only five of them, however, maintained sufficient vigilance when "the bridegroom was delayed (*chronizentos*)." The sufficiency of this vigilance is symbolized by the extra oil they brought for their lamps.

In the third parable, a departing master provides differing measures of resources—*talenta*—to three of his servants, with a view to testing their stewardship. Whereas two of them do pretty well, the third fails miserably. The nub of the trial consists in the prolonged passage of time: "*After a long time* (*meta polyn chronon*) the master of those servants came."

In each story, the differing fates of the characters has to do with their handling of *chronos*, the prolonged *time* preceding the arrival of the Expected One, *ho Erchomenos* (Rev. 1:4). Thus do these three parables, each of them concerned with the Final Things (*ta eschata*), open the door to the period of church history, that unrevealed measure of days intimated by the Good Samaritan when he told the innkeeper, "*when* I come again, I will repay you" (Luke 10:35).

What is required, in each story, is not only patience with the delay but also the practical application of prudence. There are things *to do*. Thus, the steward in the first parable is not only "faithful"; he is also "sensible," *phronimos*. He keeps

his head about him, when the master makes him "ruler of his household, to feed them at the proper times."

In the second parable, likewise, five of the maidens are called "sensible," *phronimoi*, inasmuch as they bring sufficient oil to fuel their lamps, for no matter how long. With no clear idea when the master will return—for "of that day and hour no one knows" (Matt. 24:36)—they are ready to "go the distance" with salvation history.

In the third parable, all three servants await the master's return. The point of the story is what they *do* while they wait. Once again, the accent is on the prudent application of resources.

All three accounts illustrate the final parable of the Sermon on the Mount, the story of the "sensible man (*andri phronimo*) who built his house on a rock" (Matt. 7:24). He, too, understood the practical application of prudence. Jesus contrasts him with the "foolish man (*andri moro*) who built his house on the sand." This *aner moros* is replicated in the *pente morai*, the "five foolish" maidens awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. All of them fail in diligence and good sense.

The foolish people in these stories were creatures of the moment who had not cultivated a practical wisdom. They appeared to do fine until "the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew." Living mindlessly in the now, they became the trampled victims of *chronos*.

The prudence required in these parables includes a cultivated habit of reflection, a practical understanding of history, and a sensitivity to God's purposes through the vagaries of time.

The Church lives in the interval between the *event* of Jesus Christ and His Second Coming. Since Matthew's Gospel indicated that this interval might be prolonged, the Church—rather early—took care to prepare oil for the lamps and to craft suitable institutions to preserve the oil. Major among these resources, surely, were the gathering of the apostolic epistles, the writing of the Gospels,[14] the establishment of the biblical canon, the development of the ordained ministry (along with teaching that linked this ministry to the apostles by way of succession), the composition and maintenance of historical records (the Acts of

the Apostles being an early example), and the structured components of the worship, centered around the Sacraments. Most of these developments came late in the first century and well into the second. Generally speaking, they were not found in the experience of the earliest Christians.

Early during that interval between the first and second appearance of Jesus Christ in this world, the People of God experienced their first and, certainly, their most significant schism—namely, the tragic separation of the Church and the Synagogue. When the Evangelist John, near the end of the first century, recorded Jesus' prophecy, "They will expel you from the synagogues" (John 16:2), that expulsion had already occurred, and the two groups went their own ways. Shortly after the defeat of Judaism's last revolutionary (Bar Kokhba), a heretic named Marcion even advanced the theory that Jews and Christians did not worship the same God.

Even as the second-century Christians were canonizing the Apostolic Writings, the Jews—now dispossessed of the Holy Land—were in the process of forming a whole new body of interpretive literature, chiefly centered around the *Mishnah*. And as the "new nation" of the Church was beginning to write its own history, rabbinic Judaism determined to make a clean break with the pursuit of historical interest. We will consider these developments in the chapter that follows.

Notes

1 I use this adjective as a plural substantive, as though it were Latin —*apocalyptica*—to include thought, imagery, literature, preoccupations, and interest in all things apocalyptic. This adjective, derived from the Greek word for "revelation" (*apokalypsis*), is commonly used to refer to later refinements of biblical prophecy, in which secrets were revealed with respect to the Final Times. The distinction between "prophetic" and "apocalyptic" is, however, a peculiarity of modern literary scholarship; the "apocalyptic writers" thought of themselves simply as prophets. We observe, for instance, that the Book of

Revelation, traditionally known as the Apocalypse, calls itself a book of prophecy (cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).

2 Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21; but see Luke 17:20–37.

3 Matt. 12:40; 17:12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2, 24, 45; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:31, 33, 45; 14:41; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31; 22:48; 24:7; John 3:14; 12:23–24.

4 Matt. 13:41; 16:27–28; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31.

5 Matt. 8:20; 11:19; 13:37; 16:13; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:22; 11:30–32; 12:10; 17:22; 19:10; John 6:27, 53, 62; 13:31.

6 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 31.

7 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 10.4; cf. Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus* 12.44.

8 Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* 20.4.

9 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 4.20.11.

10 Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, 5.20.1.

11 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion* 4.20: *kata sarka kai anthropinon avtou deiknousin*.

12 Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 30.21.

13 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 27.1.

14 Luke, at the beginning of his own account of Jesus, remarks that “many” had already attempted it (Luke 1:1).

CHAPTER 11

The Destiny of Israel

It seems to me important to reflect that the "first schism" in church history was that tragic separation setting Jews and Christians asunder and sending them in different directions. Consequently, prior to our consideration of the Savior's Passion and death, it is appropriate to reflect, at least in a general way, on a single historical fact presupposed by—and at the root of—those dramatic events: Israel's failure to recognize and receive Jesus as the Messiah.

That failure was and remains a great mystery. Indeed, "mystery" is exactly the word Saint Paul uses to speak of it: "I do not desire, brothers, that you should be ignorant of this *mystery*" (Rom. 11:25). I add the present chapter to this book for the same reason; namely, I would not have my brethren ignorant of the mystery that attends the destiny of the Jews.

In fact, I consider the destiny of "all Israel" to be an integral part—and, perhaps, *the* ultimate historical part—of the atonement itself. Until their very different historical experiences have at last made Jews and Christians to be truly *at-one*—so St. Paul argues—something important will still be lacking in the history of salvation.[1] If Christians do not endeavor to take the measure of this Pauline idea, there is a distinct danger, I fear, that they, too, may become—in his warning words—"wise unto themselves" (*hevatois phronimoi*—Rom. 11:25).

I admit that stern and conscious effort is probably required for modern Christians to appreciate the difficulty the first believers experienced when they tried to come to grips with the historical failure on the part of the very People God had chosen in order to bring redemption to the human race. Our Christian forebears pondered how this could have happened, and, with a fair measure of

forebears pondered how this could have happened, and, with a fair measure of fear in their hearts, they wondered what Israel's defection might, in turn, mean for the Christians themselves. Israel's historical failure, that is to say, is fraught with both bewilderment and apprehension. This is not an easy subject to think about.

Prophecy

The early believers considered the Lord of salvation history had prepared the Chosen People for many centuries, redeeming them from slavery in Egypt, sealing them to Himself by the Covenant of Sinai, sending them prophets and sages to reveal His will and to hold out the hope of His promises, establishing over them the royal dynasty destined to bring forth the Messiah, rescuing them from captivity in Babylon, and preserving them during the long periods when they were dominated by Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

God had done for Israel, in short, everything possible. Yet, when the Messiah finally appeared, His appearance failed to correspond to the expectations of most Jews. How could this have happened? This theme appears repeatedly in the liturgical texts of Holy Week: "My People," the Almighty inquires of the Jews, "how could you have done this to Me?"

That puzzle pertained not only to the Messiah's rejection by the religious leaders in Jerusalem but also to the ongoing experience of the early Christian preachers, who found their message rejected in local synagogues all around the Mediterranean Basin and across the breadth of the Fertile Crescent. When this rejection occurred, moreover, it was sometimes violent—starting with the deaths of James and Stephen in Jerusalem.[2]

Attempting to understand this failure of the Jews to take possession of their own inheritance in the history of salvation, Christians turned to the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures in hopes of an explanation; they discovered that the prophets had *foretold* it. For example, Paul cited the prophecy of Habakkuk by way of warning the Jews who rebuffed his message at Pisidian Antioch:

> Behold, you despisers,
> Be amazed and perish!

Be amazed and perish.
For I work a work in your days,
A work which you will by no means believe,
Though someone were to declare it to you. (Acts 13:41; see Hab. 1:5 LXX)

Isaiah provided other prophetic texts, cited by the early Christians to make sense of Israel's tragic unbelief. This reading of Isaiah is clearest in John, who was astounded by the Jews' failure to discern the "signs" by which the identity of the Messiah was revealed:

> But although He had worked so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:
> "Lord, who has believed our report?
> And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"
> Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:
> "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
> Lest they should see with their eyes,
> Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
> So that I might heal them."
> Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. (John 12:37–41, quoting Is. 53:1; 6:10)[3]

This failure was a mystery in the strict sense; it was a *disclosure* of God's purpose—His hidden *sod*—within the structure of history. Though it seemed, at first, to represent a breakdown in salvation history—as though the physical descendants of Abraham had been bereft of their destiny—the Apostle Paul, reflecting on it in the longest of his epistles, perceives that Israel's very failure played a role integral to the process of salvation. For this reason, Israel's defection from its messianic hope prompted Paul to think of salvation history in a dialectical fashion. The development of this theme fills three-plus chapters in the Epistle to the Romans.

Taking as our initial guides the Books of Genesis and Zechariah, I propose to

Taking as our initial guides the Books of Genesis and Zechariah, I propose to conduct this consideration according to themes chronologically presented in the latter part of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week. Let us walk together, then, a last few steps before the ascent of Mount Calvary.

Joseph and Genesis

Each year the Church's Lenten reading of Genesis reaches its climax, just on the verge of Holy Week, with the story of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers. Although we finish reading Genesis just prior to Holy Week, the image of Joseph remains prominent in the hymnography of that week. These liturgical chants suggest why: The Church regards the story of Joseph as a prefiguring analogue, or *typos*, of the drama of Holy Week and the victory of Pascha. Joseph was the beloved of his father, sold for a price by his brothers, unjustly accused and imprisoned on false testimony, enduring all with patience, and, finally, forgiving his oppressors. Joseph's story thus adumbrates the dramatic days of the season; his reunion with Jacob, furthermore, foreshadows Jesus' Paschal restoration to the One who sent Him: "I ascend to My Father" (John 20:17).

Joseph's significance in the history of salvation, nonetheless, consists in more than these points of correspondence with the Gospel narratives, because his place at the end of the Lenten season brings closure to themes—and resolution to conflicts—introduced at the beginning of that season. Without Joseph, Genesis would be a completely different book. His story looks back to the beginning of Lent and ties everything together.

Observe, for instance, that we Orthodox Christians start Lent by reading the Creation account in Genesis, including man's God-given rule over the land. We read:

> Be fruitful and multiply; fill the land (*ha'aretz*) and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the land (*ha'aretz*). (Gen. 1:28)

Then, during the final week of Lent, Joseph appears in our reading as "the man, lord of the land, (*ha'ish 'adone ha'aretz*)" (42:30). Genesis declares, moreover, that Joseph is filled with the same "Spirit of God" (*ruach 'Elohim*) that first hovered over Creation (1:2; 41:28).

Because of Joseph's wise rule, Egypt becomes a fruitful place—nearly an Eden—to which people come from "all the land" (*kol ha'aretz*) to be fed (Gen. 41:57; see 41:54). Under Joseph's rule, "the earth (*ha'aretz*) brought forth abundantly" (41:47). This scene of fertility in Egypt picks up the theme of abundance in the Creation story:

> And the land (*ha'aretz*) brought forth grass, the seed-yielding herb according to its kind, and the fruit-yielding tree—its seed in itself—according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (1:12)

Moreover, given the Holy Week context of the atonement, there is a special significance in Joseph's forgiveness of, and reconciliation with, his offending brothers. Once again there is a structural correspondence in our Lenten observance: We begin Lent at Vespers on Reconciliation Sunday, when each of us goes to everyone else in the congregation and seeks the forgiveness of that person. Indeed, our Lenten offering would be displeasing to God if we failed to effect such reconciliation. Then, in the final week of Lent, we all stand and listen to the story of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers; this scene, too, is an essential part of our preparation for Holy Week. Thus, the first and final weeks of Lent are tied together by certain parallels in our seasonal reading of Genesis.

The Reconciliation of Brothers

Fraternal reconciliation is an essential component of Lent. The stage is set when, near the beginning of Lent, we read of fratricide, introduced in Genesis by Cain and extended through the vengeful mindset of Lamech. This crime is overturned in the action of Joseph during the final week of Lent. Generations of fraternal contention are put right when wise Joseph, superseding Babel's confusion of the tongues, suddenly breaks into the Hebrew language to exclaim, "*'ani Yoseph*

'achikem"—"I am Joseph your brother" (45:4). In the full contextual narrative of Genesis, his words of forgiveness and comfort serve to amend the struggle between Ishmael and Isaac, to soften Esau's urge to murder Jacob, and to remedy the confusion attendant on the Tower of Babel.

Perhaps it is not entirely accurate to say that fraternity is *restored* in Joseph, for the simple reason that in the Book of Genesis there *never was* any true fraternity; the sentiment and claims of brotherhood were violated *from the beginning* (4:8). So Joseph's brothers, when they cast him into the pit, were simply carrying on the lethal tradition commenced by Cain, that murderer who had corrupted fraternity from the start.

Until Joseph arrives on the scene, the Bible paints a landscape in which "every intent of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil (*ra'ah*) continually" (6:5). Indeed, with respect to his brothers, Joseph declared, "you meant evil (*ra'ah*) against me" (50:20). He, however, does not retaliate, thus breaking the cycle of evil, according to which, "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, / Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (4:24).

Readers of the Joseph story should pay particular attention to the meals that provide a literary frame to Joseph's dealings with his brothers. Two meals especially stand out. The first is the meal the brothers share in the context of their betrayal of Joseph. Continuing the Passion theme of Holy Week, we may think of this meal as a sort of "last supper," following which Joseph is sold for pieces of silver:

> So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his cloak, the custom-made cloak that he wore. Then they seized him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat a meal. . . . Then Midianite traders passed by; so they pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. (Gen. 37:23–25)

The other side of this literary frame is the later meal Joseph shares with his brothers: "Then they made the preparations for Joseph's coming at noon, for

they heard that they would eat bread there" (44:25). When the meal is ready, Joseph gives the command, "Serve the bread" (43:31). He then sits and eats with his brothers. This meal leads directly to the drama we have just considered, in which Joseph's identity is revealed. Thus, Joseph becomes known to his brothers in the breaking of the bread.

It is significant that Joseph, immediately after identifying himself, inquires about Jacob: "Is my father still alive?" *This* is Joseph's dominating concern: his father. Everything he does in this dramatic, redemptive scene, Joseph does with his father in mind. What he seeks—for himself and for his brothers—is reunion with the father. For Joseph, there is no true brotherhood except with this true fatherhood.

Joseph, then, emerges in Holy Scripture as a living prophecy of Christ, inasmuch as he introduces into salvation history the first example of thorough forgiveness. He foreshadows the atonement wrought by Christ, because he finds it in his heart to forgive his brothers for the sake of his father. To honor his father, Joseph makes himself—*anew*—brother to those who had rejected the claims of brotherhood. He is a prophet of the reconciling mercy of Christ. At the beginning of Holy Week, the Church expresses her regard for Joseph in the *Synaxarion* on Monday Matins:

> On this day begins the anniversary of the Holy Passion of the Savior, he of whom holy Joseph, of exceeding beauty, is taken as the earliest symbol; for this Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob, and, because he was the dearly beloved of his father, his brothers were jealous and threw him into a pit. Then they took him out and sold him to strangers, who then sold him in Egypt. He was slandered for his chastity and thrown into prison. But finally he was taken out of prison, and he attained a high rank and obtained honors worthy of kings, becoming the governor of all Egypt, whose people he supported. Thus he symbolized in himself the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and His consequent great glory.

Augustine of Hippo speaks for the whole Tradition: “Christ appears to me in Joseph, who was persecuted and sold by his brethren, and after his troubles obtained honor in Egypt.”[4]

In his reconciliation with his brothers, Joseph also serves as a sort of prophecy of a final reconciliation for which, as we shall see, the Apostle Paul dared to hope—a reconciliation in which Jews and Christians will find one another in a single family.

Palm Sunday

From Genesis we turn to the prophecies of Zechariah, three passages of which are especially pertinent to the drama of Holy Week: First, Zechariah 9:9, which is understood in the New Testament to prophesy Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem; second, Zechariah 14:20–21, which is pertinent to Jesus’ purging of the temple in the aftermath of that entry; and third, Zechariah 11:13, which is quoted by Matthew in reference to the price given to Judas for his betrayal of the Lord. We will take these three texts in the sequence determined by the events of Holy Week.[5] We begin with Palm Sunday and Zechariah 9:9:

> “Tell the daughter of Zion,
> ‘Behold, your King is coming to you,
> Lowly and sitting on a donkey,
> A colt, the foal of a donkey.’” (Matt. 21:5)

The background of this passage is the story in 2 Samuel (LXX 2 Kingdoms) 15—17, where King David is portrayed fleeing from the rebellion of Absalom. Crossing the Kidron Valley eastward and ascending the Mount of Olives, David is the king rejected by his people, while a usurper is in full revolt. The king leaves in disgrace, riding on a donkey, the poor animal of the humble peasant. David is the very image of meekness in the face of defeat. In his heart, however, is no bitterness; he bears all with patience and plans no revenge. As he goes, David suffers further humiliation and deception from those who take advantage of his plight. One of his most trusted counselors, Ahithophel, betrays him to his

enemies; another citizen curses and scorns him in his flight.

Moreover, in the description of David fleeing from Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, there is a striking contrast with the victorious Absalom, the usurper, who is driving "chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him" (2 Sam. [LXX 2 Kg.] 15:1). Absalom represents worldly power and worldly wisdom, contrasted with the humility and meekness of the king.

Incorporating this image of David as a mystic prefiguration of the Messiah yet to come, Zechariah prophesied the entry of Jesus into Zion. The Savior arrives by the very path David used to flee from the Holy City. Riding the donkey, our Lord comes down westward from the Mount of Olives, crosses the Kidron Valley, and finally enters Jerusalem. He thus begins the week of His meekly borne sufferings, including betrayal by a friend and rejection by His people.

The Messiah Purges the Temple

At the beginning of Holy Week, just after the celebration of Palm Sunday, the Church turns her attention to Jesus' act of purging the temple.[6] Our guiding text here is Zechariah 14:20–21, the closing verses of the book:

> The vessels in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Indeed, every vessel in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts.[7]

In fulfillment of this prophecy, Mark records that Jesus, when he cleansed the temple, "would not allow anyone to carry a vessel through the temple" (Mark 11:16; this detail is unique to Mark).

It is not easy to imagine, at this great distance in time, the drama, solemnity, and historical significance of that event. As the Gospels record it, Jesus cleansed the temple in the context of the Passover, when its precincts were crowded with Jewish pilgrims from all around the Mediterranean Basin and across the wide

expanse of the Fertile Crescent.[8] In short, the witnesses to this incident came from worldwide Judaism, that immense international family the prophets called *kol Israel*, "all Israel."

Moreover, during the decades preceding this event, extensive restoration and embellishment, begun under Herod the Great, had further enhanced the temple's attraction, greatly swelling the crowds who milled around the four markets on the Mount of Olives, where birds and other animals were sold as victims to be sacrificed during the feast.[9]

In addition to that traditional arrangement, the temple's Court of the Gentiles had very recently—perhaps as recently as AD 30—been made available for such commerce; it appears that Caiaphas, the current high priest, was responsible for this development.[10] That is to say, the deed of Jesus was a reaction, not to an ancient and venerable custom, but to an innovation introduced by one of His principal opponents. Purging the temple of these mercantile provisions, Jesus was explicitly challenging the authority of the high priest; He was accusing Caiaphas of defiling the temple. Consequently, "the scribes and chief priests heard it and devised how they might destroy Him" (Mark 11:18).

It is most significant that the part of the temple cleansed by Jesus was the Court of the Gentiles, that place set apart for those many non-Jews who—not becoming Jews—had adopted Israel's God as their own. Such a group would never have existed without the *Diaspora*, the wide diffusion of Jewish congregations throughout the known world. In ever-greater numbers, these people, called "fearers of God" (*phoboumenoi ton Theon*), attached themselves to local synagogues and observed as much of the Jewish piety as they were able (see Acts 13:16, 26). We know of one such man at Caesarea, named Cornelius, who kept the regular fasting days and hours of prayer (Acts 10:2, 22).

It is hardly surprising that some of the "God-fearers" should also want to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the major feast days in the temple. So, to accommodate them, Herod the Great placed a large courtyard around the Second Temple where they could gather and pray.

Caiaphas, by permitting this precinct to become a marketplace, created a scandal; a house of prayer, specifically designed for Gentiles to worship Israel's

God, was thus defiled, and the devotion of faithful people was inhibited.

This, then, was the significance of Jesus' purging of the temple: When Jesus entered the temple that day, He beheld these Gentiles gathered to celebrate Passover on the coming weekend. His indignation was aroused as He beheld this affront to their piety. Today, He resolved, this must stop; this was the day prophesied by Zechariah, when "everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 14:16).

And, again in accordance with Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus "would not allow anyone to carry a vessel through the temple." That is to say, the Court of the Gentiles would not be treated as a thoroughfare; it was a place, rather, where all the nations could worship. Thus, Jesus expressed His indignation by quoting the prophecy of Isaiah: "My house shall be a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17, quoting Is. 56:7).[11]

Spy Wednesday

Relative to the fourth day of Holy Week, traditionally known in English as Spy Wednesday,[12] we consult a third pertinent text from Zechariah (11:13), quoted in Matthew 27:9–10:

> And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.

Matthew cited this verse as a prophecy fulfilled by Judas Iscariot in his betrayal of the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, the prescribed price of a slave (Ex. 21:32).

There is a curious confusion of words in this text of Zechariah, however, perceived by Matthew as pointing to a deeper layer of meaning. In the traditional Hebrew reading, the Lord tells the prophet, "Cast it to the potter (*el-hayoser*)." Zechariah goes on to say, "So I cast it, in the house of the Lord, to the potter," a reading reflected in several modern translations.

With the change of only one letter, however, the Hebrew text would read, "Cast it into the treasury (*el-hahoser*)," and "So I cast it, in the house of the Lord, into the treasury." This latter reading is followed by other translations.

Rather than choose between these two possible readings, however, the Gospel of Matthew conflates them, maintaining both the temple treasury and the potter. Thus, Judas Iscariot, realizing the gravity of his betrayal but despairing of God's mercy, returns to the temple and throws in the thirty shekels. The clinking of those silver coins, bouncing and rolling across the stone floor of the temple, has been resounding in the ears of the Church for the past two thousand years, summoning every sinful soul back from the perils of final despair.

The temple officials collect the coins. Their first thought is to put them into the temple treasury (*hahoser*), but they are afflicted by a hypocritical scruple about such a use of blood money. Instead, they take the coins and purchase the "field of the potter (*hayoser*)." The double disposition of these coins of Judas was a fulfillment of a prophetic word spoken centuries earlier in that mystic text of Zechariah.

This "field of the potter," perhaps so named because of broken shards lying about in it, came to be known as the "field of blood," says Matthew, because it was purchased with blood money. As such, this field is a very rich symbol of redemption. This obscure piece of real estate, purchased with the price of the blood of Christ, became a sort of down payment on that ultimate redemption by which "the Lord's is the earth and the fullness thereof." By the price of His blood, Christ became the "Landlord," the Lord of the Earth. All this Matthew saw in the prophecy of Zechariah.

Innocent Blood

With respect to his expression, "the price of blood," Matthew's record includes one of the most distressing and discouraging scenes in the New Testament:

> When Pilate saw that he was utterly unable to prevail—rather, a riot was rising—he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. You take charge!" And all the people

> answered and said, “His blood is on us and on our children.” (Matt. 27:24–25)

This brief exchange begins with Pilate’s symbolic act of washing his hands, claiming *personal* innocence (“*I* am innocent”)—apparently in contrast to his executive duty!—in regard to the blood about to be shed. In making this gesture, Pilate may have been counseled by some Jews. We suspect this because the gesture itself was well known to the Jews.[13]

In fact, nonetheless, it was a duplicitous and hypocritical gesture in Pilate’s case. Crucifixion was a Roman form of punishment, and Pilate represented Rome. The Jewish punishment for blasphemy—the charge, after all, brought against Jesus before the Sanhedrin—was stoning to death.[14] The Romans, not the Jews, crucified Jesus.

No matter, then, how much water moistened his hands, Pilate’s decision to execute Jesus was his to make, and he made it. Consequently, his protestation of innocence was hypocritical; he could have saved the life of an innocent man unjustly accused, which is exactly the sort of thing the Roman government had sent him to Judea to do. In handing Jesus over to death, then, he violated man’s law as well as God’s.

One fancies Pilate may have spent the rest of his days remarking, “Yes, it was the most difficult and painful decision I ever had to make.” Such references to the difficulties of a moral choice are often invoked by way of excusing a bad moral choice. Such appeals are invariably self-serving, and in no case do they excuse the person from the moral evil of his choice. A sinful decision is still a sinful decision, no matter how difficult it is.

There is no narrative perspective, consequently, in which Pilate can be viewed as anything but a moral coward, condemning an innocent man to a terrible death in order to placate the demands of a mob. It was the whole boast of Rome that the Empire put an end to mob rule.

We come, then, to the response of the Jews, the second part of this brief exchange. Pilate was not alone in guilt; all the Gospel accounts trace the initiative for this murder to the spiritual authorities of certain Jews, most

especially the family of Annas, which held the high priesthood during this period.[15]

At this point Matthew suddenly stops speaking of a "crowd" and uses the word, "people." This is the word he normally uses when referring to the Jews as a whole. Indeed, in this place, he emphasizes the point by referring to "*all* the people," *pas ho laos*. It is as *all the people*—the immense crowd, from far and near, gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover—that the Jews call down the blood of Jesus on themselves and their children. In their original setting it is obvious what these words meant: "All the people" were assuming responsibility for Jesus' death.[16]

To appreciate the deep theological meaning of this solemn imprecation, it is not on the original setting of the words that we should concentrate. In the mind of this inspired Evangelist, the chilling imprecation of the crowd ironically takes on, rather, the quality of a prayer.

The blood summoned onto the heads of the Jews is, after all, what every Christian knows it to be: redemptive blood, the blood of the atonement, the blood described by the Savior as "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:27). In every other place where the New Testament refers to the blood of Jesus—the Gospels, Paul, Peter, Hebrews, Revelation—this blood is redemptive and sanctifying. It is *never* the mark or token of a curse.

Consequently, it strains credibility to give the blood of Jesus a different meaning in this passage, at the very point where that blood is about to be shed. In the mind of Matthew, this shout from the people becomes something very different from an imprecation. It is unreasonable to understand the words used here except in a full theological sense: namely, the blood of Jesus is poured out upon the Jews—all Jews, any Jew, every Jew down through the ages—in the same way it is poured out upon the rest of us: to cleanse from sin and to purchase a people unto God.

Similarly, according to Luke, Jesus prayed for all those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). The Jews, like the rest of us, are the beneficiaries of that prayer and of that bloodshed. The Jews—until the end of time—are our brothers by the price of that blood. The Jews are *not* an accursed people. To regard them as such

is to repeat the sin of Pilate; it is to betray the innocent Christ. Even if we are separated from them at the present time, we are certain that God has not rejected the Jews. It is time now, I think, to consult St. Paul on this point.

Providence and Predestination

Toward the end of a long reflection on the Holy Spirit—Romans 8—the Apostle Paul introduces the theme of Divine Providence, the profoundly mysterious influence God brings to bear on the direction of history.

A textual problem attends this introduction (8:28); it has to do with the word "God." Depending on which manuscripts are followed (and sheer antiquity is not an adequate guide here, because the manuscripts come from Christian churches of great antiquity, and some of the textural variants must have been introduced very early), the meaning of the passage is either "in everything God works for good with those who love Him," or "God makes everything work together for the good of those who love Him," or "everything works together for the good of those who love God." Notwithstanding their differences, each of these readings testifies to God's providential guidance of the lives of those who love Him.

Having introduced the theme of Divine Providence, Paul continues it through the rest of this chapter, and then, in chapters 9—11, he applies it directly to a disconcerting historical dilemma posed to the minds of the early Christians—namely, the rejection of the Gospel by larger masses of the Jewish people. How, thinking Christians wondered, could this have happened? If God had taken such great care of the children of Israel for nearly two thousand years, how did so many of them fail to recognize the Messiah? Was this not a breakdown in salvation history?

No, writes Paul, the defection on the part of the Jews was permitted because God had in mind some greater benefit that would ensue. God is the Lord of history; He knows everything ahead of time. And, knowing everything ahead of time, He quietly and mysteriously arranges and prearranges the circumstances of history in order to bring about a greater blessing.

Paul appeals to the ancient theme of God's ability to bring good out of evil. His thesis, which forms the substance of the argument in Romans 9—11, is

drawn from the Old Testament. It is obvious, for instance, in the account of Joseph, elect among his brothers—the man whose trust in the divine guidance permits him to tell his betraying brothers:

> As for you, you meant evil against me; God, however, intended something good, in order to bring about what we have today—to preserve the lives of many people. (Gen. 50:20)

When God chose Joseph to be the savior of his family, He also permitted the other brothers' betrayal; indeed, their betrayal became part of the drama of the family's deliverance. The fabric of that story would have been incomplete without the threads of evil woven into it.

God's knowledge of the future is the basis on which He arranges for those circumstances that influence the course of events. The English biblical word for this divine activity is "predestination," which in context means "adjusting things ahead of time." In Holy Scripture this category always refers to God's historical *adjustment* (the word is chosen with some trepidation, for we have no idea *how* the Lord does these things), based on the divine foreknowledge.

We do not understand how God influences the activities of history, but we do know that He *never* acts in such a way as to remove man's freedom of choice. In the words of John of Damascus:

> We should understand that while God knows all things beforehand, He does not predetermine all things. For He knows beforehand those things that are in our power, but He does not predetermine them. For it is not His will that wickedness should exist, nor does He choose to compel virtue.[17]

What, then, does Holy Scripture mean when it asserts that God "predestines"? The verb, *proorizo*, means "to arrange ahead of time." In the biblical context, where this verb appears with "foreknow" (*proginosko*, "to know ahead of time"), it signifies the providential arrangements by which God leads people to the grace

of the Gospel. That is to say, predestination embraces the mysterious influences that God brings to bear on history, so that all things work together for the good of those who love Him.

Dialectical History

The ordering brought about by the Lord of history provides the context in which Paul introduces his treatment of Israel's failure to know and confess the Messiah at His coming. This is the theme of chapters 9—11 of the Epistle to the Romans. It is important, when we read these chapters, to keep in mind the problem with which Paul was dealing: Israel's serious defection with respect to the Messiah. *This* is the subject of his query into the dialectical structure of history.

I make a point of this because the history of theology testifies to a serious and widespread misreading of Romans 9—11. Countless are the readers who forget the subject of Paul's argument in these chapters; they treat this material as though Paul suddenly changed subjects and began writing about something else entirely. For a very long time, many exegetes of this text have misunderstood it; forgetting the explicit historical context in which Paul places it, they have treated this section of Romans as a discourse on predestination to heaven or hell.

On the contrary, Paul is making a pretty standard observation here: God, in His providential guidance of history, makes use of man's sins. He never "prearranges" those sins nor wills them; He does not, that is to say, predestine men to sin. Even less does God predestine anyone's damnation. Damnation is never God's idea, and the majestic sovereignty of God receives no glory from anyone's eternal loss.

The foreknowledge and predestination of God is Paul's way of describing the priority of divine grace in redemption and justification. The initiative is God's, not ours. We foreknew nothing; we prearranged nothing. God has done it all. He knows and He determines, ahead of time, what form His work in history (including the personal history of each of us) will take.

Those who truly experience His grace are aware of themselves as known by God (1 Cor. 8:3; 13:12), loved by God (1 John 4:19), chosen by God. When Paul speaks of predestination, he is describing the experience of life in the Christian

Church. That is to say, the sense of predestination is an existential perception. It pertains to spiritual experience.

The verb "to predestine"—the noun never appears in the Bible—has no reference to an alleged divine decree whereby some people are consigned to heavenly life and others to everlasting damnation. There is not the faintest suggestion of such a thing in Holy Scripture. On the contrary, God wills *all men* to be saved. In the Bible, predestination does not refer to any divine decree at all. It is a description, rather, of God's providential activity in history, working to bring good out of evil.

This is the activity Paul discerns in Israel's failure to recognize the Messiah; this failure, for Paul, was the extreme example of God's ability to bring good out of evil, to make human sins the very instrument of His grace.

For the rest: Nowhere does Holy Scripture hint even faintly at a person's "predestination to hell." In fact, this repulsive idea does violence to the Bible, in which predestination is *always* a category of grace, never of punishment. Predestination pertains invariably to the divine call, not the rejection of that call. It is *always* a description of the divine favor, not disfavor. Predestination does not include God's arrangements to have someone damned.

Israel and Election

Paul's argument moves in stages. First, he says, Israel's rejection of the Messiah was not complete, inasmuch as many Jews—himself mentioned first—gladly received Jesus and became the remnant, the original nucleus of the Church. Comparing this remnant to the three thousand faithful of whom Elijah learned in a revelation on Mount Horeb, Paul writes:

> I say then, has God cast away His people? Perish the thought! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin. . . . Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (Rom. 11:1–5; see 1 Kin. [3 Kg.] 19:18)

Even now, then, Paul was no more alone than Elijah had been alone when he

met the Lord on Mount Horeb (1 Kin. [LXX 3 Kg.] 19:14, 18). God had not abandoned Israel in those days; He would not abandon Israel now, because “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

The irrevocable nature of God’s election leads to Paul’s second consideration—namely, that the falling away of Israel is only temporary. God has future plans for Israel. For the moment, Israel is acting in blindness (11:7–8), which is the source of Paul’s sadness (9:1–2; 10:1). He observes, moreover, that Israel’s blindness at the present time was hardly unique; the Hebrew Scriptures were full of prior examples, and prophets—he cites Isaiah and David—had commented on the theme.[18]

That is to say, Israel’s current defection has had no shortage of precedents in the past, and if God remained faithful to Israel in former times, He surely remains faithful to Israel now and will manifest that fidelity in days to come. The course of history, Paul argues, will prove the Jews still to be God’s elect and predestined people.

Paul’s comments on the irrevocable nature of God’s fidelity to Israel prompt two further considerations. First, it is clear that in Paul’s entire treatment of election and predestination, these terms refer to social entities—not individuals. Neither in Romans nor elsewhere does Paul show any concern for individual predestination. It is simply outside his scope of interest, and none of his statements on the subject of predestination and election have any relevance to such a concern. For Holy Scripture, it is always a matter of the chosen “people,” not a collection of chosen individuals. Election and predestination in Paul, then, are themes pertinent to ecclesiology, not to individual salvation.

Consequently, it would be a mammoth distortion of the text to apply these verses to the spiritual lives of individuals, pretending that God, having called them to justification, is somehow obliged to save them, even if they turn their backs on Him. God is said to remain faithful to Israel, but this does not imply that all Jews will be saved. God remains faithful to the Church, but that does not ensure that all Christians will be saved. However this subject is approached, it has nothing to do with the Epistle to the Romans.

Second, “Israel” in these verses is a biological/religious term, not a political

designation. Consequently, it is a serious distortion of the Sacred Text to suggest that the modern State of Israel is somehow the predestined beneficiary of God's blessings, especially the benefit of specific real estate. The modern State of Israel is simply a state, nothing more; its link to biblical "Israel" is political, not theological. There is no compelling reason to believe that the contemporary State of Israel has more theological significance than any other political institution in this world.

Indeed, the Lord and Judge of history holds the State of Israel to the same standards of morality and justice He imposes on all nations. As is the case with any other nation, God will bless the State of Israel if it serves Him in its social and political life. God will condemn it if it is unjust or oppressive in its social and political life. But the modern State of Israel, as such, has not the slightest theological claim on the biblical promises or prophecies.

The Olive Tree

After his discussion of the "remnant," Paul turns to the metaphor of the olive tree in order to illustrate how it is that non-Jews now find themselves to be branches of the ancient plant of Israel. That is to say, Paul now inquires, how is it that "Abraham is the father of us all"?

The failure of most Jews to recognize Jesus as the Messiah is described by Paul as the lopping off of branches from the olive tree of Israel, and the entry of the Gentiles into the Christian Church he portrays as an engrafting of alien branches into the earlier stock. The tree, however, remains the same. Thus, the ancient calling of the Israelites has not been abrogated. It remains the root-work of the whole plant.

How, then, should Christians react to this new and crucial development of salvation history? What should be their relationship to the Jews? Paul mentions two things, one negative and the other positive.

From a negative perspective, Christians must not be boasters and smart alecks. They must avoid pride about their own engrafting into the ancient tree (Rom. 11:18). After all, it was by grace through faith that they were engrafted; they had done nothing to deserve it. Divine grace should be received with

reverence, not with smug self-satisfaction. The Christian, then, must not look down on the Jew or give himself airs. If the native branches themselves were lopped off the tree, then the engrafted branches should be especially cautious, lest they too suffer the same fate (11:21). Nothing is less attractive than a smirking Christian, and the Christian who boasts against the Jews, or contemns the Jews, or speaks of the Jews with disdain, is a moral abomination.

From a positive perspective, Christians should endeavor to make the Jews "jealous":

> For I speak to you Gentiles: inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I expand my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to *jealousy* those of my flesh and save some of them. For if their defection means the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead? (11:13–15)

Paul's meaning is clear: The first Gentiles joined the Christian Church because they were "jealous" of the blessings enjoyed by the Jews and were looking for an opportunity to share those blessings (11:11).[19] Now it is time for the process to work the other way: The present task is for Christians to live in such a way as to make the *Jews* jealous!

It is Paul's expectation that the Jews will want to share in the blessings of the life in Christ, because the life in Christ was meant to be, all along, their own inheritance. Christ is the fulfillment of all of Israel's deepest longings, and if Jews see Christians sharing blessings that properly belong to themselves, they too will become jealous and will claim their proper inheritance.

What should this mean in practice? At the very least it should mean that Christians keep a special place in their hearts for the Jews, because the Jews have a special place in the heart of God. Christians will recognize in the Jews the blood-relatives of the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the Virgin Mother of God, and Christ our Lord. Anti-Semitism is more than a heresy. Viewed from a Christian moral perspective, it may rank just below blasphemy.

The Immediate Aftermath

History was not kind to the Jewish people during the century following the trial of Jesus. Just before that trial, Israel's Last Prophet wept over Jerusalem and foretold the destruction of its temple, and within a generation of that prophecy the Holy Land was engulfed in a series of Jewish revolts against Rome, a running conflict culminating in the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman army.

The fall itself, in July of AD 70, was preceded by a siege of three and a half years, during which many thousands of Jews perished of hunger, disease, and incessant infighting among the city's defenders. Although Titus, the commander of the Roman forces, was disposed to preserve the temple after the city's fall, it was gutted by a fire that spread from some neighboring buildings. According to Josephus, the Jewish historian present during the entire tragedy, 97,000 Jews were captured and enslaved.[20]

Even then, however, the unrest did not end; it moved south. Just west of the Dead Sea stands a high plateau known in antiquity as "the fortress," in Hebrew *metzadah*, from which name it has long been called "Masada." On this nearly invincible site, a remnant of Jews held out against the Romans for three more years. In the end most of them finally preferred suicide to capture.

Nor did the fall of Masada finish Jewish nationalism and resistance to Rome. Early in the second century, there were Jewish uprisings in Cyrene, Egypt, Cyprus, and the Fertile Crescent. Because those local revolts were put down by a Roman general called Lusius Quietus, they are jointly referred to as the Kitos War.

The final war between Rome and the Jews was waged during the years 132–136. The Jewish leader was Simon bar Kosiba, better known to history as "Bar Kokhba," "son of the star." Simon received this name from rabbis who believed his appearance in history fulfilled the prophecy in Numbers 24:17: "A star shall emerge from Jacob, / A scepter will arise out of Israel." The great Akiva ben Joseph (40–137), an important contributor to the *Mishnah* and arguably the most venerated rabbi of the time, regarded Bar Kokhba as the Messiah. Subsequent to the failure of his revolt, however, the disappointed and disillusioned rabbis took to calling him "Bar Kozeba," "son of a lie."

After Bar Kokhba's revolt, a deep and darkening cloud fell over the Jews. Now deprived of their homeland, they lived wherever they could, guests wherever they went. Nor was this separation from the land, it seems, the worst form of their alienation. Their geographical displacement was more than matched by a dislocation in time. I quote my chief source on this subject: "Three tremendous uprisings against Rome, all with eschatological overtones, had ended in disaster and disillusion."[21] After so much historical disappointment, who could blame the Jews for abandoning their interest in history?

After centuries of interpreting the events of history, a century of sustained disappointments now compelled the Jews to foreswear the effort. As far as they could see, the

> biblical past was known, the messianic future assured; the in-between-time was obscure. . . . In the biblical period the meaning of specific historical events had been laid bare by the inner eye of prophecy, but that was no longer possible. If the rabbis were successors to the prophets, they did not themselves lay claim to prophecy.[22]

Thus, the people who bequeathed to mankind's mental treasury the Deuteronomic history, the work of the Chronicler, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the sundry Maccabean annals, and the writings of Flavius Josephus—this people, quite abruptly, gave up their interest in history.

Inasmuch as the very notion of "religious history" was a product of Hebrew history and experience, this phenomenon is extraordinary. It is a fact, nonetheless, that the rabbinical tradition, after the defeat of Bar Kokhba, became utterly ahistorical in its attitude, interest, and methodology. The rabbis believed they had already learned what history had to teach them; there was no sense in studying it anymore. During the next millennium and a half, a Jew could—and many did—become a rabbi, a saint, a mystic, a poet, or a sage, but he wouldn't dream of being a historian.

Christians, who regard the history of the Church as the legitimate continuation of biblical history, will be disposed to see in Israel's rejection of a

crucified Messiah the root cause of its separation from its own roots—this, following Paul's metaphor of the lopping-off of the branches. The Passion of Christ, that is to say, *forces* the tragedy of Israel's historical estrangement. Arguably, the man who perceived this cause most clearly was St. Paul, who experienced Israel's estrangement first-hand. Consequently, in the next volume of this work, as we take up our consideration of the Lord's Passion, we will devote serious attention to the vocation and conscience of St. Paul near its beginning.

Notes

1 I summarize, for the moment, what I believe to be Paul's thesis in Romans 11, concerning which more will be said in the pages that follow.

2 Acts 7:54–60; 8:1; 9:1–2; 11:19; 12:1–2; 13:45; *et cetera*.

3 The Isaian text was cited rather often in connection with Israel's unbelief: Matt. 13:10–15; Mark 4:10–12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:23–28.

4 Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus* 15.28.

5 The Gospel readings for Bridegroom Matins and the Presanctified Liturgy during Holy Week adhere rather strictly to the chronological indications given in the Gospel texts themselves.

6 Although this event *apparently* takes place on Palm Sunday in Matthew's account, Mark 11:12 places it on Monday.

7 The Septuagint, followed by many other translations, reads the Hebrew word as *ken'ani*, "Canaanite," so that the text says, "there shall no longer be a *Canaanite* in the house of the Lord of hosts." This reading is improbable, I believe; when had there ever been Canaanites in the temple? Saint Jerome, however, reads the same Hebrew word as *kine'ani* and properly translates it as *mercator*, "merchant" or "tradesman." This rendering better fits the contexts in both Zechariah and the Gospels.

8 According to John, Jesus purged the temple just before the first Passover during His public ministry (John 2:13), whereas the Synoptics describe it as

taking place immediately prior to the final Passover of Jesus' life. The resolution of this discrepancy lies outside the interests of the present book.

9 See Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anith* IV.8.

10 See V. Epstein, "The Historicity of the Gospel Account of the Cleansing of the Temple," *Zeitschrift fur die Neuestestamentliche Wissenschaft* 55 (1964), pp. 42–58.

11 Did Jesus cite this text in Greek? I inquire because the citation is taken word-for-word from the Septuagint. No matter the answer, it is certainly true that more Jews at that time spoke Greek than Aramaic—to say nothing of Hebrew—and during the feast days one heard a great deal more Greek in Jerusalem than any other language. In any case, Jesus surely spoke Greek as a second language, that ability being rather common in Galilee.

12 This name, much favored by the Irish, is derived from the memory that on the Wednesday of Holy Week Judas Iscariot, having agreed to betray Jesus for thirty silver pieces, "was looking for an opportunity (*ezeite evkairian*) to hand him over" (Matt. 26:16). That is to say, Judas became a "spy" for the Sanhedrin. The Czechs call this day *Škaredá středa*—"Ugly Wednesday."

13 See Deut. 21:6–9; Ps. 26(25):6–10; Is. 1:15–16.

14 We see this punishment exemplified in the death of Stephen, who also was condemned for blasphemy. Stephen, however, was murdered by a mob; his case was never presented to the Roman authorities.

15 Recent popular presentations of Jesus' life pretend that the plot against Jesus was essentially a Roman idea, the Romans being fearful of Jesus' political influence. Readers of Holy Scripture are understandably miffed by such an unfounded presentation. Prior to Good Friday, Pontius Pilate, Rome's official representative in the area, seems never to have heard of Jesus.

16 See Lev. 20:9–16; Josh. 2:19–20; 2 Sam. (2 Kg.)1:16; 14:9; Jer. 51:35.

17 John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2.30.

18 Rom. 11:8–10; see Is. 29:10; Ps. 68 (69):2–23; Deut. 29:4.

19 In Romans 11:11 the translation “salvation has come for the Gentiles” is inaccurate. In the Greek text (*he soteria tois ethnesin*) there is no explicit verb, and in Romans the verbs connected to “salvation” are normally in the future tense. The sense of the expression, then, seems to be, “there will be salvation for the Gentiles.”

20 Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* 6.9.3.

21 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle 1982), page 24.

22 *Ibidem.*

AN ADDED WORD

Salvation History and Life in the Church

Among Christians unfamiliar with the perspective of the Church Fathers, one occasionally hears that the latter were not really interested in the theology of salvation. I confess to having heard this assessment times out of mind; such folk tell us the Fathers' pursuit of proper Trinitarian and Christological formulas occupied their minds so completely that little thought could be spared for more "practical" concerns such as "How are human beings *saved*?" This impression is sometimes bolstered by the observation that the Fathers did not, like later Christians, compose treatises on salvation.

By way of completing the first volume of this work on soteriology, let me play advocate for the Fathers of the Church.

For starters, it seems inappropriate to inquire *how* we are saved until we have somewhat explained *what* salvation is, and, in fact, the Church Fathers commented on *this* subject incessantly.[1] They spoke of salvation as union with God, adoption as children of God, participation in the life of God. In short, they identified salvation as theosis, a unique transfiguring communion with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This, they believed, was to be saved, and in this, they proclaimed, consisted eternal life—"that they may know (*ginoskosin*) You, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

To "be saved," for the Fathers, was to attain to a particular, Spirit-conferred knowledge of God in Christ. "Being saved" was inseparable from the knowledge

(*epignosis*) of the saving God. Thus, in the mid-second century, Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, prayed as he was tortured at the stake:

> Lord God almighty, Father of Your beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the *knowledge* (*epignosis*) of You, God of angels and powers and of all creation . . . I bless You that You have granted me, on this day and at this hour, to receive a portion among the number of the witnesses (*martyres*) in the cup of Your Christ, unto the resurrection of eternal life, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit.[2]

As Polycarp understood it, *this* was salvation: the knowledge of God in Christ, leading to communion in the witness of the Church, the eucharistic transformation, and the resurrection to eternal life.[3] It begins, however, with the Spirit-conferred knowledge (*epignosis*) of the Father through His Son.

Roughly a half-century later, Clement, a catechist at Alexandria in Egypt, wrote of "the *real* Christian (*ho toi onti Christianos*)" as "knowing the *real* God (*ton toi onti Theon egnokotas*)."[4] This knowledge of God depended entirely on the Christian's likeness to God through divine grace. Gregory Nazianzen, called "the Theologian," gave a formal synopsis of this knowledge in the fourth century: "What the nature and being of God is . . . will be discovered when that which is godlike within us . . . will be united to that which it is like."[5]

Second, when the Church Fathers spoke of salvation, they tended to do so within a full creedal context, as the central component in a more ample narrative of the faith, the biblical story that begins with creation and ends with the "final things," the *eschata*. The Creed, commencing with creation and ending in fulfillment, was understood to be an abbreviated form of the history of salvation.

The creedal components, wrote Gregory the Theologian, include

> our original constitution (*prote systasis*) and final restoration, images (*typoi*) and truth and covenants, the first and second coming of Christ, His Incarnation (*sarkosis*), sufferings, and death (*analysis*), with the

> Resurrection, the last day, the judgment and the recompense, whether lamentable or glorious.[6]

We observe that as elements in the history of salvation, Gregory places the "sufferings of Christ" (*pathemata tou Christou*) within an elaborate creedal list. This list contains

> the Law, the Prophets, the covenants and their oracles, the basic catechesis and the more advanced instruction, *the sufferings of Christ*, the new creation, the apostles, the Gospels, the distribution of the Spirit, faith, hope, love, both toward God and from God—not given out by measure, like the gift of manna to ungrateful and insensitive Israel, but in proportion to our desire—ascent and illumination (though limited in its earthly expression), directed to the One we hope for, and lucid, but most of all the knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the confession of our highest hope.[7]

On the historical quality and dimensions of salvation, the *oikonomia*, I cite Gregory the Theologian in preference to other Church Fathers here, because this greatest of the Cappadocians is sometimes mentioned as a writer so engaged with the Mystery of the Holy Trinity that he showed scant interest in the theology of salvation. In fact, the opposite is true; Gregory's theology of the Holy Trinity includes a close reading of salvation history, understood as embracing the entire biblical story and continuing through the life of the Church. This knowledge of the saving God is multifaceted because its material components are formed of the myriad historical "moments" (*kairoi*) in which He reveals Himself to His people.

In the teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian we arguably have the finest summary of the thesis I proposed in the first chapter of this book—namely, "the study of salvation is properly formed from within the ecclesial experience of *being saved*, and this experience is chiefly communicated in the Church's sacramental and liturgical worship."

For St. Gregory, becoming a Christian—a state initiated in the creedal

experience of Baptism—meant incorporation into a vast stream of salvific history, going back to creation itself and embracing the full span of the biblical story. The minister who initiates the new believers into the sacred mysteries may justly say to his catechumens:

> Let us enter the cloud. Hand me the tablets of your heart. Though it is a bold thing to declare, I will be your Moses. By the finger of God I will write on them a new Decalogue. I will compose on them an abbreviated formula of salvation (*soteria*). . . . I will baptize you and make you a disciple (*mathetevso*) in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one divinity.

For those he invites to the sacred table, Gregory recites the menu of the feast. These are the items of the Creed. First there is one God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. So, says Gregory,

> Believe (*pistevete*) that everything in the world, whether visible or unseen, was made from nothing by God and is governed by the providence (*pronoia*) of the Creator, and will be transformed to a better state.

Second, there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. So, says Gregory,

> Believe that the Son of God, begotten of the Father before all time, was without a body, but in these last of days, for your sake, became a Son of Man, and came to be (*genomenos*) through the Virgin Mary, in an unutterable and stainless way—where God is the subject, and where salvation (*soteria*) is concerned, nothing is sullied. In His very person He was simultaneously a complete human being and perfect God. He did this for the suffering human being, that He might bestow salvation (*soteria*) on your entire existence, having dissolved the full condemnation of your sins. . . . In addition, receive the resurrection, the judgment, and the reward.[8]

Be “enlightened” into Christ, Gregory invites his catechumens, and begin to learn the vocabulary of the Church’s prayer:

> The psalmody with which you will be received is a prelude to the psalmody of heaven. The lamps you will enkindle are the mystery of the Illumination (*mysterion Photismou*), with which you will meet the Bridegroom—O bright and virginal souls!—with the shining lamps of our faith.[9]

For Gregory, who on this point certainly represents the consensus of the Fathers, “being saved” (*soteria*) is not an individual experience. It is a process of transformation that takes place in the life of the Church, into which the believer is initiated through the sacred mysteries. It is inadequate to say that the Church is the proper context of salvation; salvation is accomplished, rather, in and through the Church’s discipline and defining institutions: the Holy Scriptures, the Creed, Baptism, the Lord’s Table, the sundry rites of worship (including its arts and appointments), the chanting of the Psalms and other sacred texts, and the life of evangelical charity and ascetical striving to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. The atonement we receive in Christ is theosis. It is a gracious participation in the divine life.

Notes

1 Nonetheless, the Church Fathers did not neglect the “how” of our salvation, ascribing its causality to the Incarnation (Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 63.16; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 1.10.1), the Lord’s death on the Cross (Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians* 7.4; Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* 18.1), and His Resurrection (Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against Apollinaris* 2.5).

2 *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14.1–2. An anonymous Christian contemporary of Polycarp wrote of faith in Christ as conferring “the first knowledge of the Father (*proton epignosin Patros*)” (*The Letter to Diognetus* 10.1). See Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.2.5.

3 By way of commentary on this rich text of Polycarp, see P. H. Reardon, “The Cross, Sacraments and Martyrdom: An Investigation of Mark 10:35–45,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 36/1&2 (1992), esp. pp. 111–114.

4 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.1.

5 Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 28.17.

6 Gregory, *Orations* 2.36.

7 Gregory, *Orations* 32.23.

8 Gregory, *Orations* 40.45.

9 Gregory, *Orations* 40.46.

About the Author

Patrick Henry Reardon is pastor of All Saints' Orthodox Church in Chicago, Illinois, and a senior editor of *Touchstone*. He is the author of *Christ in the Psalms* and *Christ in His Saints,* in addition to the books in the "Orthodox Christian Reflections" Bible commentary series. He has also written more than 500 articles, editorials, and reviews, published in *Books and Culture, Touchstone, The Scottish Journal of Theology, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Pro Ecclesia, St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly,* and other journals on three continents.

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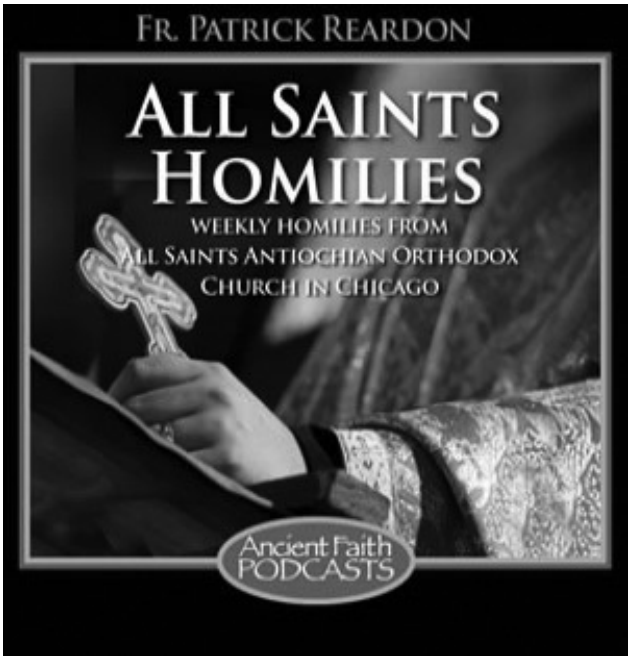

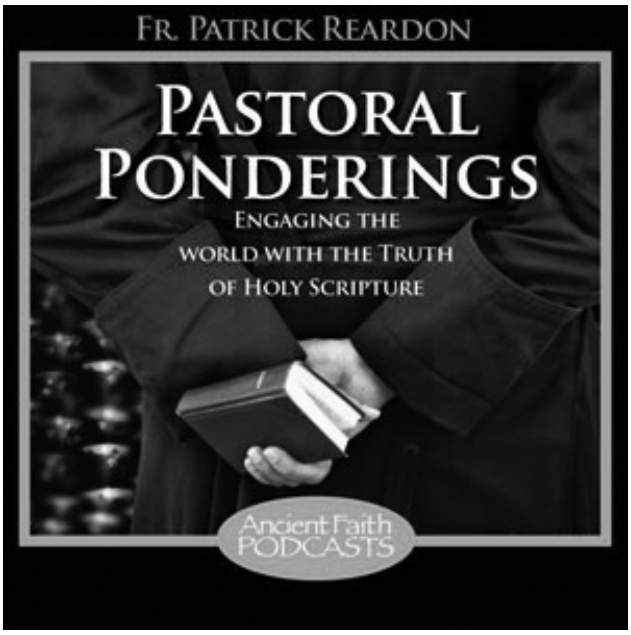
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