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CONTENTS

PATRISTICAL READING

- On the Incarnation of the Word, 54 1
St. Athanasius
-

ARTICLES

- Reassessing the Relation of Reformation and Orthodoxy: A Methodological Rejoinder 3
Richard A. Muller
- Discovering the Sacred In Secular Art: An Aesthetic Modality That “Speaks of God” 13
Christopher Evan Longhurst
- A Match Made In Munich: The Origin of Grenz’s Trinitarian Theology 23
Jason S. Sexton
- The Best Man Is Only A Man: Reflections On Some Enchantments and Disenchantments of the Grail 47
Charles M. Natoli
- There Is No Sex in the Church 61
Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov
- The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree 85
J. Lyle Story
-

BOOK REVIEWS

- Walter Isaacson. *Einstein: His Life and Universe.* 95
Stephen V. Murphy
- J.L. Walls and J.R. Dongell. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*; R.A. Peterson and M.D Williams. *Why I Am Not an Arminian.* 97
Myk Habets
- Review Article: John Walton. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate.* 102
Johnathon Bowers
-

- THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS OF CHRISTIANITY 107
-

PATRISTICAL READING

ON THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD, 54

St. Athanasius

The Word Incarnate, as is the case with the Invisible God, is known to us by His works. By them we recognise His deifying mission. Let us be content to enumerate a few of them, leaving their dazzling plenitude to him who will behold.

As, then, if a man should wish to see God, Who is invisible by nature and not seen at all, he may know and apprehend Him from His works: so let him who fails to see Christ with his understanding, at least apprehend Him by the works of His body, and test whether they be human works or God's works. 2. And if they be human, let him scoff; but if they are not human, but of God, let him recognise it, and not laugh at what is no matter for scoffing; but rather let him marvel that by so ordinary a means things divine have been manifested to us, and that by death immortality has reached to all, and that by the Word becoming man, the universal Providence has been known, and its Giver and Artificer the very Word of God. 3. For He was made man that we might be made God; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality. For while He Himself was in no way injured, being impossible and incorruptible and very Word and God, men who were suffering, and for whose sakes He endured all this, He maintained and preserved in His own impassibility. 4. And, in a word, the achievements of the Saviour, resulting from His becoming man, are of such kind and number, that if one should wish to enumerate them, he may be compared to men who gaze at the expanse of the sea and wish to count its waves. For as one cannot take in the whole of the waves with his eyes, for those which are coming on baffle the sense of him that attempts it; so for him that would take in all the achievements of Christ in the body, it is impossible to take in the whole, even by reckoning them up, as those which go beyond his thought are more than those he thinks he has taken in. 5. Better is it, then, not to aim at speaking of the whole, where one cannot do justice even to a part, but, after mentioning one more, to leave the whole for you to marvel at. For all alike are marvellous, and wherever a man turns his glance, he may behold on that side the divinity of the Word, and be struck with exceeding great awe.

REASSESSING THE RELATION OF REFORMATION AND ORTHODOXY: A METHODOLOGICAL REJOINDER

Richard A. Muller*

The study of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology in relation to its antecedents has emerged as a fairly significant focus of scholarly investigation in the last several decades and whereas, prior to this resurgence of interest, there was basically one way of looking at the material, namely the approach conveniently summarized under the rubric “Calvin against the Calvinists,” there is now an alternative approach (or more precisely, there are various alternative approaches) that dispute the radical discontinuity claimed by the “Calvin against the Calvinists” school of thought. My purpose here is not to reexamine the entire debate but to offer a clarification of my own approach to the subject, given the level of misunderstanding present in several recent essays, both pro and con. Myk Habets’ review in the previous issue of *American Theological Inquiry* (Vol. 3, No. 2) of the reissue of a rather old book of mine provides occasion for that clarification.

Habets begins by commenting that my “basic thesis” consists in the claim “that there is continuity between the Reformer’s theology and...Reformed scholasticism/orthodoxy.”¹ In fact, this particular point—not yet, by the way, the full thesis of the book—was a bit more nuanced, indicating *both* continuities and discontinuities occurring in the process of the development and institutionalization of Reformed Protestantism. That approach to both continuity and discontinuity has remained (a matter of my own continuity!) throughout the project as it developed into such studies as *After Calvin* and *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*.² Of course, continuity received some emphasis given the tendency of the older scholarship to declare a fairly radical discontinuity. But as Van Asselt and Dekker have noted, the language of continuity associated with the current reassessments of Reformed orthodoxy is also to be contrasted with assumptions of radical continuity between the Reformation and later orthodoxy.³ The approach found in the reassessment assumes a multifaceted or variegated pattern of continuities and discontinuities, not only between the Reformation and orthodoxy but also between Protestant orthodoxy and the earlier tradition, both patristic and medieval, with accent on the issue of inherited or traditionary connections with the later Middle Ages. It also indicates that differences between matters of definition and expression between specific Reformers and specific later thinkers are often paralleled by

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¹ Myk Habets, Review of *Christ and the Decree*, in *ATI*, 3/2 (2010), p. 105.

² Cf. e.g., Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, reprinted, with a new preface (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 9, 175; with idem, “John Calvin and Later Calvinism: the Identity of the Reformed Tradition,” in David C. Steinmetz and David Bagchi, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 148-149; *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 83-84, 87-89; and *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 15, 38-40, 44-46, 60-61, 121-122, 278-281, 308, 438; IV, pp. 17-18, 387-391, 419-420.

³ Willem J. Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, “Introduction,” in van Asselt and Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 33.

differences among the Reformers themselves and differences among the later orthodox writers. As Heiko Oberman long ago pointed out with reference to the relationships—continuities and discontinuities—between the Reformation and the late medieval thought, the underlying issue concerns the nature of the ongoing conversation, dialogue, and debate in theology and philosophy, a conversation that did not stop abruptly with the beginnings of the Reformation,⁴ or, one may add, with the passage from the Reformation into the era of orthodoxy.

My own work in reassessing Reformed orthodoxy has never defined continuity as sameness nor discontinuity as mere difference. Nor was the issue of continuity and discontinuity the entirety of the thesis, an impression perhaps given by one early review essay:⁵ it was identified specifically as a “question” raised by the earlier scholarship, given, among other things, its differences over the interpretation of Calvin as highly predestinarian (nineteenth- and early twentieth-century readings) or as christocentric (mid-twentieth-century readings) and the impact of these diverse readings on the understanding of later Reformed theology.⁶ In other words, continuity and discontinuity were not so much the thesis of the book as one of the “avenues of reappraisal,” together with the issues of the varied sources of Reformed thought and the development of doctrine, noted on the way to a thesis.⁷

Those qualifications are both crucial to the thesis and embedded in its earliest form. More specifically, the original thesis was focused on the issue, fundamental to the “Calvin against the Calvinists” theory, that the christocentric Calvin had not utilized predestination as a central dogma, whereas later Reformed theologians had typically deduced entire systems of thought from the divine decree.⁸ Issues of continuity, discontinuity, and development were examined in relation to the specific question of predestination as a central dogma—without any claim being made about the relation of the teachings of the Reformers to those of the Reformed orthodox on other points of doctrine. Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of the original thesis, later elaborated in other essays, specifically introduced at the beginning of the third chapter, was the character of the Reformed tradition as varied or diverse, resting on a group of influential formulators and not on Calvin alone.⁹ The conclusion of the study indicated that neither Calvin and his contemporaries nor later Reformed theologians had developed their theologies around central dogmas, that both Christology and the doctrine of predestination had been subjects of considerable development among the Reformed, and that the ways in which Reformed writers interrelated the doctrines demonstrated multiple theological *foci* in their theologies—not that there were no differences between the various theologies examined. In fact, the differences were consistently noted, beginning with significant differences among the major codifiers of Reformation theology,¹⁰ requiring a

⁴ Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 38-39, 42-43.

⁵ Martin I. Klauber, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Post-Reformation Reformed Theology: An Evaluation of the Muller Thesis,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 33 (1990), pp. 467-475.

⁶ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 9.

⁷ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 7-9.

⁸ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 1: note the last sentence of the first paragraph of the book.

⁹ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 38; cf. *After Calvin*, pp. 7-15.

¹⁰ E.g., Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 38-39, 69-73.

more nuanced approach to the issue of continuity and discontinuity rather than a simplistic registering of sameness or difference.

The underlying theme of the book, a theme that has carried over into my subsequent research, was the development of the Reformed tradition from the time of the Reformation into the post-Reformation era. The issue addressed was never just continuity—nor was the issue simply a matter of continuity, discontinuity, and developments. Rather the issue was, quite consistently, the proper location of discussion of continuity, discontinuity, and development, namely, not in facile, decontextualized comparisons of a Reformation era thinker like Calvin with a later thinker like Perkins or Turretin, but in contextualized discussion of the larger tradition as identified in a broader sampling of its representatives.

My subsequent research has largely consisted in shifts of topic and emphasis from the original thesis concerning the nineteenth-century central dogma theory and the claim that later Reformed writers produced a theology grounded in a predestinarian form of metaphysical determinism to the topics of prolegomena, Scripture, the doctrine of God, and a variety of other topics including covenant. In each case, the more specific theses or themes of the essays have shifted with the topics, even as the questions of continuity, discontinuity, and development remained ways of approaching the materials, albeit with different results in relation to the different topics. Thus, in the study of prolegomena, the specific theses argued concerned the nature of the theological task, the varieties of theological method, the relations of faith and reason and of theology and philosophy (as defined by the Reformed orthodox) with a view to medieval and Renaissance as well as Reformation backgrounds. Among the conclusions of the study was that on certain points, such as the usefulness of natural revelation, the later Reformed view had greater affinity with the thought of Vermigli than with the thought of Calvin—a conclusion that represented, among other things, an indication of one way in which the question of continuity and discontinuity needed nuance.

Habets also misunderstands the underlying point made in *Christ and the Decree*, as well as various other of my essays, that scholasticism (as also humanism) is primarily a matter of method. This point, by the way, is hardly original to me. It represents the consensus of a large body of scholarship from Kristeller onward,¹¹ a body of scholarship typically not consulted by proponents of the “Calvin against the Calvinists” approach, who had consistently attempted to define scholasticism as a particular content and philosophy without reference to the history of scholasticism itself. As to the implications of identifying scholasticism as a method, I never made the claim, “that method does not affect content” or that differences in method and order are “merely cosmetic” (as Habets put it).¹² Since I never made this claim, I ought not to be faulted for repeating it and certainly not for failing to engage in “a genuine historical enquiry” to prove it!¹³ Nor, in stating specifically that scholasticism (and humanism) were primarily concerned with method, was I making a claim

¹¹ As cited in *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 35-36, notes 11, 12, 13.

¹² Habets, Review, pp. 106, 107; a similar misreading is found in Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008), p. 22; and perhaps in Willemien Otten, “Scholasticism and the Problem of Reform,” in Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten eds., *Scholasticism Reformed: Festschrift Willem van Asselt. Studies in Theology and Religion*, 13 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), pp. 58, 61, 73.

¹³ Habets, Review, p. 107.

about method in general—only about scholasticism and humanism as approaches to learning in the late medieval and early modern eras. An underlying problem in the older scholarship is that it stated, without grounds, that the Reformed adoption of the scholastic method resulted in theologies controlled by predestination and deterministic metaphysical speculation.¹⁴

What I consistently indicated (including in the book reviewed by Habets) is that a distinction needs to be made between method and content without entirely separating the one from the other—not that method has no effect on content, but *very specifically* that neither a scholastic nor a humanistic method can be credited with yielding particular doctrinal conclusions such as focus on a central dogma, supralapsarian understandings of the decrees, hypothetical universalism, and so forth,¹⁵ given that Thomists, Scotists, Jesuits, Calvinists, Lutherans, and Arminians all employed scholastic and, often in the early modern era, also elements of humanistic methods, to very different doctrinal conclusions; and given that the same doctrinal conclusions can be found both in works obliging scholastic method and works not conceived according to scholastic method.¹⁶ Proper study of Arminius specifically evidences that the scholastic method was employed by him to argue significantly different theological content, albeit as part of an ongoing conversation and debate in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theology and philosophy.¹⁷

I also quite specifically indicated some of the differences in Reformed theology brought about by scholastic method in the concluding section of *Christ and the Decree* and I elsewhere noted, with reference to one kind of contrast that can be made between Luther's theology and later Protestant thought, that “methodological changes bring about changes in doctrinal statement if only because the careful systematization of an idea tends to remove elements of tension and paradox resident in the initial, unsystematic formulation.”¹⁸ This statement, of course, does not exclude other topical or doctrinal impact of methodological change. As to the “genuine historical enquiry,” I have consistently shown in and through examination of historical sources, that the understanding of scholasticism primarily as a method rather than as a particular theology or philosophy is not merely a matter of recent historiography but is embedded in the writings of the Reformed thinkers of the early modern era. The documentation for the general definition of scholasticism as primarily method is clearly given in the body of scholarship cited in the footnotes and the documentation for its specific

¹⁴ Note that the older scholarship has been shown to have been mistaken on *both* points: use of scholastic method did not bring about theologies controlled by central dogmas—and, in any case, the older Reformed dogmatics was not developed around predestination and metaphysical speculation.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. ix-x; with *After Calvin*, pp. 81-83.

¹⁶ Note the discussion of this methodological issue in Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), pp. 120-129, 183-189; especially pp. 128-129, 184-185.

¹⁷ Cf. Richard A. Muller, “Arminius and the Scholastic Tradition,” in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 24/2 (November 1989), pp. 263-277; and *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

¹⁸ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, p. 46; cf. *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 179, 180-181.

application in my own work ought to be evident in the seventeenth-century sources deployed and examined in my research.¹⁹

So also, it should have been clear that my related contention, “barring rather different definitions of doctrine, such differences in order and arrangement have more to do with the literary genres of works examined than with any implied theological messages,”²⁰ included a significant qualification in the first clause. Namely, it is the difference in definition that bears the weight of arguing doctrinal discontinuity and that, barring such differences, the order and arrangement by itself does not provide evidence of doctrinal discontinuities. And I did document the point in detail in an essay which noted, among other things, that the placement of predestination in older Reformed theology was unrelated to issues of supra- and infralapsarian definitions and often differed in the theological works of differing genres written by the same theologian.²¹ Beza, who never did locate predestination in the doctrine of God and who varied its location from document to document (*pave* Habets), illustrates the point.²²

Another significant misunderstanding on Habets’ part is found in his indication that another “contention of Muller’s is that Christology and predestination are not antithetical in Reformed scholasticism but must be seen as interrelated in just the same ways as they are in the theologies of the Reformers.”²³ Habets mistakes both points. The issue in debate between myself and proponents of the “Calvin against the Calvinists” approach was not that Christology and predestination are antithetical in the older Reformed dogmatics: they did not make such a claim and I accordingly did not argue against it. The claim against which I argued was that Calvin produced a christocentric theology, later Reformed writers followed Beza by deducing all doctrine from the divine decree or “decrees,” and that this predestinarian system either replaced or opposed Calvin’s christocentrism²⁴—and my conclusion was that neither Christology nor predestination was constituted as a central dogma either by Calvin or by later Reformed writers, including Beza, and that the claim of an opposition between central dogma christocentrism and central dogma predestinarianism

¹⁹ E.g., *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 109-204; and note the chapter on Calvin’s understanding of scholasticism in Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Formation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 39-61.

²⁰ Habets, Review, p. 106, citing *Christ and the Decree* (2008), p. xi.

²¹ Richard A. Muller, “The Placement of Predestination in Reformed Theology: Issue or Non-Issue” in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 40/2 (2005), pp. 184-210.

²² Cf. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 80-81, 83-84, 87; with Muller, “Placement,” pp. 197-199.

²³ Habets, Review, p. 106.

²⁴ One may ask here precisely what Habets means by the comment “Whether the divine decree is singular or plural makes a huge difference materially to soteriology not to mention proclamation and worship” (p. 107) inasmuch as Reformed thinkers of the early modern era, including Amyraut and Turretin, consistently indicated that the decree was singular and that the usage of multiple “decrees” was a matter of human convenience in sorting out the logic of the divine willing in relation to the order of salvation as revealed. Differences in descriptions of the logic of divine willing or order of the decree, moreover, can hardly be said to arise from scholasticism inasmuch as all parties to the argument employed scholastic method. And, of course, it is not correct that merely speaking of the decree as singular as opposed to making distinctions concerning various decrees or orders of the decree “makes a huge difference materially to soteriology”—rather it is how one defines and deploys such definitions and distinctions that makes the difference.

was historically unfounded.²⁵ Given, moreover, that *Christ and the Decree* was about developments in Reformed theology and that it fairly closely documented the rather original ways in which Perkins and Polanus, among others, argued trinitarian and christological issues in their formulations of predestination, it was clearly not the thesis of the volume to argue that the Reformed orthodox “interrelated” these doctrines “in just the same ways as they are in the theologies of the Reformers.” In point of fact, the argument shows that they interrelated the doctrines in ways not conceived by the Reformers, although not indicative of a shift from a christocentric model to a deductive predestinarianism.

It is also worth clarifying the issue of my differences with the work of my old colleague, Brian Armstrong. Habets indicates that I dismiss Armstrong’s thesis “outright” and that Armstrong’s work, as distinct from mine shows “how diverse Reformed thinkers are not cut from the same cloth and do in fact differ over essential theological points.”²⁶ The specific issue on which *Christ and the Decree* disagreed with Armstrong’s argumentation in *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* was his definition of Reformed scholasticism. Since I did not address his argumentation concerning the theology of Moyses Amyraut, I did not dismiss his thesis outright, but, quite specifically, his definition of scholasticism and his understandings of the impact of scholasticism and humanism on the development of Reformed theology. More than that, I never made the claim (whether against Armstrong or in isolation) that Reformed orthodox or scholastic theologians were “cut from the same cloth.” In fact, on the specific issue of the relationship of Amyraut’s exegesis of universalist passages to Calvin’s readings, it is Armstrong’s reading that flattened out differences and mine that identified them.²⁷ (Beyond this, where Armstrong’s work, like that of other proponents of the “Calvin against the Calvinists” approach, makes value-laden judgments based on twentieth-century theological proclivities concerning what is good and bad in Reformation and post-Reformation theology, mine does not.)

Both in *Christ and the Decree* and in all of my subsequent essays, I have noted differences, whether between formulations found in the Reformers and those found in the Reformed orthodox, or among the Reformers themselves, or among the Reformed orthodox writers. These differences concern both doctrinal definition and method—and, as noted in several places, differences in definition that related specifically to method.²⁸ The point was always to chart the development of a theological tradition that was variegated in its early formulations in the era of the Reformation and that remained variegated in the formulations found in its early and high orthodox eras.

What I have argued, with only brief reference to Amyraut, is that when the confessional boundaries—as understood by the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox are observed—a distinction can be made between debates between theologians of different confessionalities, debates among Reformed theologians that result in the identification of a

²⁵ I have, more recently, argued that the usage “christocentrism” is both confusing and redolent of a modern dogmatic assumption not held by writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: see Richard A. Muller, “A Note on ‘Christocentrism’ and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology,” in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 68 (2006), pp. 253-260.

²⁶ Habets, Review, p. 107.

²⁷ See Richard A. Muller, “A Tale of Two Wills? Calvin and Amyraut on Ezekiel 18:23,” in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 44/2 (2009), pp. 211-225.

²⁸ E.g., Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 72-73, 95-96, 125-126, 180-182.

particular theological formulation as standing outside the Reformed confessional boundaries, and debates among Reformed theologians, however heated, that went on within the confessional boundaries and that the very real differences in argumentation, method, definition, and content among the Reformers and among the later Reformed writers belong to the development of a rather broad and variegated theological tradition and do not provide the basis for the kind of radical distinctions made in earlier scholarship between Calvin and the so-called “Calvinists.”²⁹ Beza did not duplicate Calvin and Perkins did not duplicate Beza. Neither Amyraut nor his opponents duplicated Calvin.³⁰ Nor was Amyraut declared to be in violation of the Reformed confessional standards. Rather he was exonerated by several French synods. Habets’ comment about differences over “substantial” or “essential theological points,” then, is itself too vague to offer any index for examining the diversity of the era. Is, for example, a disagreement over supra- and infralapsarianism, over the meaning and implications of a covenant of works, over more particularistic understandings of Christ’s satisfaction and the Amyraldian form of hypothetical universalism, or over the interpretation of the *pactum salutis* in relation to the covenant of grace, “essential” or “substantial” in the sense of indicating a radical discontinuity when none of these debates relates directly to doctrinal points deemed by the Reformed orthodox to be “fundamental” or confessional and, moreover, when none of these issues were defined or referenced in Calvin’s *Institutes* (or in the thought of contemporaries like Bullinger, Musculus, or Vermigli)? I think not.

Given that my approach has consistently looked for both continuity and discontinuity as well as development, it is curious to find Habets commenting that application of the approach “dissipates” discontinuities.³¹ The point of my approach was to indicate that the identifiable differences or discontinuities between Calvin’s method as well as his definitions and arguments and the methods, definitions, and arguments of individual later thinkers are not of the status claimed by the “Calvin against the Calvinists” argument. In other words, the issue concerns the nature and character of the discontinuities as well as the continuities, just as it concerns the nature and character of the movement that has (in my view, rather imprecisely as well as against the wishes of Calvin and most seventeenth-century Reformed thinkers) come to be called “Calvinism.” By including contemporaries of Calvin like Bullinger, Musculus, and Vermigli in my analysis, by referencing medieval backgrounds, and by noting the eclecticism of the seventeenth-century writers, I have built into my approach a basic sense of the diversity of the Reformed tradition.

A similar counter can be made to the comment that my approach “flattens out the diverse thinkers...into neatly packaged categories.”³² If one accepts the older claim of a radical discontinuity between a christocentric, humanistic Calvin and predestinarian, scholastic theologians of the era of orthodoxy, then, certainly there has been a flattening of the curve, given that Calvin’s work, albeit highly influenced by humanistic methods has been shown to have scholastic accents, the implications of his polemics against the “scholastics” have been more nuanced, and the theory of a christocentric theology of Calvin disputed, at

²⁹ *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 44-46, 76-81; cf. *After Calvin*, pp. 8-9; and “A Tale of Two Wills? Calvin and Amyraut on Ezekiel 18:23,” pp. 223-225.

³⁰ Cf. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 96, 164-165, 167, 171-173, 179-182; with “A Tale of Two Wills? Calvin and Amyraut on Ezekiel 18:23,” pp. 223-225.

³¹ Habets, Review, p. 106.

³² Habets, Review, p. 107.

the same time that later Reformed theologians have been shown to have humanistic as well as scholastic aspects and to have continued to critique what they saw as problematic elements of medieval scholastic theology, while the claim that they grounded their theology in predestination as a central dogma has been set aside. What was flattened was an exaggeration. What remains is a rather variegated picture of the developing Reformed tradition in which, historically, the efforts of later theologians were not directed toward duplicating the thought of Calvin or, indeed, of any of his predecessors or contemporaries. As to the categories employed in analyzing the various thinkers, I have done my best not to invent categories (or to reify “isms”—one of the other significant deficits of the “Calvin against the Calvinists” approach) but to elicit my categories from the historical materials themselves.

My intention (rightly identified by Habets), is to investigate “how doctrine developed in the early Protestant period.”³³ But the very nature of the development, as testified over and over again by the explicit comments of the later Reformed writers, was not to duplicate Calvin’s thought or the thought of any one of the early Reformers.³⁴ Seventeenth-century Reformed Protestants consciously formulated their theology with reference to the broader Christian tradition, basing formulations on Scripture, the Fathers, various medieval thinkers deemed useful, the works of the Reformers, and a host of contextual issues. Simply to compare Calvin to a later thinker and draw a conclusion as to continuity or discontinuity fails to respect the historical record, the genres and contexts of definitions, and the diversity of the Reformed tradition. The far more illuminating study concerns the ongoing conversation, dialogue, and debate over issues in terms of nuances, whether those inherited from the pre-Reformation tradition, those contributed by the Reformers, or those brought about by the altered contexts of argument in the post-Reformation era—without, by the way, heaping theological praise or casting theological blame when continuities and discontinuities are examined.

There is also some misunderstanding of my work and, I would add, a general misunderstanding of the historical issues of faith and reason, theology and philosophy in Habets’ comment that I argue “against those who contend that the differences between the Reformers and the Reformed scholastics is based upon the use of rationalism by the latter group as the primary principle of explaining the will of God, as opposed to the use of faith and Scripture by the former group.”³⁵ Habets’ statement confuses reason with rationalism and thereby overlooks the point that there are two issues at play in the discussion of Protestant orthodoxy, namely, the role of reason in theological formulation and the impact of rationalism (i.e., of the rationalist philosophies of the early modern era) on Protestant theology. On the first of these issues, there is certainly a contrast to be made (a discontinuity?) between the explicit declarations of the Reformed orthodox concerning the ancillary role of rational argumentation and of philosophy in theological formulation and the relative absence of such declarations on the part of Calvin and his contemporaries. It is not the case, however, that the Reformers used only faith and Scripture in their formulations

³³ Habets, Review, p. 106.

³⁴ As documented in Richard A. Muller, “Reception and Response: Referencing and Understanding Calvin in Post-Reformation Calvinism,” in *Calvin and His Influence, 1509-2009*, Proceedings of the Calvin Congress, Geneva, May, 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), forthcoming.

³⁵ Habets, Review, p. 106.

(remember Luther's declaration at Worms) and the Reformed orthodox let faith drop out of the picture and appealed only to reason and Scripture.

When, moreover, one examines later Reformed discussion both of theological principia and of the divine will, neither Scripture nor faith has been replaced by a rational exercise.³⁶ In their discussion of principia, the Reformed writers quite clearly delimit the relationship of reason to faith and identify the function of philosophy as ancillary to the theological task. Their use of the older, modified Aristotelian philosophical tradition evidences much the same effort to adapt and appropriate what conformed to Christian belief or to modify or eject what did not. Even so, in their discussions of the divine will, the Reformed did not simply apply philosophical categories but worked through a series of traditional distinctions grounded in the realization that Scripture used the concept of divine willing in a variety of senses. The use of philosophical concepts appears in the ways in which the Reformed relate divine willing to such issues as necessity, contingency, and the nature of causality, but one would be hard put to demonstrate that this interrelation of the philosophical and theological departs from the Reformed understanding of the ancillary status of philosophy.

As to the issue of rationalism, the history of Reformed thought in the early modern era indicates a reluctance to absorb the new rationalist philosophies into a full, positive relationship with theology. Some seventeenth-century Reformed thinkers found elements of Cartesian thought appealing, and several of the eighteenth-century Reformed became its advocates with some erosion of the final authority of Scripture. A larger number resisted Cartesianism strenuously. The rationalisms of Gassendi and Spinoza were consistently rejected. The philosophical approaches of the Reformed remained rather eclectic throughout the era.³⁷

These considerations lead rather directly to the issue of the more developed thesis or, more accurately, set of theses that frame my work since *Christ and the Decree*. There are two primary places where these thesis-statements occur—in *After Calvin* and in the second edition of my study of prolegomena.³⁸ In both places, the assessment of continuities and discontinuities appears as one among other methodological issues and, when stated in such a way as to indicate that the variegated trajectory of Reformed thought can be described in terms of a series of continuities and discontinuities extending from the later Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation into the seventeenth century, as a thesis nuanced by a series of other theses or concerns. Those concerns include recognition of the varied medieval backgrounds of the Reformers themselves and of developing Reformed theology; identification of the Reformed confessional tradition and the varied thinkers belonging to it as the theological context for examining development, change, continuity, and discontinuity; examination of the exegetical traditions out of which many of the Reformed theological formulations arose; and study of trajectories in intellectual history and philosophy in the

³⁶ On the issue of divine will and some of the biblical texts referenced by the Reformed orthodox, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, IV, pp. 432-475.

³⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 67-73, 367-382; and note the extended study by Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625-1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Antonius Driessen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006).

³⁸ Muller, *After Calvin*, pp. 71-72; *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 37-42.

early modern era with reference to such issues as scholastic method, humanism, piety or pietism, and the new rationalist philosophies.

Habets concludes that my work does not constitute “the last word on the subject” despite it containing “the most words on it” and that “after working through Muller’s arguments” he is “still not entirely convinced.” I sincerely hope that I haven’t uttered the last word on the subject. Particularly in my conclusions I have regularly called for more detailed study of Reformed orthodoxy in the hope of encouraging others—and I must admit that I haven’t yet exhausted my interest in the Reformation and the era of orthodoxy. I am still learning. I also have the impression that Heinrich Heppé still holds the record for the most words on the subject, particularly if one includes quotations. And although I do not expect all readers to be entirely convinced, I would hope that on their way to a conclusion about my approach to early modern Reformed thought they would work carefully enough through my arguments to understand what claims have been made and what conclusions have actually been drawn. I am not convinced that Habets has done that.

DISCOVERING THE SACRED IN SECULAR ART: AN AESTHETIC MODALITY THAT “SPEAKS OF GOD”

Christopher Evan Longhurst¹

Introduction

Continuing the development of themes in theological aesthetics, the following article explores the relationship between art and theology from the unique perspective of artistic technique, that is, the manner in which an artwork is executed. It aims to arrive at conclusions about the capacity of a genuine figurative work of art, in particular the painting, to “speak of God”—put more technically: “how [all genuine pictorial] art can function as a source of and in theology.”² The *status quaestionis* is that if the disciplines of art and religion are in conflict today, as many still claim, then theological discussion needs to articulate the nature of this conflict.³ To do so the theologian, or any creditable scholar interested in serious debate on matters of religion and art, must ask whether all instances of art “speak of God,” and if so, ascertain the criteria by which they do, and if not, consider the lack of such reference as the necessary cause of conflict.

The framework of this investigation is the comprehensive Catholic (Thomistic) theory of aesthetics in its historical and analytical context. The hypothesis is that aesthetic modality, by virtue of the artistic act, conceives both art and theology as occupied with, or envisioned in, the same object—Existence.⁴ It proposes that by the creative act the artist participates in the highest excellence of God and that this involvement is a basic fact of aesthetic modality for

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² Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (ed.), *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 204.

³ Pope Benedict XVI restates the “symptoms” of this conflict expressed already by his predecessors John Paul II and Paul VI. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Incontro con gli artisti* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009). Speaking of the relationship between the contemporary Church and artists, John Paul II, in his *Letter to Artists*, addresses the need for a renewed dialogue: “I turn to you, the artists of the world, [...] to help consolidate a more constructive partnership between art and the Church”. John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (Rome: Vatican City Press, 1999), 14. Pope Paul VI, in his homily delivered to artists, invites a return to friendship, recalling that: “[...] siamo sempre stati amici. Ma, come avviene tra parenti, come avviene fra amici, ci si è un po’ guastati. [...] allora restiamo sorpresi ed intimiditi e distaccati.” Paul VI, “L’omelia di Paolo VI agli artisti”, 9, delivered at the Mass of Artists, 7 May 1964, in *Chiesa e Arte, Documenti della Chiesa testi canonici e commenti*, ed. Giacomo Grasso (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 2001), 34. (Translation of the present author). Cf. Albert Rouet, *Liturgy and the Arts*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997), 25-7.

⁴ By “aesthetic modality” I intend the manner in which one perceives the beauty in any work of art. For the argument there are two measures by which one can “speak of God”: (1) directly, by affirming specifically the God of religion; (2) indirectly, by affirming ultimate reality in general. Both of these approach concern Existence. Cf. Paul Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” in *Art Creativity and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 220.

every instance of art.⁵ Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate how all art ends in questions about God no matter what the individual conception of God may be. In the final analysis I will establish that art and theology reveal the same object, though in entirely different ways, and in so doing, they remain fully independent enterprises, yet they search the same world, a world in which God continually reveals Himself. In so doing it may be categorically verifiable that the end of these disciplines is a mutual one in which the subject of the divine, if not the Eternal God Himself, is encountered; and this end is achieved in every instance of genuine artistic creativity.⁶

An Aesthetic Modality that “Speaks of God”

The underlying proof of art’s capacity to coincide with theology is the fact that God’s plan of salvation in the economy of all religious traditions includes not only the glory, salvation and transfiguration of humankind, but also its suffering and death, along with its failings and sinfulness.⁷ Art expresses this dualism, this apparent contradiction, the splendor of the human person *ad imaginem Dei* along with the reality of human suffering, failure and death. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council expressed this relationship succinctly when they affirmed:

[...] the arts [...] seek to penetrate our nature, our problems and experience as we endeavor to discover and perfect ourselves and the world in which we live; they try to discover our place in history and in the universe, to throw light on our suffering and joy, our needs and potentialities, and to outline a happier destiny in store for us. Hence they can elevate human life, which they express under many forms according to various times and places.⁸

In a similar light, speaking on the occasion of the presentation of the Vatican exhibition in the United States, Pope John Paul II mentioned that a genuine work of art “will speak of history, of the human condition in its universal challenge, and of the endeavors of the human spirit to attain the beauty to which it is attracted.”⁹ In his *Letter to Artists* he makes

⁵ According to Thomas Franklin O’Meara aesthetic modality is a basic fact of all human experience. He affirms that “aesthetics can describe religion, revelation, faith and thinking about faith with a strength and clarity equal to the categorical style (‘categorical’ in both the Aristotelian and Kantian sense)”. Thomas Franklin O’Meara, “The Aesthetic Dimension in Theology”, *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 5.

⁶ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 57, 3, c.; II-II, 45, 3 (henceforth *Summa theol.*); Paul Weiss, *Religion and Art*, The Aquinas Lecture, 1963 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963), 5-6, 10-11.

⁷ Christian traditions refer to the normal collective state of human existence in this context as one of “Original Sin.” The Hindu tradition calls it “*maya*” while Buddhism uses several terms to describe the same notion, one being “*dukkha*.”

⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, (Apostolic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965), 62—“[...] artes [...] *Indolem enim propriam hominis, eius problemata eiusque experientiam in conatu ad seipsum mundumque cognoscendum et perficiendum ediscere contendunt; situationem eius in historia et in universo mundo detegere necnon miserias et gaudia, necessitates et vires hominum illustrare atque sortem hominis meliorem adumbrare satagunt.*”

⁹ John Paul II, Address on the occasion of the presentation of the Vatican exhibition in the United States entitled “The Vatican Collection - The Papacy and Art.” Thursday, 29 April 1982.

more explicit the connection between art and religion on the one hand, and secular art and faith on the other:

Even beyond its typically religious expressions, true art has a close affinity with the world of faith, so that, even in situations where culture and the Church are far apart, art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience. In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.¹⁰

The Pontiff concludes that genuine artwork, in all of its creative expressions, may treat of any theme that the author desires though it must “translate into meaningful terms that which is in itself ineffable. [...] translate it into colors, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen. [...] make perceptible, and as far as possible, attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God.”¹¹

What then is the property of art that achieves these ends? What in art effects the reality of a divine-human encounter? Is it the content of an artwork that the observer perceives, or is it the subject matter to which he or she relates? Or is it the artistic skill and the nature of the creative act of the artist *in se*?¹² To begin to understand this property two categories of signification need to be examined: (1) subject matter and content which is material; (2) modality, which is qualitative.¹³ Consider, for example, a comparison between the artworks *Crucifixion* by Fra Angelico and *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso.¹⁴

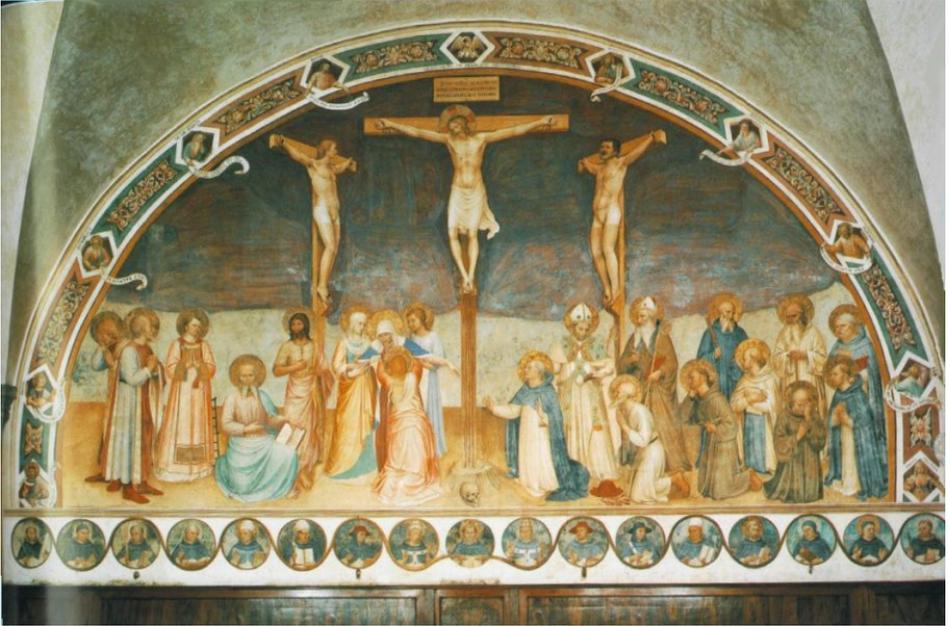
¹⁰ *Letter to Artists*, 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² The capacity of the human person to co-create is a divine gift. The Book of Genesis reveals that God’s first act was creation: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gn* 1:1), and that the human person is created *ad imaginem Dei*: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (*Gn* 1:26). So God is the Divine Artist and the human person is God’s masterpiece created in the master’s image.

¹³ Cf. Weiss, 37-43. Professor Weiss makes a succinct analysis of the distinctions among secular works of art having secular subject matter and those having religious subject matter, and religious works of art having religious subject matter and those having secular subject matter. The distinction of signification will be addressed further in the theological analysis of St. Thomas and Paul Tillich.

¹⁴ Pablo Ruiz Picasso, *Guernica*, oil on canvas, 1937, National Museum *Reina Sofía*, Madrid, online: <http://www.abcgallery.com/P/picasso/picasso36.html> (accessed 25 April 2010). Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion*, mural painting, 1438, National Museum *San Marco*, Florence, online: <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/giorgio.vasari/angelic/angelo.htm> (accessed 25 April 2010).



Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion*, mural painting, ca. 1442
National Museum *San Marco*, Florence



Pablo Picasso: *Guernica*, oil drawing on canvas, 1937
National Museum *Reina Sofia*, Madrid

Both paintings are figurative representations that portray suffering and death. The *Crucifixion*, however, is said to be a “religious work of art” while the *Guernica* is thought to be “secular.”¹⁵ This distinction is false, at least artificial, on account of being based solely on content and the disposition of the artist’s soul. Theologically speaking, neither of these factors contributes to an objective or universal principle by which a work of art may be said to “speak of God.”¹⁶

What then is it about these two paintings that may unconditionally tend towards “speaking of God”? In his Aquinas Lecture on *Religion and Art*, Professor Paul Weiss maintains that a work of art “is religious” not by being concerned with the distinctive God of any religion but rather “with the God who is evident to anyone who looks at the portrait with aesthetically sensitive eyes.”¹⁷ What, however, does the observer see? Usually he or she perceives only the subject matter and the content. The question arises: how then would the painting of a stone be understood as capable of “speaking of God”? Professor Weiss affirms that a “religious work of art” may be “produced out of any material and concern itself with any topic,” though he claims that it must be produced by an artist who is religious.¹⁸ This opinion seems somewhat implausible as a crucifixion of Christ, superlatively painted by a nonbeliever, would not be considered a religious work of art for Weiss, yet it could be identical to, even better painted than one of an artist who is religious. So what are the criteria by which a work of art may be deemed to speak of God independently of the artist’s beliefs or disposition of soul, and independently of the subject matter or content?

A Theological Response from the Aesthetic Theories of St. Thomas Aquinas and Paul Tillich

To respond satisfactorily and provide a convincing theological argument, the artwork needs to be placed into a theological context—a complex though exciting task. According to St. Thomas Aquinas “art” is correct knowledge combined with efficient skill in making things: “[...] Art is nothing else but ‘the right reason about certain works to be made.’”¹⁹ His most renowned expression to describe art is “*recta ratio factibilium*” (right reason in making things).²⁰ This definition, as it excludes the human disposition, provides a satisfactory solution to the problem of Weiss’s argument which holds that the artist has to be a religious

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, however, praises Picasso’s *Guernica* as a religious work of art. Cf. Paul Tillich, “Existential Aspects of Modern Art”, *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson (New York: Scribner, 1956), 138. Professor Weiss agrees, “[...] it is possible to view a work of art, even the “Guernica”, within the framework of some religion, and find that it sustains and enriches religious activity, particularly by means of the beauty it embodies.” Weiss, op. cit., 13-4. Weiss’s interpretation, however, is somewhat incomplete.

¹⁶ The subject matter could be a flower and the artist’s intentions satirical. If the two pictures, the *Guernica* and the *Crucifixion*, differ in form and content, they certainly agree in subject matter and creative dexterity.

¹⁷ Weiss, op. cit., 40.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 38-9.

¹⁹ “[...] *ars nihil aliud est quam ratio recta aliquorum operum faciendorum.*” *Summa theol.*, I-II, 57, 3 c. Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm>, accessed 12 April 2010 (at article “virtue”): “Art, *techné* or *ars*, according to the Schoolmen, signifies the right method with regard to external productions: *recta ratio factibilium*”.

²⁰ *Summa theol.*, I-II, q. 68, a. 1, ad 1.

person. St. Thomas describes the impersonal and objective work of art as an object that expresses its own structural laws and not the person of the author. He is not concerned with the affirmation of the artist's self. The religious quality of the work is thereby placed by St. Thomas in its aesthetic modality, in the *modus operandi* of the artist.²¹ Despite the importance of the artist's will, St. Thomas affirms that it is not the intention that makes a particular work art, but rather the quality of work performed.²² There is, accordingly, an essential element of dexterity involved for a work to be truly art.²³

Theologian Paul Tillich maintains that if the idea of God includes "ultimate reality," then everything that expresses ultimate reality, as does art, expresses God whether it intends to do so or not.²⁴ All creation, for Tillich, expresses God, and insofar as a work of art is a reality that expresses some thing, then it expresses God.²⁵ This, however, may seem to be too simplistic an argument, for a work of art is not comparable to a stone. Earle Coleman, professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, would refute Tillich's argument on the following grounds: "If everything is religious, it conveys little to assert that all art is religious."²⁶ Yet Tillich has a point insofar as the distinction between art as "being" and art as "expressive of being" is made. Tillich says that art indirectly expresses God because the intention of art is to express ultimate reality.²⁷ Here he seems to have a valid point.

So where is God in *Crucifixion* by Fra Angelico and in Picasso's *Guernica*? It depends on whether one looks for Him in the subject matter and content, or in the proficiency of the creative act of the artist, in the artist's *recta ratio*, somehow residing in the work and affording its inherent beauty. God may or may not be perceived in the former; however, He is always present in the latter, at the level of artistry.²⁸ Whatever the artist creates—although he can never *facere ex nihilo*, as a result of his artistic act he is always imitating the primordial act of the Divine Artist. According to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, a work of art is a

²¹ Cf. Thomas Franklin O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas Today*, op. cit., 207.

²² "Non enim pertinent ad laudem artificis, in quantum artifex est, qua voluntate opus faciat: sed quale sit opus quod facit." *Summa theol.*, I-II, 57, 3 c. Here St. Thomas describes how art is not only dependent on the goodness of the work done, but how it has something in common with the speculative habits as well.

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁴ Cf. Paul Tillich, "Art and Ultimate Reality," op. cit., 219-20.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* In asserting this Tillich is in accord with St. Thomas who affirms that the idea of God includes ultimate reality, and everything that expresses ultimate reality expresses God. Cf. *Summa theol.*, I, 8, 1-4, *de existentia Dei in rebus*, I, 14, 8, *utrum scientia Dei sit causa rerum*. Tillich, however, maintains that "ultimate reality" is not another name for God in the religious sense of the term. St. Thomas asserts that the God of religion is nothing less than ultimate reality though much more.

²⁶ Earle J. Coleman, *Creativity and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York, 1998), 13.

²⁷ Cf. Paul Tillich, "Art and Ultimate Reality," 231-3. Tillich concludes that rather than imitate or idealize, an artwork expresses, and by such it is most able to reach into ultimate reality by breaking through "both the realistic acceptance of the given and the idealistic anticipation of the fulfilled." (*Ibid.*, 235)

²⁸ Some critics interpret the large lamp at the top center of the *Guernica* as the eye of God or creation that watches over human destruction. God, moreover, is rendered present cryptically in the *Guernica* by apophysis and on account of hidden images and ambiguous imagery. Almost every line and shape is meaningful either in the context of what it represents or what it is concealing. Cf. Melvin E. Becraft, *Picasso's Guernica, Images within Images* (New York: Vantage Press, Inc.) 1983.

projection of the human person *ad imaginem Dei*, the fruit of the work of one who is “engaged in a kind of sacred imitation of God the Creator.”²⁹ By this means he produces an artwork from specific material though always anew: *ex materia sed noviter*.

Divine presence in art, therefore—its “sacredness,” must be perceived at a level beyond subject matter.³⁰ When the final product is a creative work assimilating characteristics of reality through factors such as skillful use of form, evident integrity, harmony of order, due proportion, control of movement and emotion, and intelligent design, then art will “speak of God” by means of these qualities which endure permanently in the work and independently of the artist’s self. Herein lies theology’s connection to art, the *recta ratio factibilium* without which the artist does little more than represent or duplicate material forms.

As a result, art becomes an eminently human and religious enterprise. It envisions the world as an act of creation and in itself reflects this basic endeavor. So one need not be a believer to paint a crucifixion scene, though one must be an artist to paint such a scene well.³¹ Thus the problem of subject matter and content is easily solved and that crucifixion scene will speak the language of its own creative genius. It will affirm a sacrality of the art that surpasses any subjective or exterior criteria only. Whether an artwork be supposedly sacred or profane, contemporary or antique, Renaissance or Cubist, whether subjectively nominated “good” or “bad” (moral categories that art cannot objectively embrace), it will always “speak of God” through excellence in craftsmanship and the ontological status of the artist’s creative act.

Consequently, God need not be represented explicitly in the content of *Guernica*, nor in Fra Angelico’s *Crucifixion*. He can, moreover, metaphorically speaking, be found inside or behind the works, in their creation and in following the activity of the artist who produces them. God need not be experienced only in the mystery of the image presented, or through its semiotic qualities directing the observer to the reality represented in the content and subject matter. The presence of God needs to be perceived also in the metaphysical qualities adhering permanently in the form and arousing aesthetic appreciation in the acute observer based on the excellence of the work having been done. The principle is that when the artist has sufficient skill and does the best possible job, that artwork will “speak of God.” If the skill is lacking, then the product cannot be art, for art requires, as St. Thomas affirms, “excellence of skill.”³²

²⁹ “[...] *de sacra quadam Dei Creatoris imitatione*.” *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 127. It can be seen here how art speaks of God not only in its object and end but also in its source, the human person as sustained and moved by God.

³⁰ Professor Weiss maintains that “whether the subject matter be secular or religious, a work could be religious” insofar as it makes God present in and for the artist only. (cf. Weiss, op. cit., 42) I do not agree. The presence of God must be in the artwork itself, not only in the artist. All else being equal, a believer and a nonbeliever can produce the same work of art.

³¹ When one speaks of an artist who also happens to be a believer (cf. Weiss, op. cit., 39-40), the artist should be understood in his capacity as artist and not as believer. Fra Angelico, for example, considered in his capacity as a painter, should not be seen as a believer but rather as a disciple of Gentile da Fabriano and Masaccio. It would seem that not to make this distinction is to confuse the categories of religion and art, and of being and doing.

³² Cf. *Summa theol.*, I-II, 57, 3 c.

One need not be overtly religious to create a work of art since the religiosity of the work is independent of the artist's belief, disposition or intention. It follows that such religiosity is even independent of those judgments of anyone else for that matter. For God's presence is in the manner of carrying out the work, in the excellence of the work itself, qualifying it, and in the artist's skill which communicates it to the mind of the observer, and this is what renders it "sacred."

Thus art "speaks of God" on account of two factors: (1) the dexterity in which the work is executed, a quality permanently adhering in the form independently of the artist's self or the observers' interpretations; (2) the fact of the artist's participation in the creative act of God. Such participation is equally a concern for theology as it is for art. All artists therefore produce works that bear the marks of the presence of the divine, the imprint of God the Creator, and refer to Him as qualifying Existence, for the artist is concerned with artistic matters, and artistic matters are also the matters of theology in terms of end. As a result, any work of art, insofar as it is the genuinely created work of an artist, conforming to the canons of artistry, is one that "speaks of God."

So as the artist mirrors divine creativity, so art tells something about the nature of God. As Dante so eloquently put it:

From Intellect Divine, and from its art;
And if thy Physics carefully thou notest,
After not many pages shalt thou find,

That this your art as far as possible
Follows, as the disciple doth the master;
So that your art is, as it were, God's grandchild.³³

Conclusion

The assumption that art can speak of God independently of its subject matter or content is a relatively new idea for contemporary art theory and theology, or for debate in theological aesthetics in general. It has many opponents and only a few adherents in the field.³⁴ The common assumption, however, that art is "sacred" only when its subject matter is drawn from religious themes or concepts regarding religious subject matter is narrow and derives from a limited understanding of content in art and the importance of the artist's skill. On this assumption the difference between religious expression in art and other forms of artistic expression would be purely external. Much less can art be limited to terms of movement and style, fixed forms etc., as that would be to relegate it to a merely historical precedent.

From the foregoing it has been proposed that not only in subject matter or content does a work of art qualify as being capable of "speaking of God." Rather, it is the integrity of the work and the splendor of its form adhering within that achieves this status independently of the artist's intentions or disposition of soul, and independently of the observer's interpretations. Even when one tries to disregard these factors in order to oblige the artwork to serve some other purpose, it will still preserve its intrinsic status of "sacredness" or one

³³ Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, "Inferno", XI, 100-5.

³⁴ Cf. Rouet, op. cit., 27-9.

may say, “God-centeredness” on account of the impersonal and objectives nature of those characteristics.

After this innovative, albeit provocative proposition, further development of this theory may help the theologian with a constructive consideration of the value of contemporary art. Such consideration will surely afford a solution to the so-called “conflict” and the resolution of a successful harmony between both art and theology today. Thus with confidence does Pope John Paul II conclude his address on the occasion of the presentation of the Vatican exhibition in the United States: “And, yes! These works of art will speak of God, because they speak of man created in the image and likeness of God; and in so many ways they will turn our attention to God himself.”³⁵

³⁵ John Paul II, Address on the occasion of the presentation of the Vatican exhibition in the United States, titled “The Vatican Collection - The Papacy and Art.” Thursday, 29 April 1982.

A MATCH MADE IN MUNICH: THE ORIGIN OF GRENZ'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Jason S. Sexton¹

Introduction

While being trinitarian since his earliest memory, the time Stanley Grenz spent with Wolfhart Pannenberg² greatly shaped his understanding of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. With this also included an understanding of the doctrine's central place in theology, and how "the triunity of God ought to inform all systematic theology."³ Imprints left on Grenz's theology by his *Doktorvater* provided indelible marks on the constructive work of the younger theologian.⁴ While many theologians have made these assumptions,⁵ very little systematic evidence has been given for the claim.

The present essay's aim is to set forth crucial components of Grenz's trinitarian theology that have drawn deeply from Pannenberg, whose work provided the major catalyst for the most significant development in Grenz's thought. It seeks to show precisely where and how certain factors dominating Pannenberg's work were later picked up and adapted by Grenz.

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² Pannenberg's status as a theological giant carries general consensus. See Carl E. Braaten and Philip E. Clayton, "Preface," *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 9-10; Ted Peters, "Wolfhart Pannenberg," *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians*, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abington, 1996), 363; and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2007), 124. Bruce P. Baugus calls Pannenberg "probably the most important Protestant systematic theologian to emerge on the Continent since Karl Barth" (Review of *Reason for Hope*, *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 [2006], 152), and John Webster signals his *Systematic Theology*, "surely the most consequential Protestant account since Barth" ("Systematic Theology After Barth," in *The Modern Theologians*, 3d ed., eds. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers [Oxford: Blackwell, 2005], 250).

³ Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), x.

⁴ See Grenz's account of Pannenberg as a theologian in *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4; and *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 2-3. Grenz also testifies to the prominence of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology in his own thought: "[I]t was not until I encountered the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg—first as his graduate student [1976-78] and later during a sabbatical year in Munich [1987-88]—that I began to see the deeper importance of this Christian confession [i.e., "belief in the doctrine of the Trinity"] for the theological enterprise" (*Rediscovering*, ix). He states elsewhere that "Pannenberg's proposal offers perhaps the most rigorous and highly developed statement of the doctrine [of the Trinity] and its interrelatedness to the whole of theology" (Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 191; see also Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 65).

⁵ E.g., D. A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*" in *Reclaiming the Center*, eds. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 35, 54; Brian S. Harris, "Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration, Evaluation and Extension of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz" (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2007), 51-52; and Steven Denis Knowles, "Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology with Particular Reference to Stanley J. Grenz," PhD thesis (University of Liverpool, 2007), 75, 88, 90, 94, 113, 174, 197.

Therefore, by according attention to theology's primary subject, the triune God, this essay provides explorations into God's relationship with history, his self-revelation, the future's ontological priority, what has become known as "Pannenberg's Principle," and a relational ontology. As initial aspects of Grenz's trinitarian development are examined, this essay seeks to illumine precise contours he harnessed from his mentor for employment in his own work, for the construction of his trinitarian theology.⁶ As argued elsewhere, this coincides with Pannenberg's careful engagement with aspects and implications of Karl Rahner's well-known axiom (i.e., "the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and vice versa").⁷ Only insofar as Grenz reflects adaptations of Pannenberg's work may his theology equally receive the designation as primarily trinitarian.

Themes presented in this essay first set forth Pannenberg's conceptions, followed by Grenz's interpretation, appropriation, or adaptation thereof. Several reasons make this approach sensible. First, Pannenberg's theology is well-established, and is much more mature.⁸ Second, Pannenberg successfully managed "to develop a doctrine of God and to treat the subjects of Christian dogmatics ... in the form of a Christian systematic theology,"⁹ while Grenz unfortunately did not.¹⁰ The German theologian also enjoys chronological

⁶ See the interesting discussion of whether Pannenberg's theology was always trinitarian by Iain Taylor, who concludes (contra Grenz's assessment that Pannenberg gained a "newer understanding" in the early 1980s [*Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 57]) that "the Trinity is present at each stage of Pannenberg's theological development," and "operative in a way that presages its later importance in [*Systematic Theology*]" (Iain Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God* [London: T&T Clark, 2007], 3-5). Grenz concurred with this notion in his conclusion that Barth's catalytic contribution had already "determined that any truly helpful Christian theology would need to be trinitarian in both method and content" (*Rediscovering*, 217). Grenz's theology was also trinitarian since its inception. See also Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), x, where he spells out precisely how the doctrine of the Trinity gave birth to his program and engagement with theology. Christiaan Mostert, whom Pannenberg declared "pointed out brilliantly" the conclusive insight for this discussion (Wolfhart Pannenberg, "An Intellectual Pilgrimage," *Dialog* 45 [2006], 189), captures the idea of Pannenberg's basic ontological principle: "that the essence of something is only determined by its end, but—on the principle of retroactive permanence—is then constituted as its essence throughout." Mostert concluded this is also true for Pannenberg's theology: "the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in his theological system is fully clear only from his later writings but turns out to have been the real centre of the system all along" (*God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Eschatological Doctrine of God* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002], 185).

⁷ Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 97-98. Rahner's Rule appears to have been first coined by Ted Peters, "Trinity Talk: Part 1," *Dialog* 26 (1987), 46. It is stated explicitly: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity" (Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel [London: Herder and Herder, 1970], 22).

⁸ See his recent comprehensive bibliography: "Bibliographie der Veröffentlichungen von Wolfhart Pannenberg 1953-2008," *Kerygma und Dogma* 54 (2008), 159-236.

⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "God's Presence in History," *The Christian Century* 98 (11 March 1981), 263. The work was *Systematische Theologie, 1-3* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988-93); *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-98) (ET hereafter *ST*).

¹⁰ A comprehensive systematic theology was something Grenz was unable to do because of his untimely death, although he had plans for a more mature revision of his single-volume *Theology for the Community of God*, as well as a three volume systematic theology once his explorative work in *The Matrix* series was complete (this insight was first disclosed in a personal interview with John R. Franke, 28 Jan,

precedence, and finally, as a practical matter, Grenz is an established interpreter of his former teacher.¹¹ It is therefore a very natural practice for him to interpret Pannenberg and then follow by adapting relevant features he determined as fitting for his own proposal.

Approaching Theology's Ultimate Subject: Discovering the Triune God

The ultimate subject matter in Pannenberg's theology is God, unifying all reality.¹² Grenz likewise maintained the triune God as the topic of the entire systematic construction of theology, with all other theological loci being viewed as "in some sense participants" in this grand, central topic of theology—the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³ Pannenberg came to understand God through the lens of at least five features that the remainder of this essay will highlight, each intimately related to his doctrine of God, which simultaneously orients and informs this doctrine's shape. These include emphases on history, revelation, Pannenberg's future hypothesis, the so-called "Pannenberg Principle," and his development of a relational ontology.¹⁴ In what follows, Pannenberg's understanding of these facets is briefly explored, along with the manner in which they inform his doctrine of the Trinity, yielding evidence of

2009 and verified by Grenz's personal files in a document entitled "Writing Deadlines," last updated 22 Feb, 2005).

¹¹ At the time, Grenz's interpretation of his supervisor's theology was extolled as "clearly the best effort of its kind... convincing even to Pannenberg himself" (Michael Bauman, "Review of *Reason for Hope*," *JETS* 40 [1991], 563-64). In the foreword, Pannenberg offered gratitude for Grenz's work, especially since it would be another decade until the three volumes would be in English, calling it "a correct picture" of the synthesis of his overall theology ("Foreword," in *Reason for Hope*, ix). In chs. 1 and 2 of *Reason for Hope* Grenz highlights Pannenberg's key themes from the German ed. of *ST* (chs. 1-6), giving interpretation which, though sound, was somewhat underdeveloped, perhaps a consequence of it being the first English interpretation of Pannenberg's *ST*. While Elizabeth A. Johnson lauds Grenz's "descriptive" introduction to Pannenberg's "systematics in print and yet to come" ("Review of *Reason for Hope*," *Theological Studies* 51 [1990], 765), Pannenberg's work continued to develop beyond *ST*, which he called an inevitable "fact" ("God's Presence in History," 260). It developed, as his own tenets call for (see the concepts of provisionality and "anticipation" that Pannenberg refers to in his comments in the "Foreword" to *Reason for Hope*, ix), and the exegesis and exposition of his program has also matured. Others have probed Pannenberg's theology, elucidating new contours of it that Grenz may not have earlier seen clear enough to delineate overtly, these were nevertheless present at varying degrees and have been noticed by researchers of Pannenberg who came after Grenz's early work. E.g., see Iain Taylor's explicit treatment of Pannenberg's trinitarianism in *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 1-21, which was earlier noted in Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed. 57-9 and *Rediscovering*, ix-x. See also F. LeRon Shults's exposition of Pannenberg's postfoundationalism in *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), something alluded to earlier in Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 5, 16-18. See also Christiaan Mostert's exposition of the ontological priority of the future over other modes of time in *God and the Future*, though Grenz seems to develop this in his third theological motif, "eschatological orientation," and the early motifs of "kingdom" and "community," in Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisiting Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 137-62.

¹² Pannenberg, *ST*, 1:59-61. See also Stanley J. Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology: Pannenberg and the Quest for Truth," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992), 308; and Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 88, 91.

¹³ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 190. The doctrine of the Trinity is distinguished though not separate from the Trinity itself.

¹⁴ Dissecting these traits is a somewhat unnatural, utilitarian task, since each informs the other in Pannenberg's explication of the trinitarian doctrine of God. Yet the dismemberment is made in order to compare Grenz's development, reception, appropriation and adaptation of these characteristics of his theology.

being a comprehensive theology “more trinitarian than any he knows of.”¹⁵ Upon presentation of Pannenberg’s traits, consideration is given of how Grenz’s relates to, adopts and adapts these significant themes for his own program, thereby elucidating both primary catalytic features in Grenz’s trinitarian development as well as its origin.

The Role of History

Notable for his early work on God’s relation to history, Pannenberg designated the triune Being as the God of history, identifying the nature of his truth as historical.¹⁶ Early in his career he stated that this is not limited to one or even a few events, but that all historical facts themselves amidst history’s development are “the totality of revelation.”¹⁷ Over a decade later he proffered,

...there is no event, either holy or unholy, in which God is not acting, and the question or the meaning of historical occurrences should be judged initially on that basis.... The question concerning the truth of history can only find its answer through God himself. If history is essentially the history of divine activity, then it follows that the truth of God’s deeds and their identity with him can only be grounded in him.¹⁸

According to Philip Clayton, the theme of Pannenberg’s essay quoted above, indicating a major shift in his thinking, is that “both history and God can be conceptualized only in a reciprocal relationship with each other.”¹⁹ Clayton then notes that “a (the?) *Grundmotiv* of Pannenberg’s entire corpus” is that in Christian theology “the biblical understanding of God in the Old and New Testaments and the *historicity of reality* are necessarily tied together.”²⁰ He summarizes that for Pannenberg “theology works at the level of contexts of meaning that account for history as a whole.”²¹

Grenz avoids linking God and history in the same way Pannenberg does. Specifically, he more easily avoids the accusation of being Hegelian,²² although finds God working in

¹⁵ Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 263. See the affirmative conclusion by Taylor after his exhaustive study of the Trinity in Pannenberg’s *ST* (*Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 187).

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The God of History: The Trinitarian God and the Truth of History,” trans. M. B. Jackson, *Cumberland Seminarian* 19 (1981), 37 from the German of “Der Gott der Geschichte, der trinitarische Gott und die Wahrheit der Geschichte,” *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze, Band 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 112-28. See also *ST* 1:171 for the role of history in religions. See also Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 49.

¹⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou and Edward Quinn (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 17-18. According to Grenz, Pannenberg maintained “that no inspired word must be added to events” (*Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 55).

¹⁸ Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 31.

¹⁹ Philip Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” *The Journal of Religion* 65 (1985), 103.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Clayton’s translation of Pannenberg, “Der Gott der Geschichte,” 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, with reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976 [German, 1973]), 220-24, 309-10.

²² This idea is owed to an attendee of a presentation of an early portion of this chapter at the Society for the Study of Theology meeting, 31 March 2009, Amersfoort, The Netherlands, who suggested, “Perhaps Grenz is Pannenberg without the Hegel?” See also the discussion in Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 15-21, which persuasively rejects the notion that Pannenberg is Hegelian, while not unwilling to acknowledge Hegelian aspects of his thought. Note also that while Grenz

history, which work in itself gives history its significance of meaning. Hegel is not all Grenz wants to avoid, however, since he also has difficulty with traditional evangelical conceptions of history that have sought to construct a history behind the text as a primary goal and thus treat the Bible “as a problem rather than a solution.”²³ This led Grenz into a theological interpretation of history, over against the positive way Pannenberg viewed historical-criticism when he placed his ontology upon historical research. Alternatively, Grenz’s view of history situates itself distinctly upon a narrative, enabling him to define it as “the narrative of God’s activity in bringing humankind to God’s intended goal,” which is the accomplishment of the divine plan for humanity.²⁴ This is consonant with the Israelite view of history that the West inherited, presenting history as much more than a man-centered sequence of world events. According to Grenz, the biblical view “places history on a theocentric foundation.”²⁵ Seen in Scripture, this narrative yields Grenz’s corporate eschatology, which follows a trajectory also observed in Scripture. This trajectory began with the prophetic vision of justice and continued with the apocalyptic vision disclosing world history as the stage where the divine drama of cosmic warfare rages while still en route towards the establishment on God’s goal for his creation. This narrative is marked by “one crucial innovation” from the NT narrative that would ultimately “mark the climax of human history,” namely, “the return of the crucified and risen Jesus.”²⁶

The Nature of Revelation

As noted in the previous section, Pannenberg’s early description of revelation consisted of history’s entirety. In part, this emerged from his emphasis on history in light of Schleiermachiian subjectivism and the dialectical theologians of the early twentieth century.²⁷ On the other hand, Pannenberg faulted the Protestant position for seeking to establish Scripture’s inspiration as the presupposition of revelation rather than its goal.²⁸ His 1963 essay, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” highlighted the problem arising from focusing on Scripture while neglecting theology’s task to concern itself with “all truth whatever.”²⁹ He saw the “double crisis of the Protestant Scripture principle” ensuing from historical-critical work and the growing hermeneutical problem amplified by the increasing horizon gap between text and reader locations.³⁰ This led Pannenberg to recognize the need for a universal understanding of history to provide a view toward “the totality of all events,” which can also be explained as “an all-embracing theology of history.”³¹ As such,

himself conscientiously avoids Hegel, he welcomes the notions Barth picked up from him, that “all theology is the explication of the being and action of God in Christ” and that, following Hegel, a “truly trinitarian” theology is one where the explication of the Trinity informs and is informed by every theological category (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 190).

²³ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 60-63.

²⁴ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 599, 608.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 607-608.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 603-606. Note also how crucial this is in Pannenberg’s trinitarian theology, especially in the Son’s relation to the Father and the Father’s own deity (*ST*, 2:364-67).

²⁷ Pannenberg, *ST* 1:40-47.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31, 35-36.

²⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 1:1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Pannenberg understood the focal point of God's self-revelation being the historical process, but only understood in light of the whole.³² His epistemic starting point is the triune God in history, without any sought after preconceived notions of the triune God *in se*, or in the eternal relationships, as though revelation came about by some "supplementary inspiration" outwith history,³³ or as though the primary revelation of God in Christ took place "in some strange Word arriving from some alien place and cutting across the fabric of history."³⁴ For Pannenberg, the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in the divine economy which yields a genuine ontic description of God as the Creator and future Redeemer of the world. His self-revelation is proleptic and observable *proleptically* in light of the future's view of history's entirety. Thus, he understands revelation via the anticipation of the totality of history in light of its end.³⁵

Grenz expressed caution over Pannenberg's doctrine of revelation, finding at least four faults: (1) the lack of a doctrine of Scripture viewing the Bible as divine revelation; (2) an over-dependence on historical research; (3) a minimized view of special revelation; and (4) a pneumatology unable to accept divine working beyond historical events in the epistemological process coinciding with reception of divine truth.³⁶ And yet Grenz also adopted numerous aspects of Pannenberg's understanding. He understood revelation as,

...an event that has occurred in the community within which the believing individual stands. "The revelation of God" is the divine act of self-disclosure, which reveals nothing less than the essence of God. This divine self-disclosure, while standing ultimately at the eschaton—at the end of history—is nevertheless a present reality, for it has appeared proleptically in history.³⁷

Unlike Pannenberg, he did not equate revelation with history, making theology dependent on historical research,³⁸ nor did he conclude that revelation and God's truth was subject to the scrutiny of other scientific disciplines. Grenz understood revelation as resting on a foundation of historical events, and disclosing the very "essence of God." This feature is complex in Grenz's work, and seems to be the lynchpin for understanding the progressive nuancing of his epistemology and ontology, which primarily remain tied together throughout his work, but remain critical for understanding his view of revelation. Specifically, his understanding of revelation is Spirit-driven, corresponding to how he understands the Spirit working in culture. His view of revelation does not equate the Spirit with culture, nor does it subject the Spirit to culture, or remove the Spirit from culture. Rather, Grenz sees the Spirit revealing God within culture.

It would be naïve to suggest that Grenz's doctrine of revelation was not jolted during his time with Pannenberg. This experience with his mentor seems crucial for his situating of

³² Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed. 7; M. Douglas Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 69.

³³ Pannenberg, *ST*, 1:250.

³⁴ Pannenberg, "God's Presence in History," 262.

³⁵ Pannenberg, *ST*, 1:228-29.

³⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, "Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology: Sympathy and Caution," *Christian Scholars' Review* 20 (1990), 276-80.

³⁷ Grenz, *Revisiting*, 76.

³⁸ Grenz, "Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology," 278.

revelation under a pneumatological heading.³⁹ This, then, allows Grenz to draw deeply from the “contemporary context” situated in history as a source where God is both working and speaking.⁴⁰ Grenz asserts that in this “context” (i.e., real history) the Spirit is not speaking independent of scripture but “through scripture... in the particularity of the historical-cultural context in which we live,” and “in which the theologian seeks to work.”⁴¹ Emphasis on the historical context is consistent with the notion that God spoke prior to scripture (in historical-cultural contexts),⁴² speaks in and through the text of scripture (both in the historical context where it was written and the subsequent history of the church’s interpretation of it), and also speaks today (in the present historical-cultural context).⁴³ Here is where Grenz finds justification for his dependence on other theologians from church history, and those working in the present context.⁴⁴ Indeed, contemporary theologians categorically fall into two of the sources in Grenz’s theological triad—the stream of church tradition and the contemporary context. These sources are not isolated from theology’s primary source (scripture), but are dynamically and intimately related. There is an organic unity flowing from Grenz’s principal source to the other sources as a result of the pneumatological governance and organic “extension of the authority of scripture” into

³⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 379-404. Grenz also treats soteriology (particularly the nature of conversion and salvation) under the rubric of pneumatology (405–60). He would have also presumably done this in *The Matrix* series, which had no volumes distinctly devoted to the traditional categories of bibliology and soteriology, but relegated these under pneumatology. No other North American evangelical theologian placed Scripture directly with a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including the Donald Bloesch in his seven volume Christian Foundations series and Clark H. Pinnock (who also never proposed a systematic theology) either with his *The Scripture Principle* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) or *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996). In a personal conversation, Scottish evangelical A. T. B. McGowan told me that Grenz’s work was the first he ever read that located Scripture under a pneumatological rubric with the traditional systematic categories (24 Feb 2010).

⁴⁰ Grenz, *Revisoning*, 97-101, 113. The Spirit’s speaking cannot be discerned individually, lapsing into a necessary subjectivism, but is discerned within the context of the redeemed, gathered community imbedded in a social-historical context (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68, 92, 160-66).

⁴¹ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 161; Grenz, “The Irrelevancy of Theology,” 310.

⁴² Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 160–61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64-68. Here is also where Grenz’s affinity for “narrative theology” of such as George Lindbeck is evinced (see Grenz, *Revisoning*, 77-78; Stanley J. Grenz, “The Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story’ and the ‘Incredulity Toward Metanarratives,’” in *No Other Gods before Me?* ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 107-11; Grenz, *Social God*, pt. 2-3 passim; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox], 2005, 282, 332-33). Although Grenz is not uncritical of Lindbeck (see Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 206-11 and Stanley J. Grenz, “Toward an Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30 [2003], 459). This is also a significant difference between Pannenberg and Grenz. Pannenberg is dissatisfied with the “narrative approach to the Bible” because he believes it “evades the truth claims of the biblical narratives” which he deems largely historical and basic to faith and doctrine (*Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 49). See also Pannenberg’s interaction with proposals of James Barr et al in *ST*, 1:230-57.

⁴⁴ See Grenz’s declaration of an eclecticism that led him to “draw from a variety of voices—Pannenberg, Lindbeck, and I should add Karl Barth as well...” (Stanley J. Grenz, “The Virtue of Ambiguity: A Response to Archie Spencer,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 [2004], 364).

church tradition and then into the contemporary context, all three of which are sources for the second-order construction of theology.⁴⁵

The purpose of the speaking of the Spirit taking place through theology's sources is not just for the intellectual satisfaction of hearing or knowing what was said, which may simply terminate with the individual hearer.⁴⁶ The present hearing of what the Spirit has said (and says) is for the continual instruction "in the midst of our life together as we face the challenges of living in the contemporary world."⁴⁷ It also serves present developments in scripture's proper interpretation and application. And it nurtures the theological description of the faith experience and faith's act(ion) in specific historical-cultural settings within the contemporary world, which is part of God's working in salvation history.⁴⁸ Accordingly, Grenz highlights the importance of "context" in a variety of spheres. It is not just where the Spirit speaks, but also where (extending from the biblical text through church history, and into the present context) the Spirit is working. And if the trinitarian God is speaking and acting, this must be worked (i.e., acted) out in "performance" for those who have encountered God. These performers are ones who are "destined to be the new humanity" and thus are in the process of presently being transformed into the *imago Dei*. According to Grenz, those being transformed by the Spirit into the divine image "carry the ethical responsibility to live out that reality in the present."⁴⁹ This is consistent with Grenz's "working" definition of the nature, task, and purpose of theology:

Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in critical and constructive reflection on the faith, life, and practices of the Christian community. Its task is the articulation of biblically normed, historically informed, and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated.⁵⁰

Here, one might start to observe underlying motivating factors for Grenz's reliance on "cultural context" as a source of theology.⁵¹ Rather than assessing Grenz on the nature of this practice, making judgment about the degree to which factors in the contemporary context are driving his program, it must be granted that there is always a situated location in which theology must be done. Specifically, theology is and must be done in every situated location. Here is where the church's "missiological calling" is advanced and her theological engagement mandated, believing that "Christian faith addresses the problems, longings, and ethos of contemporary people, knowing that the social context in which we live presses on

⁴⁵ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 95; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 119, 124-29, 161-64.

⁴⁶ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁸ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 75-76, 83; Grenz, *Social god*, 222.

⁴⁹ Grenz, *Social God*, 251-52; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65, 126-28.

⁵⁰ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16.

⁵¹ While likely that, in part, Grenz borrowed such a notion from Pannenberg and Lindbeck (Archie J. Spencer, "Culture, Community and Commitments: Stanley J. Grenz on Theological Method," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 [2004], 344), the impetus for much of Grenz's proposal is found in his need to find a theology able to adequately address some of the most serious problems in the world and facing the church.

us certain specific issues that at their core are theological.”⁵² For theology that claims to be distinctly *Christian*, trinitarian, and communitarian, it must serve the church in her present mission and witness of attesting to the Bible’s message, “which is directed toward the ‘future,’ toward the goal or *telos*, of the divine activity in history.”⁵³ This emphasis leads to the next major Pannenbergian theme reflected in Grenz’s work—the future’s ontological priority.

*The Ontological Priority of the Future*⁵⁴

Once described as one of the principal “theologians of hope,”⁵⁵ maintaining that God’s revelation and activity are found in history, Pannenberg is also markedly known for his eschatology. His appeal to the future became “the focal point of ultimate truth,” while admitting the brokenness of the ascertainment of revelation “in the era before the consummation.”⁵⁶ His retrieval of eschatology for the center of theology has been called “unmatched in contemporary theology,” and “nothing if not comprehensive.”⁵⁷ His emphasis on the future’s ontological priority over the present (and past) provided him the key to unlocking the meaning of the present (and past) since, he argues, the “essence” of something can only be known at its end and completion. And yet, through “anticipation” a thing possesses its essence since “[t]he decision concerning the being that stands at the end of the process has retroactive power.”⁵⁸ Clayton notices how Pannenberg avoids “skeptical” epistemological conjectures by making an ontological move.⁵⁹ In doing this he employed what to him was a “new systematic category” known as “prolepsis.”⁶⁰

Prolepsis (“anticipation”) has a long history in philosophy and theology, but became significant to Pannenberg’s work in a manner unparalleled by any theologian.⁶¹ On this point there is development within Pannenberg’s thinking in that early in his career he saw the future engendering eternity whilst later he saw God engendering eternity.⁶² This move landed Pannenberg closer to Aquinas’s expression of the divine being’s actuality, *Deus est suum esse* (“God is nothing but the actuality of being”). Thus Pannenberg is able to affirm

⁵² Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 159.

⁵³ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 115; Grenz, *Named God*, 218.

⁵⁴ Roger Olson calls this “[t]he most difficult problem with Pannenberg’s doctrine of the Trinity” (“Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 [1990], 203).

⁵⁵ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 170-72.

⁵⁶ Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 19, 55. Grenz acknowledges this “wholesome and helpful development” in Pannenberg’s thought,” which did not exist in his 1961 essay later translated as “Kerygma and History,” in *Basic Questions*, 1:81-95 (“Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology,” 280).

⁵⁷ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 20.

⁵⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. by Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105.

⁵⁹ “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 99.

⁶⁰ Pannenberg, “God’s Presence in History,” 262.

⁶¹ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 113. See also Roger Eugene Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,” (PhD thesis, Rice University, 1984), 29, who suggests Pannenberg adopted this from Martin Heidegger’s “anticipation,” evinced in *Basic Questions*, 1:167.

⁶² Mostert, *God and the Future*, 141-44.

that “God is his own future in the sense that he has no future beyond himself.”⁶³ In this way, the future does not occur to his present, but rather “God’s future constitutes his present.”⁶⁴

This is unlike the creatures, whose experience of the future is contingent upon the “present reality” of their lives.⁶⁵ Therefore by prioritizing God’s future, Pannenberg safeguards human freedom and the contingency of all human events.⁶⁶ And yet the eternal Son became a human creature, dependent upon the triune God’s work to bring about the reconciliation of all things with himself.⁶⁷ According to Pannenberg, Jesus’ resurrection proleptically displays “the reality of the new, eschatological life of salvation in Jesus himself,” making sense of his incarnation as “the inbreaking of the future of God, the entry of eternity into time.”⁶⁸ He argues further:

... the reality of the resurrection of Jesus is definitively and irrefutably decided only in connection with the eschatological resurrection of the dead, with all the implications for the person of Jesus Christ that the church already confesses on the basis of its conviction that the Easter message is true.⁶⁹

Pannenberg, then, is not advocating any kind of realized eschatology since, for him, the eschaton remains future while having come proleptically in such a way that God’s futurity (and eternity) is already present.⁷⁰

Grenz’s emphasis on the future knows little of the philosophical gymnastics occupying Pannenberg’s work. Instead, journeying from a premillennial dispensational heritage, he shows awareness of historical and socio-theological developments in eschatology that have generated helpful threads for integration into his own eschatological construction.⁷¹ His version of the priority of the future, however, looks to revelation as such, and to the structure of the scriptural canon. In the introduction to one of his final works, which was posthumously published, Grenz asserted that the character of God’s revelation of his own name has a “largely nonphilosophical character” to it. He observed that God’s revelation of his name is “initially indeterminate, for it anticipates a future, deeper disclosure of meaning,” moving “from ambiguity to clarity.” Additionally, he stated that the very “pronouncement of

⁶³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” *Dialog* 39 (2000), 13. This affirmation seems to be a self-conscious avoidance of two problematic ideas: (1) a Hegelian view of reality; and (2) process theology’s continual development of all things, making God dependent on something (a process) external to himself.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Although this seems to contradict Pannenberg’s earlier often misinterpreted statement that “God does not now exist” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969], 56), which, according to Mostert, is a matter of God’s existence and power being known when God’s essence is made explicit and his deity established “in relation to precisely this world” (*God and the Future*, 154-55).

⁶⁵ Pannenberg, “Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God,” 13.

⁶⁶ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 136.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 232. See also the recent treatment by Kent D. Eilers, “Pannenberg on God’s Reconciling Action” (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2009).

⁶⁸ Pannenberg, *ST*, 3:627.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:331.

⁷⁰ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 113-14, 143-45.

⁷¹ This is the agenda of Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992).

the I AM is an eschatological event.⁷² Divine revelation therefore leaves creation facing an eschatological direction, longing for “eschatological participation in the divine life,” which is “the ultimate expression of *imago dei* and therefore marks the *telos* for which humans were created in the beginning.”⁷³

Much milder than Pannenberg, Grenz adapted the future principle into what he called “eschatological orientation,”⁷⁴ one of the three theological motifs he saw inherent in distinctly Christian theology.⁷⁵ Eschatological orientation gives way to “eschatological realism,” being discovered and experienced through anticipation of the vision of salvation which God is effecting.⁷⁶ “In the end,” he argued, this “participation in the perichoretic dance of the triune God as those who by the Spirit are in Christ is what constitutes community in the highest sense.”⁷⁷ This ultimate “community in the highest sense,”⁷⁸ according to Grenz, is nothing short of “an outworking of God’s own eternal reality.”⁷⁹ While Grenz’s language here might suggest that the only difference between the present community of gathered believers and the eternal fellowship of believers with the triune community might be one of degree, he does distinguish the two. While the issue warrants further exploration outwith the scope of this article, his distinction may be most readily observed in his refusal to make the ontological connection between the future kingdom and present linear history.⁸⁰ And yet Grenz finds God’s future kingdom being present in a

⁷² Grenz, *Named God*, 9-10.

⁷³ Grenz, *Social God*, 327.

⁷⁴ While evinced at the rudimentary stage in the “kingdom” motif (Grenz, *Revisioning*, 137-47 and Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 28-29), this motif became more defined in Grenz, *Renewing*, 216-17 and Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 239-73 (although *Renewing* was published earlier, *Beyond Foundationalism* was conceived earlier and works-out Grenz’s methodology more thoroughly), although the idea of future orientation existed in Grenz’s thought as early as his 1985 essay, Stanley J. Grenz, “A Theology for the Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 4 [1985], 266.

⁷⁵ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 166.

⁷⁶ Contra Knowles who misreads both Pannenberg and Grenz, suggesting the latter draws on the former for his eschatological realism (“Postmodernism and Evangelical Theological Methodology,” 94). Unfortunately this fails to account for Grenz’s divergence from Pannenberg to establish an eschatological realism. Knowles further conjectures an interesting but speculative hypothesis of Grenz’s adaptation of John Hick’s “eschatological verificationism” (*ibid.*, n144) without explicitly factoring Grenz’s own dismissals of Hick (e.g., *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 637 n11; *Renewing*, 2d ed., 272-74).

⁷⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhooser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 268.

⁷⁸ See the phrase used in Grenz, *Revisioning*, 156, 158; Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 24, 113, 198, 647; Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 168; Grenz, *Renewing*, 2d ed., 224; Grenz, “Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 110. The phrase is modified as “community on the highest plane” in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 264 and used earlier as “community in the fullest sense” and “widest sense” in Stanley J. Grenz, “The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age” *Cruce* 28 (1992), 24-25, followed by an initial description in Stanley J. Grenz, “‘Community’ as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization,” *Cruce* 28 (1992), 14-15.

⁷⁹ Grenz, “Universality of the ‘Jesus-Story,’” 110.

⁸⁰ As early as 1992, Grenz argued, “the kingdom of God is a transcendent reality that can be confused with no earthly kingdom prior to the final transformation of creation. No earthly city can

concealed way, as a “hidden power currently at work in bringing the end to pass,” which then carries “ethical importance for the present.”⁸¹ With this understanding in view, God’s image bearers are privileged and mandated to participate with God in constructing a world in the present by speaking about (i.e., proclaiming) “the actual world,” which is the future coming kingdom, “for the sake of the mission of the church in the present, anticipatory era.”⁸²

Grenz’s eschatological realism accords not with Pannenberg’s “provisionality of present,”⁸³ but instead refers to the “present reality” focused on Christ as the new humanity that corresponds to God’s “eschatological goal” for his creation.⁸⁴ Grenz holds a tension in not seeing the future taking ontological “precedence,” but rather constituting the present orientation which in turn portends the future. The kingdom, then, is understood as “both an event and a sphere of existence,” and its coming creates “a new way of life in the present.”⁸⁵ As such, the church “is determined by what the church is to become.”⁸⁶ He explains further that while “not chronologically first in the historical flow, the final goal of history is logically first in the order of being. Only the end process determines ultimately ‘what is.’ We are, therefore, what we will be.”⁸⁷ All of this must be balanced, with how Grenz sees the future kingdom of God arriving as God’s action breaks into the present, not having any retroactive effects for the present and past, but bringing “a contradiction to, rather than merely a continuation of the present.”⁸⁸ Rather than finding the future determining the present as in Pannenberg’s ontology of the whole,⁸⁹ Grenz’s narrative approach is much closer to seeing the future defining now, particularly for those who have faith in Christ, and in this manner determining the end of history when the kingdom is established.

God is constructing his “eschatological will” in the present world, which is the “real world that he is bringing to pass.” Indeed, Grenz understood the present world as passing away (1 Cor 7.31) while God is presently making the eschatological new creation world, which is a realm that “lies before rather than beneath or around us.” It is this new creation world where all creation finds its connectedness in Christ, where the Spirit actively speaks

ever hope to become the New Jerusalem, except through a radical transformation both of human nature itself and of the universe that through the Fall unwillingly participates in the human predicament” (*The Millennial Maze*, 214; see similar language in *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 619).

⁸¹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 605.

⁸² Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 273.

⁸³ Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 43, 176.

⁸⁴ Grenz, *Social God*, 224.

⁸⁵ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 475.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 479.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 453.

⁸⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 619, 605.

⁸⁹ Puzzled over whether Pannenberg’s usage of the term *bestimmen* in his lectures and in *Systematische Theologie* referred to the future as “defining” or “determining” the present, Roger Olson once posed the question to him directly. Pannenberg responded, “Both, of course!” (Personal interview with Roger E. Olson, 23 April 2009). See also Stanley J. Grenz, “Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 46 (1991), 86.

through the Scriptures by creating this eschatological world, “in, among, and through us.”⁹⁰ Grenz describes his eschatological realism succinctly in this way:

Eschatological realism arises out of the biblical teaching that the new creation comes only as God’s gift to the world and will come only through the in-breaking of the kingdom of God that will be here when Jesus Christ returns from heaven in great glory. My point in advocating “eschatological realism” is that the future kingdom of God—the new creation—that will come as God transforms this creation into new creation—is what is ultimately real. Indeed, God’s new creation is in this sense “more real” than the present world. The New Testament declares that this is world is passing away. Moreover, as the author of Hebrews says, God will once again “shake the foundations” (of this world) so that what is truly real (the new creation/God’s kingdom) can appear.⁹¹

As such, the future kingdom, drawing believers ever forward and bringing them to fix their gaze upon that day when God is fully known, will one day “emerge” into the present, by God’s own doing. This leads to the next theme shared somewhat between Pannenberg and Grenz.

The “Pannenberg Principle”

The string of coherence seen thus far through Pannenberg’s program starts with the provisionality of the present, which lends to the contestedness of all truth claims including God’s revelation. God’s self-revelation is subsumed under an ontology of the whole that prioritizes the future, which is where God irrefutably and incontestably establishes his kingdom and hence his deity. This fundamental thesis formed early and maintained throughout Pannenberg’s work has been coined “Pannenberg’s Principle.”⁹² This deity is proleptically (though not *really*) present while ultimately displayed in the future, at which point its reality contains retroactive effects for all previous history.

Pannenberg derives these consequences from Rahner’s Rule, says Ted Peters who concludes that “the eternal self-identity of God cannot be conceived independently of the work of the Son and Spirit within salvation history.” Pannenberg’s resolve, then, affirms that apart from this kingdom being realized in the world, “God could not be God.”⁹³ Pannenberg explains how this principle works:

At stake, then, in the creative work of the Father, as well as in the reconciliation imparted through the Son and in the work of the Spirit glorifying them both, is the existence of God in the world, without which no existence of God before the foundation of the world could be affirmed either. Now, once a world is given, the Godhood of God as its creator is no longer conceivable without his ruling in this world, no longer conceivable without the creatures giving praise to him, thanking him

⁹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?” *Zygon* 35 (2000), 351-53; Grenz, *Renewing*, 2d ed., 253-56. See also Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 600.

⁹¹ Personal correspondence between Stan Grenz and Christopher G. Petrovich (6 Jan 2005). See also Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?” 352.

⁹² This maxim, “God’s deity is his rule,” was first coined by Roger Olson in “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 199.

⁹³ Ted Peters, “Trinity Talk: Part 2,” *Dialog* 26 (1987), 136.

for their existence, and thereby, honoring him as their creator. Therefore it is not until the eschatological consummation of the world—but then with retroactive power—that the existence of God will be conclusively decided.

He then offers an important implication, namely that “God, through the creation of the world, made himself radically dependent on this creation and on its history.”⁹⁴ So in the relationship of God’s history with the world, mediated by the Trinity, and with God’s deity presently up for grabs, the fulfillment of God’s coming kingdom will demonstrate (“*ermiesen*”) God’s deity.⁹⁵ It is precisely this commitment to the completion of the Kingdom that is part of each trinitarian member’s divinity.⁹⁶ Alternatively, “[a]part from the coming of His kingdom, God would not be God. Therefore, the future of His kingdom, as a history of His activity, is the place of God’s reality and the truth of history.”⁹⁷

Pannenberg understands the deity and identity of each member of the Trinity as dependent on the distinction from other members, including their deity and actions. While the Father’s monarchy is ultimately established in history, the Father is said to not “have his kingdom or monarchy without the Son and Spirit, but only through them.” Pannenberg explains further that “[o]n the basis of the historical relation of Jesus to the Father we may say this of the inner life of the triune God as well.”⁹⁸ Beyond this, “the Father and Son have their divinity only as mediated through the Spirit... [who] is the reality of God’s kingdom in the world and, in that way, the reality of the presence of God Himself.”⁹⁹ Commenting on the significant essay, “Der Gott der Geschichte,” in Pannenberg’s *Grundfragen, Band 2*, Clayton offers the following synopsis:

For each of the persons of the Trinity, the other two represent “the one God,” and each has his full divinity only through the other two persons. Hence, in the resurrection of the Son through the Spirit, the Father’s Godhood is confirmed; in his self-differentiation from the Father, the Son’s full Godhood appears through the Spirit; in his glorification (*Verherrlichung*) of the Father and Son, the Spirit’s equal Godhood is established. Such a Trinitarian formulation ties God indissolubly with creation and history.¹⁰⁰

Following the above citation, Clayton declares that Pannenberg’s formula “is emphatically not meant to be a panentheistic doctrine of God, since the condition for humanity’s fellowship with God is its self-differentiation from God (on the model of the Son’s relationship to the Father).”¹⁰¹ While some might conclude that this formula of

⁹⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God,” *Dialog* 26 (1987), 255. This is a major difference between Pannenberg and Grenz, the latter maintaining God’s independence from the world and also the world’s dependence on Him, not simply with God’s freedom ontologically relocated in the eschaton, but also as the reality free from and in no wise dependent on this world.

⁹⁵ Pannenberg, “Der Gott der Geschichte,” 127.

⁹⁶ Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” *SJT* 36, 227.

⁹⁷ Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 39.

⁹⁸ Pannenberg, *ST*, 1:324.

⁹⁹ Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 36.

¹⁰⁰ Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 104.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

indissolubly linking God, the world, and history harbors a latent pantheism,¹⁰² Pannenberg's major difficulty is with "Hegel's ghost," panentheism.¹⁰³ While Pannenberg's most generous interpreters have acknowledged this "becoming" component in Pannenberg's God,¹⁰⁴ one interpreter insists that "the ontological principle of 'retroactive permanence' overrules the principle of development or becoming."¹⁰⁵ And yet there is a critical qualification Pannenberg gives in his refutation of God's becoming in history, namely, that "the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity."¹⁰⁶

Echoes of "Pannenberg's Principle" are evident numerous places in Grenz. While sketching his agenda for a revisioned evangelical theology, he saw "the eschatological kingdom as the future of the world and its presence in the here and now" standing as "an important theological motif, an illuminative and integrative theme for theological reflection." For Grenz, the "divine reign" concept served to be "a promising focal point for understanding the great Christian doctrines of God, humankind, Christ, the Spirit, the church and the last things."¹⁰⁷ Viewing Pannenberg's effort as "the latest and greatest attempt to construct a theology that is oriented to the theme of 'kingdom,'"¹⁰⁸ Grenz's early kingdom theme was more or less an adaptation of the German theologian's major principle. However, Grenz viewed the kingdom as partially present "in principle," while finding that there still remains "a future eschatological aspect of the kingdom." In the future, "God's kingdom will be fully actualized in the new human society that God will inaugurate." This will be when God becomes "king over all the universe de facto. What is God's by right (de jure) will be actualized in the world. The entire universe will be the realm of God's rule."¹⁰⁹ More than just proleptically, because the power of the kingdom is at work, breaking into the present "from the future.... we can experience the kingdom in a partial yet real sense prior to the great eschatological day."¹¹⁰

By endorsing what he calls "amillennial realism," Grenz saw the need for God's people to expect great things to happen in the present, engaging in "realistic activity in the world."¹¹¹ At the same time, they also know that "the kingdom will never arrive in its fullness in history" unless it comes by "the divine action breaking into the world." Grenz asserted that this view "lifts our sights above the merely historical future to the realm of the

¹⁰² See Grenz's criticism of LaCugna (*Rediscovering*, 190), which could be equally made of Pannenberg. See also Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology," PhD thesis, 378.

¹⁰³ Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology*, 254. For additional critique of Pannenberg's panentheism by those aware that Pannenberg denies the charge, see Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology," PhD thesis, 373-84 and John W. Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 278-81.

¹⁰⁴ Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 87.

¹⁰⁵ Mostert, *God and the Future*, 153-58.

¹⁰⁶ Pannenberg, *ST*, 1:331. Taylor notes this as an "important" qualification (*Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 41).

¹⁰⁷ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 147.

¹⁰⁸ Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 311.

¹⁰⁹ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 146-47.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹¹ Grenz defined "realistic" as activity that is "both effective and penultimate" (*Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 657).

eternal God... [reminding] us that the kingdom of God is a transcendent reality which can be confused with no earthly kingdom prior to the final transformation of creation.”¹¹² Meanwhile, God is working in history, “effecting the consummation of the divine reign by establishing community” in a world where ultimate sovereignty remains a “theological question.” Accordingly, the story of Jesus is incomplete at its current stage, which nevertheless highlights the narrative of God’s saving action in the world. When reaching conclusion in the future, “God will establish community in its fullness,” bringing “his universal plan for creation to completion” and thereby publicly disclosing that Jesus is “the center and focus of all creation.”¹¹³ Therefore, while experiencing fellowship with God through Christ, since believers have not yet entered the fullness of God’s intention of “future community,” where God now stands,¹¹⁴ implications for present living remain.¹¹⁵ Russell Moore observed a marked shift in Grenz’s thinking on this point, when the eschatological goal began to be seen as “not merely a Kingdom but a Kingdom community.”¹¹⁶ This highlights no minor shift in Grenz’s program, for while the kingdom concept maintained early prominence, Grenz began speaking of “the coming of God’s *community* as the goal of history.”¹¹⁷

Despite Grenz’s initial unwillingness to adopt prolepsis as Pannenberg does, the concept begins to appear around the turn of the millennium as he speaks of the “validity” of a coherent presentation of the Christian vision. He asserted that its validity “does not look to a universally acceptable present reality for confirmation but anticipates the eschatological completion of the universally directed program of the God of the Bible.”¹¹⁸ In rearticulating his eschatological realism, he further stated that “the new creation toward which our world is developing is experienced through anticipation.”¹¹⁹ Grenz’s later work increasingly adapted components of his *doctovater’s* principle. He saw Hebrews 1.1-3 declaring that “Jesus Christ, who as the Son is the visible manifestation of divine reality, ultimately fulfills this role and therefore comes to possess this accolade only through the historical work in salvation history.” In this way, Grenz understood God’s revealed deity on display in salvation history, stating explicitly that “Jesus Christ fully reveals God—and thereby is the *imago dei*—as he fully redeems humankind.”¹²⁰ Incidentally, Grenz offered a highly sympathetic description of Hegel’s construction, even calling it trinitarian.¹²¹ And yet he seems to intentionally avoid Hegel’s trappings of self-actualizing God in the world, and thus binding God to the order of creation, by adopting a more healthy dose of trinitarian theology from the East.¹²²

Grenz elsewhere comes quite close to the concept of “retroactive” universal Lordship (and presence) when he finds that Jesus’ promise of sharing his own name (the glorious I

¹¹² Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 619.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 651.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 657.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 652-59.

¹¹⁶ Russell D. Moore, “Leftward To Scofield: The Eclipse of the Kingdom in Post-Conservative Evangelical Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004), 429-31.

¹¹⁷ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 658 (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁸ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 54.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹²⁰ Grenz, *Social God*, 222.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 318-19.

AM) entails “the promise of a new, eternal ‘being present’ of the sovereign God.” This promise is for those who bear the divine name. It is a promise to be with them “at every moment of time and even into eternity.” This promise is said to emerge in the Apocalypse as “the central significance of the divine eternality disclosed in the *ego eimi*.”¹²³ Grenz also finds another principle at work, where the Father bestows the divine name (i.e., his character, essential nature, and deity) on the Son, who then returns to the Father what he receives from him.¹²⁴ Indeed, Jesus’ own life, ministry and death in salvation history become a “composite act of returning to the Father what the Son receives from the Father, namely, the Father’s very nature as deity—that is, the Spirit, who thereby becomes the Spirit shared by the Father and Son.”¹²⁵ It is this dynamic, yielding a relational ontology, which is to be taken up as this essay’s final matter for exploration.

Relational Ontology

Attempts to nuance Pannenberg’s Trinity, itself resulting from his rigorous application of the concept denoted by Rahner’s Rule, have yielded many different labels. A range of descriptions have referred to his doctrine of the Trinity as advocating “trinitarian self-actualization,”¹²⁶ a “reciprocal relational unity,”¹²⁷ and a “relational model” of “dependent divinity” where “self-distinction constitutes... unity in God.”¹²⁸ Others have described it as the “unity-in-distinction” of immanent and economic Trinity.¹²⁹ Still others have portrayed this designation as being a mutually independent ontological *perichoretic* self-distinction as the means of distinguishing trinitarian persons, over against any description of origin for members of the Trinity.¹³⁰ While also spoken of as “reciprocal self-differentiation,”¹³¹ Pannenberg himself refers to this concept as a mutual, “reciprocal self-distinction,”¹³² which allows him to avoid the hard distinction of pitting persons as either concrete substances or concrete relations.¹³³ As Clayton notes, it is precisely at this point where Pannenberg’s view

¹²³ Grenz, *Named God*, 246.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹²⁶ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 97-107.

¹²⁷ Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 203-11, 238.

¹²⁸ Ted Peters, *GOD as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 135-42.

¹²⁹ See Eilers, “Pannenberg on God’s Reconciling Action,” 43 n126 who acknowledges that the phrase “unity-in-distinction” came from Christiaan Mostert. Mostert does use this phrase (*God and the Future*, 224), although it is actually used earlier by Roger Olson (“Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 185).

¹³⁰ Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 43; and Mostert, *God and the Future*, 188. See F. Leron Shults’s exposition of Pannenberg’s “constitutive relationality of exocentric centrality,” yielding both anthropological description and that of divine persons (“Constitutive Relationality in Anthropology and Trinity: The Shaping of the ‘Imago Dei’ Doctrine in Barth and Pannenberg,” *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 39 [1997], 316-21). See also Pannenberg, *ST*, 1:319.

¹³¹ See Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” *SJT* 36, 226-27; *idem*, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 200; and Clayton, “The God of History and the Presence of the Future,” 100, 104-105.

¹³² See this exposition in *ST*, 1:308-19; and *idem* “The God of History,” 36-38, where the term employed is “*Selbstunterscheidung*.”

¹³³ For an explanation of the issues involved here, including his “classical concerns,” see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139-77. For two leading examples of those who have developed a thoroughly

of history and epistemology take an ontological turn.¹³⁴ These descriptive features of Pannenberg's work indicate what is now commonly referred to as the "relational turn" in theistic conceptualizations.¹³⁵ The best way to understand Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity, then, and its inherent components from which Grenz later draws and adapts into his own construction, is to highlight the concepts of trinitarian self-reciprocating identity and love, along with the role played by the social analogy.

For Pannenberg, the self-reciprocating identity inherent in the divine life is where his doctrine of the Trinity begins.¹³⁶ It is also here where the phrase "God is love" (John 4.16) is unpacked, being understood as both "the comprehensive expression of the trinitarian fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit," and as indistinguishable from the divine essence. In this way, love is not simply one among God's other attributes but instead represents the concreteness of the concept of the infinite.¹³⁷ The entire economy of salvation is, then, the divine love manifested, serving as the eternal basis of the immanent Trinity coming forth as the economic Trinity, incorporating creatures thereby into the triune life. In the final sentence of his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg concludes: "The distinction and unity of the immanent and economic Trinity constitute the heartbeat of the divine love, and with a single such heartbeat this love encompasses the whole world of creatures."¹³⁸

Beyond the trinitarian expositions of love given by Augustine or the medieval theologian Richard of St. Victor,¹³⁹ Pannenberg's understanding of the divine love is grounded in the displayed reciprocity of relations between persons of the Trinity. After all, "person" is a correlative idea. Pannenberg finds that trinitarian dogma, which asserts the divine Subject's self-deployment, negates the equality of divinity for divine persons, reducing their plurality to subordinate modes of being. Alternatively, he suggests that each member receives constitution, glory, lordship, and deity in his self-distinction from the God whom he glorifies in community. And while these "self-distinctions of God are constitutive for the divinity of the Trinitarian persons,"¹⁴⁰ it must not be underemphasized that the persons themselves are constituted by their relationship to the other two members. Herein lies the reason for Pannenberg's prioritization of God's three-ness over one-ness, yet whose unity becomes a "perichoresis" of the three persons in their reciprocal relations.¹⁴¹ And yet while beginning here, priority of attention looks to the Father-Son relation worked out in history (yet belonging to God's eternity) as the foundation for the other relations in the triune life.¹⁴²

relational ontology, see David S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) and Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

¹³⁴ Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 99.

¹³⁵ See Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing*, 112-24.

¹³⁶ Ed L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 133.

¹³⁷ Pannenberg, "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," 256. See also his *ST*, 1:422-48 (esp. 427-28, 441).

¹³⁸ *Idem*, *ST*, 3:646.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:286-88.

¹⁴⁰ *Idem*, "The God of History," 36. See also Mostert, *God and the Future*, 206-10; and Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 64, 73-81, 88.

¹⁴¹ Olson, "Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity," 192.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 185-88.

God's essence is seen as a relational concept, one existing as much in the immanent as in the economic Trinity, the former dependent on the inseparable action of the latter's work in history.¹⁴³ It is unclear whether this self-reciprocal identity necessitates the Hegelian self-actualization that some have found so unhelpful.¹⁴⁴ And yet none of this can be divorced from Pannenberg's Christological anthropology, where humans have fellowship with God by "participation in the fellowship of the Son with the Father by the Spirit in the life of the Trinity."¹⁴⁵

While Pannenberg's status as a social trinitarian has been recently contested,¹⁴⁶ in a very important sense he cannot avoid seeing *imago Dei* as *similitudo trinitatis*, especially with his commitment to Jesus Christ as the true *imago Dei*,¹⁴⁷ and with how determinative the historic economy is for the triune life, lordship and deity. Having tied God indissolubly with creation and history, then, the way Pannenberg sees the trinitarian dynamic as a blueprint for establishing human societal pattern is found in humanity's destiny, which is "to share in the self-distinction of the Son from the Father," and also to growing up in this relationship (i.e., self-distinction) with God the Father.¹⁴⁸ According to Pannenberg, the Logos finds expression in humans to a higher degree than other creatures "because we are able and destined to distinguish God from ourselves and ourselves from God, so that the self-distinction of the Son from the Father can take shape in us."¹⁴⁹

While there are a number of major problems in Pannenberg's contribution to a relational ontology of divine (and human) persons, these are compounded by his application of the principles to at least three things he sees having reciprocal relations. First, there is the identity-constituting and deity granting reciprocal relations of the triune persons which through Christ also constitutes human identity. Next for Pannenberg is the reciprocal relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, as well as what exists between the present and future. And social analogies seem to be employed in multiple places.¹⁵⁰ And yet Pannenberg's reconceptualization of the Trinity, while taking Rahner's Rule seriously, remains fraught with "serious ambiguity."¹⁵¹ As Sanders suggests, this may result from his desire to apply Rahner's axiom as rigorously as he does, or it may highlight the vast gap that

¹⁴³ Idem, "Trinity and Eschatology," 226-27.

¹⁴⁴ E.g., Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 100; and Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 102-103.

¹⁴⁵ Pannenberg, *ST*, 3:583-84; see also Mostert, *God and the Future*, 206.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 92-97. See also Grenz (*Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 98) who more mildly asserts that Pannenberg has rejected traditional analogical approaches.

¹⁴⁷ See Pannenberg's understanding of *imago Dei* as anthropological, Christological and including a prescribed destiny (*ST*, 1:409). See also his description of believers needing to be renewed after Christ, having been made according to (☩) God's image from Gen 1.26 (*ST*, 2:215).

¹⁴⁸ Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 105.

¹⁴⁹ Pannenberg, *ST*, 2:385.

¹⁵⁰ This is contra the more conservative reading of Pannenberg taken by Taylor (*Pannenberg and the Triune God*, 96-97), suggesting that the *imago Dei* in Pannenberg is not *similitudo trinitatis* but *creatura operis trinitatis*. See also the confusion that Grenz highlights when he suggests that Pannenberg is an "articulate ally" of those wanting to maintain a classical understanding of the eternal God, even while he is said to reject traditional analogical approaches in order to assert doxological language about God's eternal essence (*Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 98).

¹⁵¹ Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 107.

will always exist in logical propositions humans set forth in attempts to understand God's nature and ways. In attempts to nuance the trinitarian members' self-differentiation, some have even said that it is "not an eternal, heavenly event," but one that is otherwise historical,¹⁵² which then yields supplemental confusion for the precise manner in which the future affects God, unless each is grounded in the other.¹⁵³ The entire time Pannenberg also seems also to assert that God is "simple" even while constructing a massive edifice upon the idea of reciprocal self-distinction or self-dedication in order to be more overtly trinitarian. But do all these things work together? Or is the end result simply incoherence?

Whatever assessment might be made of Pannenberg's relational ontology and its variegated dimensions,¹⁵⁴ Grenz was both sympathetic to and deeply affected by it. At the very minimum, and perhaps displaying the most significant theme transferred to the younger theologian, Grenz acknowledged Pannenberg's "elevation of the social Trinity to the center of theology," which included strident implications for a relational ontology warranting even further development.¹⁵⁵ As a general summary of something he elsewhere called "the triumph of relationality,"¹⁵⁶ Grenz cites Jüngel, Moltmann, Jenson, and Pannenberg as theologians who, building upon Hegel, Barth and Rahner, are committed to a relational understanding of the Trinity. While this statement may be highly contestable and also somewhat irresponsible, Grenz nevertheless understood their work as having launched "a relatively new emphasis that bases the doctrine of the Trinity on relationality and as such represents... an extension and development of ancient trinitarian thought."¹⁵⁷ Observed in the influential writings of theologians like Boff, Zizioulas and LaCugna, "the concept of relationality had indeed moved to the center stage," along with its incipient relational ontology.¹⁵⁸ Grenz himself found the impetus for a "thoroughgoing relational ontology" in the concept of perichoresis, which preserved the ideas of the one and the many within interrelational dynamics.¹⁵⁹ By the early twenty-first century, he saw this idea as holding major promise for his own work.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology," *SJT* 36, 227.

¹⁵³ This seems hard to maintain in light of how radically dependent God is on his creation and its history in Pannenberg's scheme ("Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," 254-55).

¹⁵⁴ See some of Grenz's own confusion over Pannenberg's conceptualization of the Trinity in "The Irrelevance of Theology," 310 as well as Grenz's survey of other critiques of Pannenberg's doctrine of God in Stanley J. Grenz, "The Appraisal of Pannenberg: A Survey of the Literature" in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 36-45.

¹⁵⁵ Grenz, "The Irrelevance of Theology," 311.

¹⁵⁶ Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 117-62.

¹⁵⁷ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 191.

¹⁵⁸ Grenz, *Rediscovering*, 117-19.

¹⁵⁹ Grenz, *Social God*, 317.

¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, in a personal letter seeking a written reference for a number of large scholarship funding agencies in preparation for the work resulting in the volume published as the 2001, *The Social God*, Grenz wrote to leading proponent of a relational model of the Trinity, Paul Fiddes, then Principle of Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, noting "the crucial importance of my proposed work in advancing the scholarly enterprise as it relates to your own field of study" (2 Nov 1998).

This relational ontology Grenz began working with was referred to as something said to also be building on Zizioulas' communion ontology.¹⁶¹ The ensuing social or relational ontology for Grenz also had import for God, who is spoken of as essentially other-oriented.¹⁶² Here, however, is where Grenz takes Pannenberg to the next step, moving from what he saw as a more underdeveloped relational ontology to a communion ontology. And while chiding Pannenberg for ignoring the theme that would have major import for Grenz's own work, which he found central to scripture and systematic theology, namely the "community" theme, he did commend his mentor for providing the foundation for the move to "community," having elevated the social Trinity to theology's center.¹⁶³ With these moves, as Pannenberg's relational ontology was explored, the same can be observed in Grenz's work by considering the trinitarian persons' self-reciprocating identity and love, along with the social analogy. Both of these features are captured together in one paragraph toward the end of his first *Matrix* volume. According to the trinitarian shape of the newfound communion ontology, "the three members of the Trinity are 'person' precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations." Grenz explained further that "[t]he attendant ontology of personhood suggests that the Creator's intent that humans be the representation of the divine reality means that the goal of human existence is to be persons-in-relation after the pattern of the perichoretic life disclosed in Jesus Christ."¹⁶⁴

For Grenz, the self-reciprocal identity constitutive of persons was a given in the newfound ontology of communion. In his theology's most mature shape, Grenz understood that personal relations, and not causal ones as in earlier theological history, affirm that the presenting and substantiating of love is complete between persons in the eternal dynamic of the divine life. It is this dynamic of the divine life—the dynamic of reciprocal-glorification and love—into which creatures are drawn.¹⁶⁵ These ideas show up earlier in Grenz's 1993 methodological work where he explains that the truth of God creates our experience within a community.¹⁶⁶ Earlier in 1990 he had also declared that "God is the divine community," the basis for the sameness and difference reflected in human community and sexuality.¹⁶⁷ And this was worked out later when the telic component of human existence was explained as it relates to the divine life:

¹⁶¹ Roger E. Olson, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," *Theology Today* 64 (2007), 197. See also Grenz, *Social God*, 16, 50-57, which shows dependence on both Zizioulas and Catherine LaCugna for this new ontology.

¹⁶² Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 231. See this notion in Grenz, where the affirmation of God as "person" comes from creaturely experiences of God's incomprehensibility as well as that of his will and freedom (*Theology for the Community*, 2d ed., 84-85).

¹⁶³ Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 310-11. There may, however, be good reason for Grenz's criticism to be put more mildly—see the description of community in relation to kingdom and *imago Dei* in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985 [German, 1983]), 531-32.

¹⁶⁴ Grenz, *Social God*, 332.

¹⁶⁵ Grenz, *Named God*, 339-40, 366.

¹⁶⁶ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 73.

¹⁶⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 47-48.

Ultimately, then, we enjoy the fullness of community as, and only as, God graciously brings us to participate together in *the fountainhead of community*, namely, the life of the triune God. For this reason, the communal fellowship Christians share goes beyond what is generated by a common experience or even by a common narrative. The community that is ours is nothing less than *a shared participation—a participation together—in the perichoretic community of Trinitarian persons*.¹⁶⁸

Within these ideas, Grenz adapts Pannenberg's self-reciprocating identity. To the confusion of some evangelicals, he was shattering categories in the subordination debate (within the divine life and with male-female relations) by affirming the mutuality of both the Son submitting to the Father as well as the Father submitting to the Son, and that, on biblical grounds!¹⁶⁹ But of additional consideration in Grenz's thought is how this idea of reciprocal-relationality, personhood and community relate to the concept of love.

Grenz designates love as central among God's attributes, and his only true attribute.¹⁷⁰ To say that "God is love" is the most basic and fundamental thing that can be declared about the divine essence. Love is a relational term requiring subject and object and is tantamount to the very "reciprocal self-dedication of the trinitarian members," constituting or comprising God's unity.¹⁷¹ This mutual self-giving and coinherence of trinitarian persons, accompanied by the use of perichoresis as the manner in which to describe their constitution "opened the way for the development of a dynamic ontology of persons-in-relationship or person-in-communion."¹⁷² In some ways, Grenz's usage of love to describe the trinitarian life perpetuates the ambiguity he saw in Pannenberg about whether the Spirit is the love relation between Father and Son or else the third person sharing love with the Father and Son.¹⁷³ At various points, God's primary attribute, God's essence, and God himself are each described as love, all the while Grenz says that the Spirit not just as just forging the connecting link between one trinitarian member to another, but "is the love shared within the divine life and as such is the personal concretization of the very essence and character of

¹⁶⁸ Grenz, "Ecclesiology," 268 (italics mine).

¹⁶⁹ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 151-56; see also Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 68-69. See also Stephen D. Kovach and Peter R. Schemm Jr., "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999), 461-76; Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); and Millard J. Erickson's desire for further elaboration in *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 72-74.

¹⁷⁰ Grenz, *Revisioning*, 185-86; Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 71-72; and also Stanley J. Grenz, "What Does It Mean to Be Trinitarian in Doctrine?" from "What Does it Mean to be Trinitarians?" Part 1, Bible and Theology Lectureship, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 18 Jan 2005 (unpublished), 2.

¹⁷¹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 71-72. Note that here Grenz actually says that love "builds" the unity of the one God. I could not find this language used elsewhere in Grenz's work when dealing with this issue of love and personhood within the divine life. He instead opts for the terms "constitutes," "comprises" or "gives rise to" (Grenz, *Social God*, 313-31; Grenz, *Named God*, 287-90, 331-41), which seems a bit more responsible.

¹⁷² Grenz, *Social God*, 314-17.

¹⁷³ Grenz, "The Irrelevancy of Theology," 310.

the one God.”¹⁷⁴ As such, as the “divine love” given by Father to Son, and then back to Father from Son, the Spirit is “shared Gift,” which becomes ontologically significant as it encapsulates God’s graciousness.¹⁷⁵ While much more of the features included in the dynamic of Grenz’s doctrine of the Trinity could be explored, including the nature of perichoretic unity, participation in God’s life, along with developments in Grenz’s conception of the doctrine and further import from the community theme, the final feature relevant to Grenz’s relational ontology is the role that the social analogy played.

Ultimately, Grenz held that “nothing in creation is totally analogous to the one God who is three-in-one.”¹⁷⁶ And yet, as already explained, it is the reciprocal dynamic within the triune life involved in the glorification of the other that is involved in the reciprocal sharing of love. Grenz explains that the Father eternally lavishes unbounded divine love on (thus glorifying) the Son, who then reciprocates this love received from the Father, glorifying the Father eternally just as he did on his earthly mission. It is then by being drawn into this dynamic of the trinitarian life that “the new humanity participates in this eternal reciprocal glorification.” This happens both as humans glorify God the Father and Son by the Spirit, but also as they are glorified in the Son by the Spirit with all of creation, displaying the “ultimate expression of the *imago dei* and therefore mark[ing] the *telos* for which humans were created in the beginning.”¹⁷⁷ What is made visible in the church, then, according to Grenz is “the divine quality of love that Jesus reveals, the love that characterizes God.” In other words, he explains that the indwelling Spirit transforms the ecclesial community “after the pattern of the perichoretic life of the triune God.” And therefore by incorporating believers “into Christ” he thus “places participants in one another,” which in turn brings about “ecclesial solidarity” that entails living out the unity of the triune God.¹⁷⁸ The analogy, however, doesn’t stop here since ultimately it is a God-centered, thus Christ-centered, view of the perichoretic relations, which was a theme exhibiting substantial development in Grenz’s reading of the issues.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

This essay’s research findings lead to the conclusion that Grenz took much from Pannenberg, which could be expected from an account Pannenberg gave of at least one

¹⁷⁴ Grenz, *Named God*, 340. See also Grenz, *Social God*, 327 and *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 71.

¹⁷⁵ Grenz, *Named God*, 340-41. The Spirit is also said to be both the name and essence of God which the Father bestows on the Son who is other than the Father and thus finds his name (i.e., Spirit) in the Son. Additionally, the Father is named as Father by the Son, in all of which each is dependent on the Spirit who is the name they share (334). Incidentally, this may come directly from his reading of Pannenberg, who, on Grenz’s account, holds that the Spirit is both the divine essence as such and the third person of the Trinity (*Reason for Hope*, 2d ed., 79-80).

¹⁷⁶ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 2d ed., 71.

¹⁷⁷ Grenz, *Social God*, 327.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 335. For a more detailed explanation of how this works in Grenz’s ecclesiology, see “Stanley Grenz’s Ecclesiology: Telic and Trinitarian,” *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 6 (2010), 31-33, 40-44.

¹⁷⁹ For more on this, see Jason S. Sexton, “The *Imago Dei* Once Again: Stanley Grenz’s Journey Toward a Theological Interpretation of Gen 1:26-27,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4 (2010), 187-206, esp. 192-96 for how various analogies worked in his anthropology and theology proper.

supervisory meeting.¹⁸⁰ Pannenberg provided an indelible introduction for many aspects of Grenz's work, and the primary aegis for the initial development of Grenz's theology. He read Pannenberg carefully and appropriated his thought in ways deemed helpful within his own context. At this point it can be seen that while Grenz does not borrow from Pannenberg on every single point, he does reflect him on each of these major point, in ways that display Pannenberg's work as the major catalytic feature that contributed much to his former student's conception and later construction of a distinctly trinitarian systematic theology. Inasmuch, then, as Pannenberg's method and shape of theology's main subject can be called "trinitarian," or even "more trinitarian than any he knows of,"¹⁸¹ and insofar as Grenz follows down the same path, his work may also rightfully receive similar designation as he sought to work out implications from the doctrine of the Trinity into all of theology—and into all of reality.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ See Wolfhart Pannenberg's comments cited in a personal letter cited in Erik C. Leafblad, "Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz," *Princeton Theological Review* 12 (2006), 1.

¹⁸¹ See this conclusion made by Clayton, "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," 108 and Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 187.

¹⁸² I am grateful for the helpful comments offered on the content of this article by a number of readers, including Steve Holmes and Chris Mostert.

THE BEST MAN IS ONLY A MAN: REFLECTIONS ON SOME ENCHANTMENTS AND DISENCHANTMENTS OF THE GRAIL

Charles M. Natoli¹

Il faut rêver le monde pour pouvoir l'habiter. Il faut rêver le Graal pour pouvoir en parler (One must dream the world to be able to live in it. One must dream the Grail to be able to speak of it).

— Philippe Walter, *Album du Graal*

What! all this beautiful world made only human!—the mountain disenchanted of its Oread—the waters of their Nymph...wouldst thou deny this, and make the earth mere dust and clay?

— Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*

In the English-speaking world many if not most who are familiar with the Arthurian tales know them through the retellings of Malory or Tennyson, or perhaps through T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* and the memorable *Camelot* musical it inspired. And perhaps, as children, they first came to them—as I did long ago (*ehou, fugaces anni*)—through the delightful versions of Howard Pyle and Sydney Lanier. Both are within easy reach on my shelf today, where not only their matter but the famously captivating illustrations by Pyle and his pupil N. C. Wyeth help serve to arm them for occasional *sorties*. But with the exception of White's, what all of these versions have in common is the telling of a story essentially for its own sake rather than, as so common in the Middle Ages, as a signpost to higher truths. In the famous dichotomy of Chrétien de Troyes, their interest is largely in matter rather than meaning, in *matière* rather than *sens*.

This is hardly matter for wonder. High quests, hazards of errantry, fierce contests of prowess, prodigies of hardihood, ill-starred love triangles and just plain blood and guts have a dramatic presence that can easily cast into shade the ideals of the long-gone chivalric world that incited and informed them. But even seen from a vantage well outside the pale of the chivalric ideal's enchantment, the tales have often stirred hearts and, at times, even fostered emulation.

However the earlier French tales, the models whence the English tellings derive, commonly aimed not merely to recount *matière* but to reveal as through veils very fundamental spiritual and philosophic truths. This is something that can easily elude the attention of readers whose background is rooted in the English Arthurian heritage. For when we are not thinking of the tales as adventure and love story, it is often merely to join in with a Cervantes or Monty Python to smile at chivalry as an infatuation or delusion, a kind of spell or insanity.

The medieval French Arthurian tales also offer a critique of the chivalric world they describe—indeed, in some cases it could be said that they recount it only to repudiate it. But

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it is a critique of a far different sort than Cervantes'. It does not mock extravagant illusions that our kind, all too susceptible to infatuation, may besottedly come to embrace. Though in the French tales too we find disillusionment relative to all too-human humanity and the world it makes for itself, they are grounded in a deeply spiritual pessimism. If Cervantes can be said to play Democritus, laughing at the follies of delusion-prone humankind, the French tales often play Heraclitus, sighing, sorrowing and weeping at a mankind that is, alas, no better than human.

The recent appearance of the third and final volume of *Le Livre du Graal* in the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series provides an opportune occasion for scholarly readers to reflect on what is arguably the best of the French tellings in terms of both *matière* and *sens*. In its pages we find not only a great story and symbol of medieval Western literature, but a powerful and intricate effort to impart spiritual and philosophic awakening to a world under the enchantment of a specious ideal. For, if the tales tell true, the chivalric spirit that their sprawling pages both capture and indict is in every sense as errant as the knights who wander through them. And in their pages we moderns can see as well some of the many distances travelled and detours taken by the human spirit up to our own days.

I. From Grail to Holy Grail to Heavenly Grail

The Grail prose tales which specialists commonly term the *Vulgate Cycle* or *Lancelot-Graal* are in effect a library of related texts figuring in multiple versions and written by various authors.² As presented in the Pléiade volumes, the texts nonetheless possess very considerable unity with the last written though thematically prior works ("branches") consciously looking forward to developments in the climactic though earlier written ones. This edition, conceived by the late Daniel Poirion and published under the direction of Philippe Walter, presents us with both an Old French text and a Modern French translation under the title *Le Livre du Graal*.

The cycle is indeed a massive work; annotation and translation included, in the Pléiade's three volumes it runs to some five thousand pages.³ Nonetheless, this edition presents us

² *Lancelot-Graal* may also denote a large subset of the *Vulgate Cycle*, to wit, that beginning with its third branch, *Lancelot*. But as the Grail if not Lancelot figures as soon as the first branch, the present essay does not follow this usage. (There are also post-Vulgate texts though these do not concern us here.) For some helpful information on the rather confusing variety of titles of wholes and parts see pp. LXIX-LXX and LXXV of Philippe Walter's introductory notice to Vol. I of *Le Livre du Graal* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

³ In the first volume we have *Joseph d'Armathie* [a.k.a. *Estoire del saint Graal*], *Merlin*, and *Les premiers Faits du roi Arthur* [a.k.a. *the Vulgate Suite Merlin*]. The following branch, *Lancelot*, is presented in two parts, the first of which fills volume II. The second part appears in volume three along with the climactic *La Quête du saint Graal* and *La Mort du roi Arthur*.

The latter two branches are conveniently available in good English versions in the Penguin classics series as *The Quest of the Holy Grail* and *The Death of King Arthur*. For the whole see *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 5 vols., ed. Norris J. Lacy (most recently from Routledge, 2010).

At the foot of the page the Pléiade volumes give the Old French text. It derives from a manuscript, dated 1286 and copied in Picardy, that is presently held at the library of the University of Bonn (S 526). [Its text is here lightly emended. For remarks see Elspeth Kennedy's review of vol. I in *Medium Aevum* (73) 2004.] Clear, elegant Modern French translations appear at the top of the page. I

with a quite unified and comprehensive story on account of the decision to follow a single manuscript recounting the “short version” of the tale. In its six branches we can follow the holy vessel from its appearance at the Last Supper to its miraculous disparition from the world, and from there to the passing of the Arthurian world that so memorably sought for it.

* * *

In its guise best known today the Grail is the cup or chalice from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, the vessel that held the wine-become-blood. But originally, as in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval* (c. 1181-1191), *grail* is not a proper name but a common noun signifying a large serving dish. Like the shape-shifting Merlin, who is sired by a demon on a mortal woman and recruited to the side of the angels only through baptism, over the years the grail too will change form. In Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parvifal* (c. 1200-1210) it will be a stone; moreover, it will serve up hot or cold meats and alcoholic beverages to taste! But by the time of *Lancelot-Graal* (c. 1235-40), wherein it figures as the deep-sided dish that contained the paschal lamb at the Last Supper, the Grail has become baptized as *le saint Graal*. For, as we read in the first branch, it not only graced the table of the Last Supper but was used by Joseph of Arimathea to collect blood from the very body of Jesus in the course of his Deposition from the cross.

And for all of its repetitions and meanderings, what a tale of adventure and romance, of mysticism and carnality, of longing and endeavor, and of failure and attainment the Grail’s saga is! Linking the world of Arthur directly to the Savior and earliest Christianity, through the test of its seeking the Grail will both ennoble Arthur’s Round Table and expose the fundamental flaws of its ethos.

Like all true tales of this earth it is tragic, ending in separation and loss, since in a world wherein all passes we and what we desire must soon or late be sundered. When, finally, Lancelot’s son Galaad attains the Grail, both he and it will pass from here forever. Having ascended to heaven—a heavenly vessel now in every sense—the Grail will no longer be an object even of quest in an unworthy world now yet further diminished.

II. Lancelot, Guinevere and a World’s Ending

In the aftermath of the Grail’s disappearance the Arthurian world will soon founder, drifting swiftly and inexorably to ruin on the rocks of betrayal and ferocious kin-strife. Its flotsam and jetsam will include a terrified Guinevere immuring herself in a nunnery and her paramour of so many years, the desolate and penitential Lancelot, dragging out his last days in a hermitage.⁴

cite these in the text above, followed by an English version. For purposes of contrast, my English is in a few places a bit more literal.

The Bonn ms. concludes by titling its contents *Roman de Lancelot*, though Lancelot does not appear until the part bearing his name.

⁴ We would do ill to see this as mere solitude for penance after the lamentable shipwreck of a stellar worldly career. From the perspective of *La Quête du saint Graal*’s pious author, which is that of the cloister rather than the court, though he fell before—into adultery and through *la luxure*—at the last Lancelot has, so to speak, risen in the world by retiring from it.

Like a new Adam and Eve, by their fall Lancelot and Guinevere have brought on their world's fall, for the aftershocks of their adultery have irremediably fractured Arthur's Round Table. But though these lovers too must finish their days in a world whose worsening they have wrought, it will be without the consolation of each other's company.⁵ Lancelot wearily retires to his hermitage, there to spend his final four years in the hardest penance, whereas the tale tells us that Guinevere seeks refuge in a nunnery under the spur, not of penance, but of fear. As civil war looms with the kingship in the balance she is terrified of the vengeance of whichever rival might triumph, whether it be her much-deceived husband Arthur or Mordret, his bastard and incestuous son whose lust for her she has thwarted.

Or, if we so fancy, we might figure their tragedy in Virgilian terms. The new realm the heavenly powers promised Aeneas came to pass despite his dalliance with Dido, but though repentance will bring Lancelot in sight of the Grail, he will be balked of it. And though Lancelot too strays with and from a woman, it is not a forsaken woman but a forsaken world, Arthur's, that will slay itself on the pyre that Lancelot's passion for Guinevere has kindled.

* * *

Having been chief among the causes of the passing of the Arthurian world, Lancelot and Guinevere will henceforth be foremost among the emblems of that failed, and perhaps foredoomed, last best effort of fallen mankind to make might subserve right.⁶ Free to fall but constitutionally (or merely in the event?) insufficient to stand, failing in the search for the grace that the Grail represents, mankind is simply unworthy of a better world. Whence, paradoxically, it is in a sense just that we live under the iron yoke of unjust force rather than under the light yoke of force tamed to Christ and justice. For we deserve no better!

And just as, in the Christian tradition, the unworthiness of mankind results in the God who walked of an evening with Adam and Eve withdrawing into hiding (Isaiah's famous 'deus absconditus'), so in the cycle our unworthiness makes it fit that in the end Arthur and his sword Escalibor, like the Grail and its achiever Galaad before them, pass beyond the confines of the world. "Girflet, montez au sommet de ce tertre, vous y trouverez un lac et vous y jetterez mon épée, car je ne veux pas qu'elle demeure sur cette terre et que s'en emparent les héritiers indignes [li malvais oirs] qui y resteront." (Girflet, climb to the summit

⁵ Perhaps their sundering can be seen as a mercy; for else, like Dante's Paolo and Francesca, each might serve as an ever-present reminder to the other of the shared sin that brought final ruin. At any event it seems a narrative necessity for Lancelot's spiritual regeneration given that, for decades, her love has been a snare that he has shown scant aptitude to evade.

⁶ One does not always think of the Arthurian world and its ethos in terms of the problematic of Plato's *Republic*, which is effectively Pascal's pithy "ne pouvant faire que ce qui est juste fût fort, on a fait que ce qui est fort fût juste" (unable to fortify justice we have simply justified force, *Pensées*, fragment 135 in Philippe Sellier's editions). (The most obvious interpretation in this line would be T. H. White's reading of Malory as implying the search for an antidote to war.) But the parallel, though obvious enough on reflection, is a worthwhile one, as both Plato and Arthur would bind force to justice's leash rather than simply, as the natural man does, employ it to help friends and harm enemies. In fact, Lancelot's virtue of *droiture* (rectitude) is specifically defined by one of the tale's innumerable omniscient hermits in direct in opposition to such partiality in conduct. Cf. *La Quête du saint Graal*, vol. III, p. 975 [169].

of this hill and you will find a lake; throw my sword into it, for I do not wish it to remain on this earth and be seized by the wicked descendants [or 'heirs'] who will remain after us.”⁷

But if it is a tragedy that henceforth forlorn mankind must languish in a lessened world, a greater tragedy lies within us. For though we are good enough to aspire to True Good, we are not good enough to attain it, or even—for Galaad is effectively more than merely human—to seek successfully the grace that would bring us to it.

According to the ideals of the terrestrial chivalry sung by the early troubadours, Lancelot, fired to deeds of astounding hardihood and prowess by the love of an adored lady, is the paragon, indeed the incarnation of knighthood and courtliness. As such he qualifies as the best man who is only a man—the finest exemplar of the finest merely human ideal. But earth’s best is still one rung short of what a man ought truly to be. For to be only a man, even if the best, is still to fall short of the excellence of the true, celestial chivalry and so to miss the mark a man was made for. Small wonder, then, that our common clay yearns to be fired by the love of a man or a woman rather than by the divine love that made it and for which it was made.

Hobbled by the courtly ideal of love and so spurred to virtue and *prouesses* by a woman – and one married to his liege lord at that—Lancelot can at the last only glimpse the Grail into whose presence will finally come a questing triad of heroes new and old, two of them his kin. They are Percival, the Grail hero of earlier tradition; Lancelot’s cousin Bors; and, above all, his son Galaad. Better than his father, and descended from both Joseph of Arimathea and King David, Galaad is as virginal and sinless as Christ—who, by the way, in a remarkable prologue is named as the author of the cycle’s thematically early, prophetic part!

The embodiment of a monastic rather than a merely amorous and agonistic ideal, the successful Galaad will exclaim in rapture: “[J]e vois maintenant en toute évidence ce que la langue ne pourrait décrire, ni l’esprit concevoir. C’est ici que je vois la raison des prouesses” (I now see clearly what tongue cannot describe nor mind conceive [cuers penser]. It is here that I see the reason for courageous exploits [l’ocoison des proeces].”⁸ The highest quest achieved, the older, all too human chivalry transcended, naught remains for this man who is more than a man, the virginal paragon of a celestial chivalry, but to pray on the instant for death and heaven.⁹

The tragedy of Lancelot is that at bottom he is wrought of stuff that is as flawed as his fundamentally terrestrial courtly ethos. And the tragedy of us all is that such an ethos, the best that the best among us can attain, not only falls short of the heavenly ideal but is unrealizable as an earthly one. From the standpoint of *Lancelot-Graal’s* pious authors, a just realm of mere humans is a mirage, not to say a contradiction in terms. What is *droit* cannot come from what inherently lacks *droiture*. (Or, as a familiar later phrase would have it, one can’t build straight out of the crooked timber of humanity.) If in sooth we would be angelic, then angels we must become. And so at the end of the day we are in this world, not to

⁷ *La Mort du roi Arthur*, Vol. III, p. 1467 [333].

⁸ *La Quête du saint Graal*, Vol. III p. 1175 [374].

⁹ Which he will be duly accorded, though not at the moment. For, in effect, if “The wages of sin is death [of the soul]”, the wages of holiness is the death of the body.

transform it, but to transcend it. Our life here is not for the living of it, but for the leaving of it.

Underscoring the pathos of Lancelot's failure is that he and Guinevere are keenly conscious that it is on account of their love that he has failed in what he was born for. "[V]ous avez payé bien cher mon amour," she laments. For, she continues, "Dieu avait fait de vous le meilleur chevalier du monde, le plus beau, le plus rempli de grâce, il vous avait, en outre, fait don d'un destin assez heureux pour que vous puissiez contempler à découvert les merveilles du saint Graal; mais cette vision, désormais, vous en êtes dépossédé, à cause de notre union. Il aurait mieux valu, je crois, que je ne fusse jamais née, plutôt que de me trouver responsable de la perte de tant de qualités, à jamais perdues." (You have paid very dearly indeed for my love. God made you the best knight in the world, the most fair, the most charming and elegant [le plus gracieux de tous]; moreover he made you the gift of so happy a destiny [tel eür] that you would have been able to see the unveiled mysteries of the holy Grail; but henceforth, on account of our union, you are dispossessed of this vision. I think it would have been better that I had never been born rather than to be responsible for the loss of so many fine qualities [tant de biens] forever.)¹⁰

But such is the perversity of human nature that the pre-condition of Lancelot's knightly excellence, the spur to his innumerable *prouesses*—and indeed to his undertaking of the Grail quest itself—is the very love for Guinevere that perforce keeps him earthbound and so debars him from the heights he was born for. Thus, speaking still under the spell of Guinevere and the values of the merely terrestrial chivalry, the as yet unrepentant Lancelot will retort: "Ma dame, vous parlez mal. Soyez sûre que jamais je ne serais arrivé à ce degré de valeur où je suis si vous n'aviez pas existé; car jamais je n'aurais eu assez de courage pour entrer dans la voie de la perfection chevaleresque ni pour entreprendre ces tâches auxquelles tous les autres avaient renoncé parce qu'ils n'en avaient point le pouvoir. Mais le désir que j'avais de vous et de votre beauté si grande a rempli mon coeur de la fierté qui s'y trouve au point de ne jamais me faire rencontrer d'aventure que je ne puisse mener à sa bonne fin." (My lady, you say wrongly. Know that I would never have come to such a height of glory [a si grant hautece] if you had never been; for I never would have had the heart to begin my chivalry [cuer de ma chevalerie enconmencier] nor to undertake those tasks others let be for want of power. But the desire I had of you and of your so-great beauty put into my heart the valiant pride that is in it [mist mon cuer en orgueil], so much so that I never encountered an adventure that I was not able to bring to a good end.)¹¹

"The needle's point will to the fixed north, such drawing arctics women's beauties are."¹²

Indeed, her beauty and the fire of their love underpin not only Lancelot's virtues but those of the whole kingdom's chivalry. For it is only because she brings to life all of the knightly virtues in him that he, in his turn, is able by his deeds to add luster to knighthood itself and so by his example inspire and enhearten the chivalry of Arthur's entire realm.¹³ The

¹⁰ *Lancelot (La Seconde Partie de la quête de Lancelot)*, Vol. III, pp. 407 [369].

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 408 [370].

¹² Middleton, *The Changeling* 3.216-17.

¹³ Thus when a jealous Guinevere's love for Lancelot turns for a time to hate, his cousin Bohort tells her that she is going to "enlever aux chevaliers de ce pays la fleur de toute la chevalerie du monde. Pour cette raison, vous pouvez comprendre que vous aller causer plus de tort à ce royaume et à bien

ground of the kingdom's weal, Guinevere is also, as a literal snare of the demon for Lancelot's entrapment,¹⁴ the ground of his and its woe. (The other chief cause of the Arthurian world's internecine apocalypse is also sexual: Arthur's incestuous union with his sorceress half-sister Morgaine, whence issues Mordret, born for treason and parricide.)

Had Lancelot only been able to refrain from mortal sin—on the face of it, a fairly low moral “high bar” to clear—he could have been the successful paragon, not merely of the terrestrial but of the celestial chivalry that his son Galaad became. But, human-all too-human, he will circle from repentance to relapse in a way well figured by his entrapment in the magical “carole enchantée,” a dance in which he will madly sing the love of the most beautiful of queens.¹⁵ The colossal, terrifying and ultimately disastrous power of the sexual draw of woman is here, as it will be in Turgenev later,¹⁶ a brute and brutal fact. As Bohort bitterly puts it to Guinevere, “Jamais homme ne fut ensuite captivé par une femme sans être honni et en mourir” (Never was a man powerfully taken by a woman [Oncques puis hom ne se prist fermement a feme] but that he found disgrace and death from it.) Peerless though he be, Lancelot, like many another champion,¹⁷ is helpless before it.

But though he fails and falls time and again, the persevering Lancelot will eventually reach port (a doggedness that much endeared him to John Steinbeck in his *Acts of Arthur*). Yet such is the power of love that he is able to succeed only at the bitter end of all things, a time when his desire for the queen, who by now has taken vows in her nunnery, is no longer merely immoral but has become impossible.

This much-belated triumph is postponed until the very close of the cycle's last branch, *La Mort du roi Arthur*. There, in a mischancy, darkening world bereft of the Grail and its ennobling quest, Arthurian chivalry descends into a maelstrom of deceit, intrigue, vendetta and brutal egoism. In an unmasking worthy of La Rochefoucauld, human love stands revealed as but a veil of *la luxure* while prowess is but a flower of and fodder for *orgueil*.

The prophetic hermits have fallen silent; the time for instruction and reproof has passed; reckoning looms. The *vaines prouesses* of bloody tournaments and quarrels spiral downward to find their outlet and their end in a fratricidal war of extermination. All seem darkly

d'autres qu'aucune dame n'en causa sur la personne d'un seul chevalier. Voilà le grand bienfait que nous vaut son amour pour vous!” (“deprive the knights of this land of the flower of all the world's chivalry. So understand that you are going to cause more harm to this kingdom and to many another than a lady ever caused to the person of a single knight. This is the great benefit that we have from his love for you!” *La Mort du Roi Arthur*, Vol. III pp. 1258 [87].

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 976-77 [170]. The devil is able to enter into her as she has not made a good confession since first she was married.

¹⁵ *Lancelot (La Seconde Partie de la quête de Lancelot)*, Vol. III, pp. 266-67 [244].

¹⁶ Cf. especially *Spring Torrents* (1872).

¹⁷ *La Mort du Roi Arthur*, Vol. III pp. 1257 [87]. So emphatic is the sentiment of Bohort just cited that it is uttered twice [cf. 86], bookending a catalogue of Christian and pagan worthies undone by lust for woman. The list forms a prologue to his bitter reproof of the jealous Guinevere for the mortal hatred she now feels for Lancelot and its disastrous implications for him, for all chivalry and for the kingdom (cf. n. 12). Perhaps a good deal of what is commonly called misogyny in the medieval Christian tradition could be more exactly specified as the thrall's rage at his subjection, or, in Nietzschean terms, the *ressentiment* of the powerless!

bewildered. It is like Gadarene swine ripping each other with tusks as they run amok over a precipice.

Too proud to summon Lancelot to the climactic battle with his traitorous spawn Mordret, Arthur will pay the penalty foretold by Merlin, for in slaying his faithless son he will receive what would have been his death-wound were he not taken hence in a faerie barge. Having learnt of Arthur's passing, in a final battle Lancelot and his men will avenge the king on Mordret's sons, though at great cost. It is the final gasp of Arthur's kingdom of Logres.

After more than twenty-five years of the blood, toil, tears and sweat of knighthood, with Guinevere and Arthur both lost to him forever, Lancelot enters on a four-year period of heroic asceticism that will last until his death. In it he finally attains his long-deferred triumph in the best of contests—that against sin. The days of *la luxure* and *l'orgueil* are passed, for they are surpassed. His audience now is not a knightly throng in a tournament or battle, nor a bevy of courtly beauties, but a fellow hermit who is permitted to view, in a dream, his triumphant reception into heaven.

Galaad, a man who like Christ was more than a man, could transcend the weaknesses of human desiring, but a mere man's heart must first be pulverized before grace is able to refashion it aright. Fortune must storm and smash our inner citadel, Providence expel *la luxure* and *l'orgueil* through the breach, our inmost self weep alone and ponder in the ashes. Only then can or may holiness enter.

"You resist the proud," as another late-repentant sinner famously said, "but to the humble you give grace." "Superbis resistis, humilibus autem das gratiam."¹⁸

Yet most, alas, fall well short not only of Galaad but even of Lancelot. It is quite instructive to compare the latter with another of the tale's great knights, Gauvain, whose career and vices are not unlike Lancelot's but who is too spiritually blind or indolent to foresee or to profit fully from his failures.

No doubt many readers have seen themselves in the erring but striving Lancelot. Fewer far will have been such paragons, or so complacent, as to see themselves in the stainless Galaad. And it is a safe conjecture that fewer still will have seen themselves in Gauvain: for those who are like Gauvain, a man who does not see himself, do not see themselves.

If, as we may imagine if we list, in his hermitage Lancelot ever reflected that "I have had my world in my time," it would not be with a Wife of Bath-like smugness that the Lancelot of old might be supposed to have felt. Rather, it would have been with the heart-breaking realization that the world is only the world after all, that it is not what we are born for, and that in the Grail he had lost the good that he did not know how to desire. "Late, late have I loved thee."

III. Game, Book and Candle

A very fundamental query whose answer is presupposed by any story of a quest lies in discerning what is really worth questing for—what game is worth the candle?

Framing this question in *Lancelot-Graal* is the issue of what we might call the height of

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1 (cf. Proverbs 3.34, 1 Peter 5.5, James 4.6).

true Christianity. If we are to be good, how good is good enough?¹⁹ Can we afford a “one world at a time” attitude (Thoreau) that will let us, like the Wife of Bath, have our world in our time with good hope of having the next one too? If so, then it suffices to embrace an easy-going Christianity—one, say, in line with the ever so accommodating Jesuitical casuistry that Pascal pilloried in the *Provincial Letters*. To this way of thinking, God is not unreasonably demanding, and the gate we are to enter is not so strait but that one replete with good cheer or covered with honors cannot squeeze through it. Waving tracts such as *Easy Piety* (“just living is incomparably harder than virtuous living”)²⁰ as though they were so many passports to heaven, the busy occupants of thrones, tables and bowers may waddle from the joys of this life directly to those of the next.

In effect, it is a gospel of all things in moderation, goodness included, a notion preached in one form or another by parties as dissimilar as Machiavelli and the head Lama in James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*.

But it is not the gospel of the pious authors of *Lancelot-Graal*. Though on the face of it the moral requirement facing Galaad, Percival, Lancelot and the others is not so very daunting—the crux is but to avoid mortal sin—in practice this is all but impossible for fallen mankind. Nor is it surprising that sex turns out to be the demon’s surest snare: not only is its draw an overmastering one, but the production of children and the cares of their rearing tie a person to this world in a way that few other things can.

And if a complacent reader should fondly imagine that truly heroic virtue is no more required of him than heroism in battle or in the lists, it would be well to look again, this time with eyes unblinking. For to win the highest prize, in fact the only one really worth the having, half-measures will never do. For preference you must lead a blameless, Christ-like life like Galaad—that is, though you are in the world it must be barely, under protest as it were, and most decidedly not of it. But if, like the rest of humanity, you naturally gravitate downwards into sin,²¹ then, *deo volente*, like the disillusioned Lancelot in his hermitage you can only tear yourself free of the world’s ties by the main force of heroic renunciation. Else, like Gauvain and so many another, you will remain the world’s man.

That knight’s deathbed wishes, voiced to Arthur, show how completely he is even then rooted in the ethos of the terrestrial chivalry. He bids the king to salute Guinevere on his behalf, to assure Lancelot (who gave him his death wound) of his high regard, to avoid Mordret in the upcoming climactic battle, and to bury him at Camelot with his brothers. It is

¹⁹ For the typical answer of pre-Christian antiquity cf. Simonides’ famous verses: “Nor is Pittacus’ proverb in tune, however wise a man he was. Hard it is to be good, he said. [But] God alone can have this privilege. [. . .] Therefore never shall I seek the impossible, cast away my life’s lot on empty hope, a quixotic quest for a blameless man [. . .] Enough for me if a man is not bad nor too intractable” (fr. 542, tr. by Lombardo and Bell).

²⁰ Cited at the close of Pascal’s ninth *Provinciale* (“le simple vivre est incomparablement plus malaisé que le bien vivre”), p. 170 in the edition of L. Cognet and G. Ferreyrolles (Paris: Bordas [Classiques Garnier], 1992). The Jesuit Pierre Le Moyne’s *La Dévotion aisée* appeared in 1652.

²¹ On the Augustinian understanding that informs the cycle’s Cistercian spirit, such is the corruption of human nature that all which does not tend directly to God leads to sin soon or late, and so virtues with a merely human foundation are effectively veiled vices. The terrestrial chivalry is no exception.

not so very surprising that the tale's pious author has the dying Gauvain, a good man as the world goes, conclude his dying words with the conventional wish that he not be judged according to the wrongs he has done (*selonc mes mesfaits*).²²

* * *

In fine, in its essence the Holy Grail, like Dante's Beatrice, is a sort of veiled chink in the material world through which something of Divinity's splendor can pass. But this Gracious Vision is profitless unless it can penetrate our sight. To be a Lancelot, and so to be savable even if at the last, requires that grace pierce a chink in the heart's blindness so that it catch a glimmer, even if confused, of the Goodness of the True Good. Like a splinter that keeps working its way inward, it will make us ever more aware of itself, and so goad the heart sunk in spiritual sloth to rise up out of sin, estrangement and defeat. Even in the forlorn hermitage of a bereft heart, a true even if failed quester of the Grail might find solace in a hopeful sentiment that, like the *Lancelot-Gail* itself, is deeply reflective of Augustinian and Cistercian piety. Moderns know it best in some famous words of Pascal. Of those who have not found the True Good, he says, "I only approve of those who seek with groans." But his Jesus says: "Be consoled; you would not have sought me if you had not already found me."²³

IV. The Playing Fields of Winchester

As the novelist James Hunter perceptively reveals in *Percival and the Presence of God* (1978), the chivalric code has elements that lie well beyond the pale of theology and ethics. For though it contains moral precepts, a code's own roots and justification may be more aesthetic, useful or merely conventional than purposively moral.

In particular, they may be conventional in the way that the rules of a game are, what Jean Renoir's famous film refers to as *La règle du jeu*. For clear if unpretentious examples of a code in this sense one might consider E. J. Hornung's stories of the gentleman burglar Raffles or the short stories of "Sapper" (H. C. McNeile)—or, perhaps even better, some of Somerset Maugham's in which young Britons go East to fill remote posts in Britain's far-flung empire.

At bottom, their characters are often governed less by a system of law, religion or morality than by a code absorbed as if by osmosis at public schools and their playing fields. Bound by loyalty to the King-Emperor or to the Firm, these "old boys" are expected as a matter of course to be above the clearly lesser (i.e., un-English) *mores* of their exotic posts. (Or, if the action should take place in England, to set themselves as gentlemen apart from the home grown second-raters, rotters, cads and bounders.) It is expected that they be truthful, chivalrous towards women, solicitous of obligations towards peers (e.g. gambling debts), and axiomatically loyal to king and country. Even if this means playing a lone hand against powerful temptations and fearful odds, it is expected that they take their stand and stand fast. The code is perhaps best conveyed by such stereotypical catchphrases as "You've got to play the game," "It's just not done," "Can't let the side down," "Act like a white

²² *La Mort du Roi Arthur*, Vol. III pp. 1430-31 [293].

²³ *Pensées*, ed. P. Sellier (Paris: Bords, 1991), Fragments 24 ("je ne puis approuver que ceux qui cherche en gémissant") and 751 ("Console-toi, tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais trouvé"). The latter, as Sellier points out in a note, is a likely echo of St. Bernard's treatise *On the Love of God* (*De Deligendo Dei*). The reference there should be to col. 987 of *Patrologia Latina* vol. 182. "...est mirum, quod nemo te quaerere valet nisi prius inveniit."

man,” “Don’t go native,” etc. Reflective of a sporting ethos that enshrines fair play, love of adventure and team solidarity, it is very much the language and the attitude of Eton’s playing field rather than its chapel.

Essentially agonistic and timocratic, the code aims at victory for preference but honor for certain in life’s contests. Indeed, there is no higher praise than to be called “dead game.” If it were not a bit strained, one might say that fundamentally the terrestrial chivalry epitomized by Lancelot was at fault because its idea of “playing the game” required “going native” in the temporal world. And in the case of lesser knights, if we may press this rather facetious similitude to a Maughamesque conclusion, the fault would lie in “going native” to the point of dwelling in a confusion of dusky concubines, mixed-race children and empty bottles.

V. A Fine Romance

Why is it that when we say of someone that he is ‘disillusioned’ or ‘disenchanted,’ it is almost always in accents that are rueful and tinged with pity? Why do we not celebrate rather than commiserate what these terms imply, which is nothing less than escape from the toils of illusion and mental bewitchment into the land of sober truth and reality?

The most obvious and perhaps best answer lies hid in plain sight, just below the surface in all of us but so transparent as to be but poorly visible. Perhaps, then, it would not be labor lost to glance in its direction. The prism of the Grail and the Christian narrative that embed it affords us only one view of this answer, but one that is both illustrative and illuminating.

Let us begin by asking what is most *captivating* about the Grail narrative? It is not, I think, principally the fact that it recounts a quest, though this element is certainly engrossing. Nor is it the tale’s agonistic spirit of self and other conquests—the spirit of contest in which and by which the quest is waged. Both are but aspects of a larger feature, one that enables the narrative to get a purchase on us at the level of the self’s very roots. There the narrative can grip and hold so because it is a glorious, and therefore powerful, exemplar of Romance. It is no accident that the Grail underwent eclipse during the rationalist centuries succeeding the Middle Ages and re-emerged with the coming of Romanticism.²⁴

Though a romance may be written primarily for our pleasure or instruction, the fundamental character of its reception by us may be quite another story. Truth to tell, the best romances take on a life of their own—ours! For a life that is all prose and no poetry is pretty thin gruel, and long before the end this fare (which is nothing less than our own faring) is deathly monotonous besides. It is an unending round of breeding and feeding, of getting and spending, wherein we seem to do little but throw one sop after another to the barking demands of ever repeated desires. A hollow existence, dispiriting, ever fading to greater ghostliness but all the while asking “Is that all there is?” and hungering for something real to make it full. Or, to mix old and new commonplaces, an “empty suit” pathetically enjoining itself to “Have a full man within you.”²⁵

²⁴ Cf. Walter in *Album du Graal* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), pp. 10-11. This is a volume of Grail iconography from the Middle Ages to contemporary graphic novels.

²⁵ Webster, *The White Devil* Act One, Scene One. In his day “full man” was a commonplace notion; in ours, following T.S. Eliot, “hollow men” seem to be all the rage. “Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind cannot bear very much reality” (*Burnt Norton*, I).

Paradoxically it is Romance, on the most obvious level the antithesis of what is real and substantial, that fleshes out the round of living with meaning, depth and color—giving blood to ghosts, if you will.

Now obviously, to assert that we have a Romantic drive to flee banality with a passionate intensity is itself to utter the most banal of banalities. Yet it is worth uttering if only because it is a truth that needs to be constantly rediscovered. Indeed, such is the ensorcelling power of the Romances that color existence for us that when, disillusioned, we emerge from their bewitchment and are restored to our all too humdrum world, we experience it as a kind of revelation. Consider, as a mere token, the noted dictum that “A thing is what it is, and not another thing” [Butler]. Were we never returning to our un-romanticized selves from a meaning-fraught realm where things are emphatically *not* merely what they are, we would hardly have occasion ever to utter such tautologies let alone, in defiance of plain logic, to experience them as informative, or even as profundities.

We can of course survive on the thin gruel of banality. But we do not thrive on it, and thrive would we all would if we could. We hunger for existence as a matter of course, but almost as much for significance,²⁶ and that too as a matter of course. But to satisfy the latter pang our mundane round must form part of a transfiguring narrative—an important or ennobling one for preference, though a Gothic or even a horrific one will serve. Or, for that matter, a humble one: if our mundane reality is a mere toiling among muck heaps, we may at least envision ourselves as gardeners and live in the hope of their flowering. All of these magnify the sense of self that banality so diminishes.

If mountains we must scale and forests we must cross, let them be enchanted of oreads and dryads. And better, as Achilles saw, a life cut short but that is part of an immortal story than an existence, be it ever so long, whose annals are vacant.

Inasmuch then as we are to live, let it be as part of a story of High Purpose. As we wax and wane, flourish and fail, let us be about a task worthy of our forces—a game worth our candles. This is the true Grail quest, be it what it may. Let it be, as in the Arthurian tales, in a world well shorn of the banal and mediocre and much invested with the exceptional and superlative—a world where womanhood reaches the pinnacle of a Guinevere or a Helen, and where a demanding code spurs men who think they have the “right stuff” to take heart from the qualities of a Lancelot or an Achilles. Let it contain fiery love and grimmest death, blackest devils and purest angels, foulest traitors and holiest hermits. In short, let it be a world set on high ground, one whose rarefied air and dizzying downward views can intoxicate even bit players such as ourselves.²⁷

²⁶ As Viktor Frankl observed in the Nazi death camps (*Man's Search for Meaning*, 1946), in the terrible stress of horrific conditions an individual's sense of high purpose mightily lengthens the likelihood of his survival. In other words, satisfying the desire for significance can go a long way towards satisfying the desire for existence itself.

²⁷ But we must have a care, for there are Romances and Romances. Drive out the priest and, often as not, in to take his place comes rushing, not the logician, but the witch doctor. On this line of reasoning, we pooh-pooh grace and grails at our peril: if we will not quest for them, spell-binders are not wanting who can weave our desires, and indeed our identities, into narratives of Revived Roman Glories and Thousand Year Reichs.

Above all, let it be a world where our efforts can take on the color of the goods they seek—and what good can be greater than the salvation of the soul hence from the mire of the mundane and on into infinite bliss?

It was with characteristic insight that Chesterton called his chief work of Christian apologetics *The Romance of Orthodoxy*. For by proclaiming the individual's quest for salvation as a contest with dark powers, the world they rule and one's very self, Christianity—on the authority of nothing less than the cinema, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*—shows itself to the very essence of transfiguring Romance.

Malory's Arthur, as both once and future king (*rex quondam rexque futurus*), has elements of the savior in him, but Romance promises—and delivers—salvation not as an element but by its very nature.

And this salvation would be from . . . ? Of course particular Romances may beckon to particular salvations, as for example Christianity from sin and Buddhism from suffering. But Romance Itself saves us from a fate that is perhaps even less endurable than these, one that is, strange to say, both starkly daunting and blankly insipid.

For Romance saves us from having to be nothing more than what we are in a world that is only what it is. It saves us, not from a fate worse than death, but, far more importantly, from a fate worse than life.

THERE IS NO SEX IN THE CHURCH

Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov¹

Arguably one of the most difficult topics to approach within the framework of modern Russian Orthodoxy² is that of marital sex. Attitudes appear to be much more pronounced with respect to premarital sex: just don't do it. There are efforts by parish priests, Sunday school teachers, various youth group leaders, and the like to raise the issue of premarital sex with young adults and thus offer a forum for discussion. Understandably these discussions have severe limitations due to the fact that the position of the Church toward premarital sex is overwhelmingly negative; most adults possess healthy inhibitions when speaking with teenagers about matters of sexuality in any detail. There are exceptions, but for the most part, adults hesitate to discuss some of the taboo topics with teenagers because the latter are so impressionable and can be easily guided by things they see or hear. A confessing priest would be worried about suggesting or describing sins of which young people might be unaware. As Archpriest Afanasii Belyaev wrote after hearing the confessions of Tsar Nicholas II's children, "... I was decidedly unsure whether I as a confessor should remind them of sins which may be unknown to them..."³

A priest, however, is usually not a young person's primary source of information about sin. Matters of morality and propriety are most often dealt with on a family level and among peers. And it may be that patterns of sexual behavior are discovered and formed primarily in peer groups. Perhaps an interesting illustration of the thought process of a typical modern young Orthodox person dealing with issues of premarital sex can be found in an essay by Laryssa Grinenko titled "Trials of Dating in College"⁴:

... In college, guys are not just content with a completely platonic relationship. If you are in a relationship, sex is expected. Not just vaginal sex, but other forms of stimulation are expected. This was something I was definitely NOT okay with. ... In the first couple weeks of school, I met a guy that I really enjoyed spending time with. Almost every night we hung out, did something around campus, or just sat and talked. From my perspective, I thought I was meeting a genuinely nice guy with whom maybe I could pursue a relationship with (*sic*). ... Then he laid (*sic*) down on the bed next to me and after a few moments proceeded to make some advances, ones that I, as an Orthodox Christian, did not want, nor did I see, coming...

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² Due to the vast variety of ethnic Orthodox traditions, I shall limit the scope of this paper to specifically the Russian tradition.

³ Qtd. in *Сборник документов и материалов юбилейного Архиерейского Собора Русской православной церкви, Москва, 13-16 августа 2000 г.* Изд-во Братства во имя св. князя Александра Невского, 2001, p. 100. Translation from Russian here *et passim* is mine—S.S.

⁴ Grinenko wrote the essay in 2002 for the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America website (<http://www.antiochian.org/1203>), but as her name suggests, these "trials" affect not only ethnic Antiochians.

Quite aside from the obvious problems that Grinenko has in relating to the opposite sex,⁵ which are at the forefront of her writings,⁶ three things in the selection above deserve our attention: 1) the young woman identifies herself as an Orthodox Christian; 2) she wants only a completely platonic relationship with a man before marriage; 3) she is “definitely NOT okay with” forms of stimulation other than vaginal sex.⁷ While Grinenko does not specifically state that only vaginal sex—by which term she undoubtedly means vaginal penetration or intercourse—is approved by the Orthodox Church, the context of this comment leads me to believe that in Grinenko’s view, “other forms of stimulation” are contrary to her status as an Orthodox Christian, or, perhaps more properly, to her view of what is appropriate for a Christian.⁸

Apparently Grinenko’s article is meant to provide some food for thought to other young unmarried adults. As people mature and get married, venues for talking about sex and Orthodoxy become virtually non-existent. Some couples may discover that sex is not allowed during Lent; others may not realize this for many years until they accidentally stumble upon this information. Some may ask their confessor whether a particular technique is allowed, others will not ask for reasons ranging from being ashamed to not having any idea that God or the Church would care what they do in their bedroom. Thus, the sense of what is appropriate in the bedroom and what is not develops largely on the foundation of bits and pieces of information from various sources: one’s parents, societal norms, correct or erroneous comments by other Christians or clergy, whether understood clearly or misinterpreted, etc. The problem with this hodgepodge is that most modern Russian Orthodox Christians are disconnected from the tradition of the Church: our parents grew up in a godless society whose norms were formed by an atheist ideology. Even modern Russian Orthodox clergy, according to Archpriest Georgii Mitrofanov of the St. Peterburg Theological Academy, are most often “self-taught neophytes who do not know the traditions of the Church, and whose spiritual formation was at best based on samizdat⁹ books.”¹⁰ This remark accurately describes the state of many Western converts to Orthodoxy.

This break between the modern Russian Orthodox Christian and the tradition of the Church leaves vast areas of this tradition to be rediscovered or reinvented (this would include the traditional views on matters of marital sex). Unlike other areas of the Orthodox

⁵ An analysis of Grinenko’s writings is most certainly outside the scope of this paper. It suffices only to note that she appears to present a very shallow, one-sided, and crudely-stereotypical view of men.

⁶ See, for example, “What are the top three things you don’t understand about the opposite sex?” <<http://www.antiocchian.org/SOYO?q=book/export/html/1240>>.

⁷ This is not to say that Grinenko is “okay” with vaginal sex before marriage, but she appears to be making a separate point about “other forms of stimulation.”

⁸ Grinenko does not explain why she thought it appropriate to “pursue a relationship with” a young man who apparently was not an Orthodox Christian, or what the desired result of such a relationship may be. Just as is the case with premarital sex, marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a heterodox or a non-Christian is forbidden by canon law (see, for example, canon 72 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council).

⁹ *Samizdat* (English: *self-publishing*) is a practice of producing hand-written copies of writings that could not be officially published in the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ Interview with Elena Kudryavtseva. *Конкурс на свято место*. Огонёк, no. 15 (5125), 19 Apr. 2010.

Christian heritage, however, the sex lives of the faithful are much more difficult to rediscover or even reinvent. It seems easy enough to organize a seminar on liturgical, historical, or canonical topics, but few scholars appear willing to address the topic of “approved” sex techniques. As will be discussed below, the general attitude of the Church seems to follow close to the “ideal” once infamously vocalized by a respectable Soviet woman: “There is no sex in the USSR.”¹¹ Most priests are not likely to mention sex in their sermons even before Great Lent, and they would think twice before asking people about the details of their sex lives during confession. Even here in the U.S., where societal attitudes toward sex have been much more relaxed for decades, asking a young man or a young woman questions that are too specific may get the curious confessor in trouble.

A survey of collections of letters to spiritual children by various elders also reveals an absence of any meaningful discussion of marital sex. This is, perhaps, not surprising, since the elders are monks, and discussing sex with a monk is just as inconceivable as discussing monastic virtues with a layman. In recognition of this inherent contradiction, canon law prohibits a monk from blessing marriages (and even from becoming a godfather to a child),¹² and, likewise, a “secular priest” is forbidden from tonsuring a monk: “How can he give to another what he himself does not have?”¹³ Yet it has always been the monastics whose lives and examples the lay faithful try to emulate, and whose teachings—from the sayings of the desert fathers to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, and from the collections of letters by elders to the tireless wandering from one monastery to the next in search of clairvoyant (or, at least, exotic-looking) old monks. These phenomena may be especially peculiar to post-Soviet neophytes, but they certainly find their roots in the collective Orthodox psyche which has held since the Apostle Paul wrote that virginity (thus, monasticism) is a higher calling than marriage, which results in “worldly troubles.”¹⁴ Such ideals, coupled with every healthy monk’s struggle against the “flames of passion,”¹⁵ and the married adults’ desire to protect their favorite elder and not add more fuel to the fire by graphic depictions of their sex lives, can certainly contribute to the atmosphere of “pious silence” on the subject of marital sex in the Church.

Even though this essay tries to address issues exclusively within the Russian Orthodox Church, the very problematic relationship between traditional Christianity and sex is perhaps even more strained in the West. As Bertrand Russell so famously pointed out,

The worst feature of the Christian religion ... is its attitude toward sex—an attitude so morbid and so unnatural that it can be understood only when taken in relation to the sickness of the civilized world at the time the Roman Empire was decaying. ... Every person who has taken the trouble to study the question in an unbiased spirit knows that the artificial ignorance on sex which the orthodox Christians attempt to enforce upon the young ... causes in those who pick up their knowledge by the way

¹¹ A comment made during a U.S.—Soviet Space Bridge produced by Unison Corporation and Gosteleradio and hosted by Vladimir Posner and Phil Donahue, *Women speak to women*, 28 June 1986.

¹² See Nomocanon 84; *Требник*. Киев, 1895, лист 447 на об.

¹³ See *Ibid.* 82 with a reference to the First Ecumenical Council.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 7:28; RSV here *et passim*. See also 7:1, 37, 38

¹⁵ *cf.* 1 Cor. 7:9

of “improper” talk, as most children do, an attitude that sex is in itself indecent and ridiculous.¹⁶

Likewise, our contemporary Russian Orthodox Priest Lev Shikhlyarov, also citing the corruption of Roman nobility, asserts that “the negative attitude toward sexual life became prevalent in the Western Church thought” and that “this tendency reached the East.”¹⁷ Commenting on the issue of “oral-genital and other kinds of sexual relations” in an apparent bid to correct the situation, Shikhlyarov argues that “those forms of [sexual] relations which help the spouses to better express their mutual help in the sphere of intimate love and do not offend mutual feelings are allowed.” In other words, Shikhlyarov attempts to place the principles of mutual love and respect, rather than those of canonical legislature, as the cornerstone of marital intimacy. As for the prohibitions contained in the ancient confessional rites which we will discuss in due course, Shikhlyarov calls them “superstitions” created by “certain Church writers of the past who clearly went beyond the limits of their competence.” Contextually, Shikhlyarov alludes to monks as the likely source of confessional rites and of the “superstitions” about sex contained in those rites.

O tempora, o mores!

Most faithful Christians who are familiar with only the modern confessional may not realize that confession in the Russian Church used to be, at least for a few hundred years, primarily about one’s sexual life. In a brief survey of Russian confessional practices related to the sex lives of the faithful, Dmitrii Zankov notes that one 15th-century standard rite of confession was almost wholly (95%) devoted to questions about sexual acts.¹⁸ Whether or not the exact percentage is correct, it is indeed close to the mark, and most (almost all) confessional questionnaires began thus: “Tell me, child, how you have first corrupted your virginity...”¹⁹ In fact, according to Almazov, beginning a confession with the statement of faith as is currently recommended,²⁰ prior to the 17th century could be found in only one document of “extremely generic character.”²¹ The initial inquiry about one’s virginity—or, rather, the details of how one’s virginity was corrupted—is in direct correlation to the confessional questionnaire of Saint John the Faster, the Patriarch of Constantinople from 582 to 595.²² It is unlikely that this initial inquiry was repeated by a confessor time after time, since once it is disclosed, the information would remain the same. Nonetheless, this initial question and ones that follow provide a framework for a very detailed discussion of every thinkable (and unthinkable) sexual act. Presuming that due prudence was exercised by priests

¹⁶ “Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?” (1930).

¹⁷ Шихляров, свящ. Лев. “Христианство и проблемы половых отношений” (1994). Unpublished paper, Moscow Theological Academy.

¹⁸ “Блуд бывает всякий...” *Родина* no. 12, 2004.

¹⁹ Алмазов, А. *Тайная исповедь в Православной Восточной Церкви: опыт внешней истории*. Одесса, 1894, 1:323.

²⁰ See “Чин исповедания”, *Требник*. Киев, 1895, лист 32 и на об.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² The Greek text of the questionnaire can be found in Алмазов 3:1; the Slavonic translation of the text is in the same volume, p. 91.

when dealing with very young people,²³ such detailed discussions were aimed at sexually active adults.

The particulars of private confession in the Greek Church from the time that the role of public confession began to diminish in the 4-5th centuries and until the time that Orthodoxy was officially brought to Rus in the 10th century is, perhaps, of little significance to the limited scope of this paper. But the first Greek-language written record of the rite of confession, along with the confessional questionnaire, can be found in a 10th-century manuscript and its contents are attributed to Saint John the Faster.²⁴ Almazov proposes that this rite was also the one used by the Slavs when they accepted Orthodoxy, although its earliest extant Slavonic translation dates back to the 13th century.²⁵ Beginning in the 14th century, however, the rite of confession in the Slavic Church changed and the questions became more detailed compared to the ones originally attributed to Saint John. Whatever the particulars, private confession in Rus and later in Russia provided both the time and place for married adults to learn which sexual practices were acceptable in the eyes of the Church and which were not. This was achieved through the use of lists of questions that priests asked penitents, inquiring whether a certain sin had been committed, thus identifying the specific acts as sins.

I shall not quote here all the confessional questions that deal with sexual behaviors, both because some of these behaviors are quite bizarre and also because many of them do not directly relate to the matters of marital sex. It suffices to note that for the purposes of this study, any sexual activity of any nature outside of marriage was viewed by confessional manuals as sinful. But not all sexual activity within marriage was viewed as acceptable. In fact, the lists of things which were not allowed grew steadily for a few hundred years. To illustrate, let us begin with a just few questions which follow the initial question about the loss of one's virginity from a 13th century abridged Serbian translation of Saint John's confessional²⁶:

- Have you fallen into masturbation,²⁷ how, when, and how much?
- Have you raped any woman or your own wife?
- Have you lain with a woman inside a holy temple?

²³ It necessary to remember, however, that Church canons allowed marriage at a much younger age than what is currently acceptable in Western societies. A 1895 Russian edition of the Nomocanon (Greek: *Νομοκανών*), with a reference to Saint John the Faster, considers girls over twelve years old to be of age (Номоканон 39; *Требник*. Киев, 1895, лист 444 на об.). Although, it must be noted that Russian civil law set the age of marriage for girls at sixteen and for boys—at eighteen (see Булаков, С.В. *Настольная книга для священно-церковно-служителей*. Москва, 1913, 2:1166-7).

²⁴ See АЛМАЗОВ, 1:67.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 1:203

²⁶ *Ibid.* 3:91-2

²⁷ In a later document, masturbation was defined as not only as an self-stimulation, but also as something that a husband can do to his wife and wife to her husband, and both kinds of behavior were viewed as sinful.

- A 15th-century Russian confessional²⁸ also asks whether one had sex “from behind”²⁹ (40 day-penance), “stepped on [someone’s] foot with lust”³⁰ (6 days), or “committed a sodomite fornication”³¹ (3 days).
- A 16th-century confessional³² adds the sins of having sex on Saturday night and on a holiday. Having anal sex with one’s wife and allowing the wife to be on top are some of the sins that are mentioned in the confessional. Also added is a sin of having sex before and after³³ Communion.
- Another 16th-century confessional³⁴ lists having sex on Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday as sins. The rest of the list is rather explicit if not grotesque: having lustful thoughts while lying down, exhibitionism, passionate kissing, putting one’s tongue in another one’s mouth or in a woman’s vagina, giving one’s penis to a woman to kiss, holding another woman by the vagina while lying with one’s wife, winking in lust, and holding hands in lust.
- Finally, a third confessional³⁵ from the same time period adds putting one’s finger in a woman’s vagina, drinking a woman’s milk,³⁶ and having sex with a menstruating woman.

It remains unclear whether our ancestors truly had real problems with some of the behavior described in the confessionals, or whether these problems were plaguing the authors who composed the documents. It also seems unlikely that all of these questions were asked all the time by every priest to their penitents. One of the reasons for having detailed lists contained in the confessionals could be to provide priests with penitential guidelines, but not necessarily to instruct them to simply read the entire list at every confession. Finally, it is hardly possible that any campaign—even one backed by the full authority of the Church—could be very successful at eradicating such behaviors as winking, holding hands, and playing footsies. One would hope that for the survival of the nation the faithful would continue to be ignorant of some of the prohibitions or resilient to them.

²⁸ Ibid. 3:144-5.

²⁹ This particular phrase could mean both—anal sex and vaginal sex “from behind.”

³⁰ Playing footsies comes to mind, but actually stepping on someone’s foot with lust?!—O tempora, o mores!

³¹ It is not clear from the document what precisely is meant by “sodomite fornication.” Most typically, this term would probably refer to any “unnatural” sexual act, such as oral or anal sex. One 15th-century confessional interprets sodomy to be anal sex by two men (АЛМАЗОВ 3:149). However, the Biblical account in Genesis 19:4-11, should be properly viewed in a religious, rather than sexopathological context. The confessional, however, clearly refers to matters of sex, not religion, and thus assigns a very light penance.

³² АЛМАЗОВ 3:145-7

³³ Ibid. 3:154

³⁴ Ibid. 3:151

³⁵ Ibid. 3:153

³⁶ This, of course, may or may not be sexual behavior—depending on exactly why our ancestors did it. Other reasons, for example, may include various folk or pagan beliefs about health or, perhaps, magical benefits of ingesting human milk. Compare this with St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s vision of himself ingesting milk from the breasts of the Virgin Mary—the symbolic significance of which cannot be divorced from St. Bernard’s theological beliefs on Mary as the Mediatrix.

Some behaviors which I have not mentioned, but which are found in the confessional questionnaires continue to be not only religiously and socially unacceptable, but indeed criminal. Such actions as rape or pedophilia, for example, have not only become cemented as sins in the confessional practice of the Church, but also as crimes in the legal codes of countries of Christian heritage. Another category of sins may have connotations that have been lost in the modern context but were still prominent in societies that had only recently become Christian. Bestiality, for example, may point to remnants of totemism and animism, whereby the act of an intimate union with an animal had pagan religious significance, rather than merely indications of deviance or sexual desperation.³⁷ It is easy to see why Christianity would have objections to such practices beyond those dictated purely by a modern sense of what is normative or socially acceptable.³⁸

Leaving these questions aside and focusing solely on marital sex, that is to say, only on sexual relations between a lawful husband and his lawful wife, we can say with certainty that during the Late Middle Ages in Russia, the Church approved of only one form of sexual behavior—vaginal intercourse in the “missionary” position.³⁹ All other forms of intimacy, including flirting and foreplay, were viewed as fornication⁴⁰ and carried penances which varied in their severity from century to century and from one confessional to another. Some prohibitions appear to have at least some explanation, while others do not. A. I. Filyushkin, for example, notes that in medieval Russian Orthodox ethics, the position “from behind” was indicative of falling into paganism because it copied animal behavior, and “woman on top” violated the world order in which the woman must occupy a subordinate position.⁴¹ Arguably, these assertions do not apply to most moderns—men or women. It seems that hardly any Christian couple, connects any sexual position to pagan beliefs or hopes to overthrow the established world order through intercourse. Furthermore, it hardly seems to violate any modern sensibilities if a husband and wife “lustfully” hold hands or even wink at each other.

³⁷ Compare this also to the midrashic texts in which Eve’s sin is that of having sex with the snake, rather than of eating a stolen apple. For a more detailed discussion see Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 82. Also in *Babylonian Talmud Yevamot* 103. It is interesting that according to this tradition, the fall (Original Sin) consisted of the defilement of the human race through Eve’s intercourse with the snake. The cleansing came to those who stood at Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Torah (see 103b), and only to them and their descendants—that is to say, only to the Jews.

³⁸ In general, as will be discussed further in this study, the Bible views intercourse as having religious significance of a spiritual union. Thus, biblical views on bestiality (Lev. 18:23; 20:15-16) must be examined through the additional lens of theology, rather than be attributed simply to the Jews’ cultural rejection of zoophilia.

³⁹ Alfred Kinsey in his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, described this position as the “English-American position.”

⁴⁰ Slavonic: “блуд”

⁴¹ Филюшкин, А.И. “Православие и этические нормы русского средневековья (по законодательным памятникам).” *Макс Вебер, веберовская традиция и современные подходы к изучению религиозных факторов в истории Европы*. Moscow State University, <http://www.hist.msu.ru/Labs/UkrBel/fil_ethics.doc>. See also Zankov with reference to Пушкарёва, Н.А. “Сексуальная этика в частной жизни древних руссов и москвитов (X-XVII вв.).” *Секс и эротика в русской традиционной культуре*. Составитель А.А. Топорков. М.: Ладомир, 1996, с. 44-91.

Already in the 17th-century, at least one confessional⁴² proposes that a penitent who is intelligent should confess his or her own sins without the use of lists read by the priest—a practice suggested for an “ignoramus.”⁴³ A 19th-century confessional, while also containing a list of questions, is far less graphic than its 16th-century predecessors. It asks about masturbation, homosexuality, extramarital sex, incest, and bestiality, but limits its inquiry about marital sex to a generic understanding: “Have you fallen with your wife not according to nature?”⁴⁴ A 20th-century edition⁴⁵ eliminates all sexual questions from the general confessional questionnaire,⁴⁶ and mentions fornication only in a brief instruction to the confessing priest, exhorting the priest to “test” the penitent “with all reasoning, paying attention to differences between persons, and testing them accordingly: clergy differently, laity differently, monastics differently, seculars differently, the young differently, the old differently”⁴⁷—a healthy advice indeed, but one which most probably illustrates and reaffirms an age-old practice, rather than some 20th-century revelation. The minimization of the role of confessional questionnaires, however, leads to the closing-off of a discourse on marital sex, which, having lost its place within private confession, is not likely to easily find a suitable venue in the public life of the Church.

Some have argued that it is “important for there to be a sort of veil around the marriage chamber. It is hard enough for a husband and wife to strive for salvation, intimacy, and everyday kindness...”⁴⁸ This is not only a valid point, but one that is perhaps most prevalent among Western Christians, and, by extension, Orthodox Christians living in the West. But herein lies the dilemma: the art of Orthodox living pays very careful attention to the forces that are at work in our lives—mental, emotional, and physical. We learn to examine and control our thoughts and emotions, and have detailed ecclesiastical instructions on, for example, what to eat, when, and how much. In many ways, marital sex is treated in Orthodox asceticism similarly to food. It is not allowed during Great Lent, and if one happens to succumb to desire, the penance is the same as for eating fish during Lent on a day other than the feast of Annunciation and Palm Sunday—the person is not allowed to partake of Holy Communion on Pascha, “because he has dishonored the entire Lent.”⁴⁹ Sexual desire is arguably one of the most powerful forces in the life of any healthy human—layman or monastic, yet we prefer to cover the elephant in the room with a veil.

If Shikhlyarov’s assertion is correct, then under the guise of faux piety, the Church unwittingly (or even purposefully) fosters the atmosphere of “artificial ignorance on sex ... [and] an attitude that sex is in itself indecent” (Russell). This attitude is by no means novel, but merely a reflection of the current swing of the pendulum of the general attitudes toward

⁴² *Требник* митрополита Петра Могилы. Киев, 1646, 1:347.

⁴³ Slavonic: “невежда”.

⁴⁴ “Чин исповедания”, *Требник*. Киев, 1895, folio 32 on rev. and 33.

⁴⁵ “Чин исповедания”, *Требник*. Москва, 1995, 77.

⁴⁶ A special questionnaire for women retains masturbation and sex with their husbands “not according to nature” as sins—Ibid. 95

⁴⁷ Ibid. 87

⁴⁸ Nadeszda Kizenko from the State University of New York at Albany, private correspondence with the author, 30 April 2010. Dr. Kizenko’s comments and suggestions provided invaluable insight and perspective in the writing of this paper.

⁴⁹ For the prohibition of sex during Lent see Nomocanon 40 (*Требник*. Киев, 1895, folio 444 on reverse); for the prohibition of fish see Typikon 32 (*Типикон*. Киев, 1997, folio 38 on rev.).

sexual and other bodily activities within the context of Christian spirituality. This “swinging” can be traced to the very origins of Christianity and to Platonic and Neo-Platonic influence on the formation of Christian thought, corresponding to similar currents within first-century Hellenistic Judaism. Echoes of misogamy, abhorrence of flesh, and fear of sexuality can be identified in the writings of both the Apostle Paul and Philo of Alexandria,⁵⁰ but also in the writings of such Church Fathers as Gregory of Nyssa, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, and others. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, for example, believed that “married intercourse had been the ‘last outward stopping place’ of Adam and Eve in their sad exile from Paradise,”⁵¹ and the early Chrysostom saw no other purpose for marriage than to control sexual desire and avoid adultery.^{52, 53}

But the opposite trend also exists both in Church Fathers and rabbinical Judaism which, to some extent, can be seen as a reaction against Hellenistic Judaism⁵⁴ and Hellenism in general. Blessed Augustine of Hippo called it an absurdity to say that copulation was a result of sin as implying that “man’s sin was necessary to complete the number of saints,”⁵⁵ and Saint Caesarius of Nazianzus taught that “copulation is ... free from all sin and blame.”⁵⁶ These two competing traditions manifest themselves in the two teachings on sexual pleasure: one arguing that sex is a by-product of sin, that pleasure associated with it is sinful, and that only as much sex and only of the kind absolutely necessary for procreation is begrudgingly tolerated; and the second teaching which states that sex and sexual pleasure are within the divinely established order of human nature, and are integrally connected to the profound sacrament of marriage, which, according to the Apostle Paul, is the sacrament of Christ and the Church.^{57, 58} Thus, the vision and teaching of the Church on marital sex can indeed be reexamined not through the eyes of modern relativism or pseudo-religious affectations, but through pastoral work within the established tradition of Orthodox theological thought.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *De opificio mundi*, LIII (151-2) *et passim*.

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa. *De virginiate*, 14.

⁵² John Chrysostom. *De virginiate*, 50:19 *et passim*.

⁵³ In this context, some of the prohibitions against “unnatural” sex may be seen as indicative of a general prohibition against any sexual act that does not have procreation as its goal. However, the confessional manuals do not explicitly connect “unnatural” sexual acts to contraception. Additionally, vaginal intercourse “from behind,” which is proclaimed by the confessionals to be “unnatural,” is most certainly a viable way to procreate.

⁵⁴ See, for example, *Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara* 5a.

⁵⁵ Augustine of Hippo. *De civitate Dei*, XIV, 23.

⁵⁶ Caesarius of Nazianzus. *Dialogue* III, 151 (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, XXXVIII).

⁵⁷ Eph. 5:32

⁵⁸ Both teachings have their theological and soteriological dimensions. For example, if sexual desire is a product of sin, then Christ was not subject to it, and, having not taken it upon Himself, He has not redeemed it. Therefore, we also must fight it just as we must fight every other sin. On the other hand, if sexual desire is a God-given part of human nature, then Christ, being fully-human, also experienced it. Furthermore, not only would He have experienced it, but did so necessarily—in order to restore it and cleanse it from the stain of sin, just as He restored and cleansed the human body, mind, will, etc. Consider, for example, the following statement: “... sex is given to man not by some dark power, not by an evil force in the world, but by the Creator Himself, and it was given for some purpose...” — Керн, Кирилан. *Православное пастырское служение*. Париж, 1957, 221.

After all, our artificial ignorance on sex is hardly an indication of our advanced sanctity or heightened spirituality, nor does it point to the absence of sex-related sins in our lives. Orthodox Christians do not seem to be in any significant way different in this respect from other Christians in the United States. Crystal Renaud, who heads the Victory Over Porn Addiction group at Westside Family Church in Lenexa, Kansas, in a recent interview for *The New York Times* said that, “In the Christian culture, women are supposed to be the nonsexual ones. It’s an injustice that the church is not more open about physical sexuality. God created sex. But the enemy has twisted it.”⁵⁹ If we could agree with Renaud in at least the last two of her assertions, then, would it not be foolish to “piously” ignore the problem?

But is there really a problem? Is it not clear that pornography and infidelity are bad, but whatever happens between a lawful husband and wife in their bedroom is good? Obviously, some of the questions addressed to 16th-century penitents may be irrelevant in the 21st century, but are they all irrelevant? Should pastors insist that married couples abstain from sex on Saturdays, Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, as the old penitentiaries indicate? Perhaps also on Mondays in honor of the bodiless hosts commemorated on this day?—such a practice would be in harmony with the monastic practice of fasting on Mondays in imitation of the angels.⁶⁰ Should the Church concern itself with whether the faithful engage in intercourse “from behind” or in a “woman-on-top” manner? And what about other, perhaps, more controversial positions and techniques? Should pastors guide their parishioners according to their personal sense of propriety, or should the Church exert theological effort to provide guidance to the pastors? There cannot and should not be a singlehanded answer to these questions. But neither can there be a *status quo* in matters that involve life. Even inanimate nature abhors a vacuum,⁶¹ and this principle is no less true for human nature. If the Church lacks an affirmative position, one will be supplied by society, and the Church will be forced to either accept it or react to it. And if the Church wished to reestablish a clear position on matters of marital sex—whether in an effort to provide historical continuity for its own medieval tradition or as a reaction to the ethical challenges of modern ethical relativism—a Scriptural foundation would need to be found for this position.

Sex By the Bible

Most texts in the Bible that speak about sex are laconic. Most often the term that is used to indicate that intercourse took place is “to know”—“Adam knew Eve his wife”⁶² (*ἀδὰμ ὄξει ἔγνω εναν τήν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ*).^{63, 64} Another term used in many places is “to go in to”—“Jacob

⁵⁹ Leland, John. “Church Counsels Women Addicted to Pornography,” *The New York Times* 2 May 2010.

⁶⁰ This approach to controlling marital sex can quickly lead to either frustration or to very low birth rates. Tuesdays, for example, are devoted to St. John the Baptist who was a strict ascetic, which leaves only Thursdays. Thursdays, in turn, are dedicated to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker; so, given a particular devotion to the memory of this great saint, coupled with other feasts and fasts of the Church throughout the year, marital sex can become an extremely rare occasion, if not a total impossibility.

⁶¹ Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* (1677), part I, prop. 15: note; but this principle was first formulated by Aristotle.

⁶² The Revised Standard Version of the Bible is used here *et passim*.

⁶³ Here *et passim*: Rahlfs, A., ed. *Septuaginta*. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935.

went in to her” (εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν ἰακωβ).⁶⁵ Certainly, no details of any kind—who was “on top,” for example—can be gleaned from these brief mentions. However, the story of Jacob seems to imply that the ancients, or at least Jacob, preferred total darkness and complete silence, at least on the part of the woman: “But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her... And in the morning, behold, it was Leah; and Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?’”⁶⁶

There could be many reasons for the lack of detail and description. Clearly the Bible treats a variety of other subjects with equal brevity. We know, for example, that “God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it,”⁶⁷ but we are not told how this tilling was supposed to be accomplished or what tools needed to be used. We know that a calf was killed when the prodigal son returned to his father,⁶⁸ but the Scripture is silent about the kind of bread, drink and vegetables that were served. The Bible is not a popular novel and does not concern itself with “juicy” descriptions—it has a goal quite different from that of making its way onto a bestseller list. The exact methodology Adam used to know Eve may simply be unimportant within Sacred Scripture.

Another important reason for the silence could be the taboo status of the topic. We can hardly speak of an emotional aversion of the Jews toward any mention of sex-related acts or body parts. Consider, for example, the following verses:

- ...for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust upon her...⁶⁹
- Yet she increased her harlotry, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt and doted upon her paramours there, whose members were like those of asses, and whose issue was like that of horses. Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom and pressed your young breasts.⁷⁰
- Yea, upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down as a harlot... Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done -- a restive young camel interlacing her tracks, a wild ass used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her.⁷¹

Of course, these are prophetic texts, and as such they can be well outside of social norm, just as the prophets themselves may violate certain norms for the purpose of conveying their message. But here is another verse from a legislative text: “He whose testicles are crushed or

⁶⁴ Gen. 4:1

⁶⁵ Gen. 29:23

⁶⁶ Gen. 29:23, 25

⁶⁷ Gen. 2:15

⁶⁸ Luke 15:23

⁶⁹ Ezek. 23:8

⁷⁰ Ezek. 23:19-21

⁷¹ Jer. 2:20, 23-4

whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord⁷²; and another from a historical text: "...and they knew her, and abused her all night until the morning..."⁷³ The Bible does not appear particularly squeamish about mentioning certain sexually-explicit details. Yet, in speaking about marital sex, Scripture seems to use taboo deformations. This taboo is most certainly religious in nature, considering the context in which it is placed. The religious denotation is not that marital sex is shameful or inappropriate—an abomination before the Lord—but that it is sacred in the highest degree.

Note that the first few selections quoted above are not speaking about sex at all. They are the words that God said about Israel and her religious practices. The Bible uses very strong sexual language to convey the nature of God's relationship to His people; or, as is the case with the quoted examples, the nature of the people's relationship to God. While nowadays we typically refer to God as the Father, the Bible often refers to Him as the Bridegroom and Husband, and His people—Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New—as the bride. Thus, the union of God and His bride is described in the terms that we usually associate with marriage—love, wedding feasts, and bridal chambers; or, in the case of Israel: adultery, unfaithfulness, and defilement. In the collective consciousness of the Church, Christ is certainly the Traveler who returns from the faraway land⁷⁴ or the Sower who went out to sow,⁷⁵ and the Church is the rising dough,⁷⁶ but perhaps most prominently, Christ is the Groom and the Church is His Bride.⁷⁷

The very sacrament of our salvation can be and has been envisioned in terms of God's marriage to humanity. And while most often Orthodoxy places the wedding feast at the eschatological end within our temporal dimension, the words that the two shall become one flesh⁷⁸ appear to have come to pass already in the incarnation of Jesus Christ: "And the Word became flesh..."⁷⁹—human flesh, one flesh with us (*cf.*: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"⁸⁰; "Now you are the body of Christ"⁸¹). The Apostle Paul says that the mystery which we usually refer to a husband and wife—"the two shall become one flesh"⁸²—refers to Christ and the Church.⁸³ Commenting on Genesis 1:27, St. Clement of Rome wrote: "God made man, male and female." He then applied this verse directly to Christ and His Church: "the male is Christ, and the female is the Church."⁸⁴

⁷² Deut. 23:1

⁷³ Judg. 19:25

⁷⁴ Matt. 25:14-30

⁷⁵ Matt. 13:3-9

⁷⁶ Matt. 13:33

⁷⁷ Matt. 9:15; 25:1; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 18:23, *et passim*

⁷⁸ Gen. 2:24; *cf.* Eph. 5:31

⁷⁹ John 1:14

⁸⁰ Gal. 2:20

⁸¹ 1 Cor. 12:27

⁸² Eph. 5:31

⁸³ Eph. 5:32

⁸⁴ *The Second Epistle of Clement* 14. Authenticity of Saint Clement's authorship is in this case of little consequence.

With a mystery so profound,⁸⁵ taboo deformation in the biblical language about sex may be seen as a parallel to the mystery of the name of God—the actual word is hidden, but the qualities are revealed through euphemisms. The sacred tetragrammaton is not pronounceable, or, more correctly, its pronunciation is veiled from the profane, and it is instead replaced by “my Lords” (*adonai*).⁸⁶ Similarly, the mystery of Christ and the Church is veiled by the euphemism “to know.” And just as “*adonai*” hides the essence while revealing a relational action,⁸⁷ “to know” does the same. In religious context, to know is not to dissect or to study, but to form a union. In other words, to know is not to learn, but to become. Saint John Klimakos once wrote that the perfection of purity is the beginning of theology.⁸⁸ If by purity we are to understand an essential quality of God or an attribute of His likeness, and by theology—the knowledge of God, then it is by *becoming* the likeness of God that we enter into the knowledge of God or a union with God—as opposed to the knowledge *about* God or an objectification of Him.

The notion that an act now commonly viewed as not too much more than a human physiological necessity could be viewed as a sacrament in the context of the biblical narrative is not unique to sexual intercourse. Eating, for example, can also be seen as a sacred act, at least when Scripture speaks of it. There are the obvious examples, such as Abraham’s offering of bread and a sacrificial calf⁸⁹ to *Adonai* Who “appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre,”⁹⁰ and the father’s sacrifice of a calf at the return of his son.⁹¹ According to Leviticus 9:2, a calf is sacrificed for a sin offering. The sin of the prodigal son had to be “washed away” by the blood of the sacrificial calf; and even though the story with Abraham and Sarah is less clear, in the Old-Testament worldview, their lack of children could be seen as a punishment for sin—thus, it would not be far-fetched that Abraham and Sarah thought it appropriate to offer a calf as a sacrifice.⁹²

If we closely examine the brief account in Genesis of the first humans’ stay in the Garden of Eden and their expulsion from it, we can notice three divine ordinations: “be fruitful and multiply” (1:28), “I have given you... food” (29), “the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (2:15). The same three acts—procreation (marriage), eating, and labor⁹³—were corrupted by the original sin and became curses: “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth

⁸⁵ Eph. 5:31

⁸⁶ Contrary to the common English translation of “*adonai*” (Hebrew: אֲדֹנָי) as “Lord,” the word is plural in form (“Lords”); the singular version is “*adoni*.” Additionally, it is in the vocative case, which is lacking in the English language.

⁸⁷ Consider in this context the Palomite theology of God Whose essence is hidden, but Whose uncreated energies are revealed.

⁸⁸ “Τελος δε αγνειας υποθεσις θεολογιας” (*Scala Paradisi* 30:20)

⁸⁹ According to Gen. 18:8, Abraham offered to the three divine visitors milk along with the calf, and “they ate.” But, of course, this would not be Kosher.

⁹⁰ Gen. 18:6, 7

⁹¹ Luke 15:23

⁹² Certainly, we must keep in mind that at the time that Abraham and Sarah hosted their guests, Leviticus had not yet been written. However, both written accounts do come from the same religious, cultural, and traditional source, although not necessarily from the same pen.

⁹³ The work that meant here is probably not the plowing of fields or pounding of nails, although both are also important in this context, but rather the internal work of achieving the likeness of God.

children” (3:16), “cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (17-19). In the context of the story of the original sin, we may suspect that the Scripture would not be preoccupied with common human physiological necessities or matters that lack religious significance. The very fact that procreation (marriage), eating, and labor are mentioned, points to their sacramental value. Indeed, one of the most profound mysteries of Christianity is that of Christ and the Church—“the two shall become one flesh,” we refer to its highest form of worship as *λειτουργία*, or “*work* of the people,”^{94, 95} and the highest sacrament is a *meal* at which the Body and Blood of God are consumed.

Of course, we have been speaking about procreation or the conception of children, and some have tried to divorce it from the act of sexual intercourse. Saint Methodius of Olympus, for example, commenting on the way that the devil had beguiled the first humans, wrote: “the devil... led [the man] captive, persuading him to conceal the nakedness of his body by fig-leaves; that is, by their friction he excited him to sexual pleasure.”⁹⁶ Should this be taken to mean that in the absence of this trickery of the devil, the man (and woman) would never have known sexual pleasure and instead conceived children by some remote means?⁹⁷ This seems to be implied in the works of many Christian thinkers.⁹⁸ But is this a viable concept, or are Methodius and others trying to put asunder that which God has joined together? Is there any Scriptural support or logic for a proposition that some unknown-to-us way of remote procreation was established for us by God before the fall of the first humans, and that what we have now in no way relates to that which was preordained? It seems that at least three principal objections could be raised to such an argument.

First, if a completely different way of procreation had been established, and that which we now have in no way resembles the original divine creation, from whence, then, would this new and unique way have come? Methodius himself in the above-cited discourse (n. 95), quite correctly argues that the devil is only an imitator, not a creator. He is only able to corrupt that which was created by God. And if God did not create sexual intercourse with its pleasures, neither did the devil; how, then, did it come to be? Would it not be much more appropriate to say that the whole of creation—with mountains and valleys, bees and flowers, men and women, and their genitals—is the wonderful work of the Creator? We must acknowledge that sin corrupts that which God has created, but can it be that the corrupted

⁹⁴ From *λαός*—“people” and *-ουργός* < *ἔργον*—“work”; could be translated as either “work of the people” or “work for the people,” and in the most profane sense, “public works.”

⁹⁵ This is but one example of the sacramental status of labor. A more interesting case for study, in my opinion, is the third chapter of 2 Thess. The Apostle Paul entreats the faithful to work; and “if anyone will not work, let him not eat” (10). Considering that much of eating in the early Christian community was the form of agape meals (see, for example, *The Letters of Pliny the Younger*, book 10, letter 97), there can be envisioned a clear liturgical connection between work and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

⁹⁶ Methodius of Olympus. *Concerning Chastity*, discourse 10, ch. 5.

⁹⁷ For a very meaningful discussion on the relationship between procreation and sexual love see Solovyov, Vladimir Sergeyevich, “Beauty, Sexuality, and Love,” *Ultimate Questions*, ed. By Alexander Schmemmann, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, pp. 73-134.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Justin Martyr, *Fragments*, ch. 3; Origen, *Against Celsus*, preface, ch. 37; and others.

world bears no resemblance to the original whatsoever? What would be the basis and benefit of thinking that God did not create our arms, legs, heads, or any other body part? Would it not be a completely unnecessary leap of faith which defies the framework of Christian theology to propose that Adam and Eve's genitals and the nerve endings which produce very specific sensations somehow spontaneously developed through the act of donning fig-leaves? It seems more profitable to suppose that both the genitals and the nerve endings in them were created by the same Creator Who fashioned our hands and the nerve endings in them: "Now the flesh, too, had its existence from the Word of God, because of the principle, that here should be nothing without that Word."⁹⁹ To abhor our flesh and to propose that "it is unclean from its first formation... [and] is even more unclean afterwards from the mire of its own seminal transmission... [and that] it is worthless, weak, covered with guilt, laden with misery, full of trouble"¹⁰⁰—is the doctrine of the Gnostics to which the Fathers of the Church objected as a false teaching.

Second, what is really so morbid about the feeling of pleasure usually associated with procreation? Would it not be sickening to envision a human who feels no pleasure, or worse—feels displeasure? Would this not be commonly viewed as a symptom of some emotional trauma or psychological disorder? Do we jerk away when a cat's soft fur is pleasant to the touch? Do we plug our ears when a lark's song or a child's laughter pleases our ear? Do we gouge out our eyes when a sunset or a beautiful flower is a pleasure to look at? Most healthy Christians faced with such pleasures are more likely to praise and thank God for giving these gifts to us, than to shut themselves away in a cold, dark, silent, and lonely place in order that they might not experience pleasure. In the instructions for the *sacramentum sacramentorum*, the Eucharist, it is stated that the bread must be "pleasant ... for eating,"¹⁰¹ and likewise the "wine must have its proper taste and aroma, must be pleasant for drinking."¹⁰² We do not choose the worst-tasting bread and wine for the sake of avoiding pleasure. Why, then, should Christians be offended by sexual pleasure? Is it not plausible that the One Who gave song to the larks; and pours out the warm spring rain in which children play and laugh; and makes the sunset glow red, and orange, and a cool breeze come from the sea on a on a summer night—also gave to a husband and wife the gift of finding pleasure in each other?

Finally, if genitals were a purely superficial part of our bodies, or worse, a sinful one—one that somehow had sprung into being due to the fall and was not God's original creation—should we use it as a chief factor in determining who can be a priest in the Church and who cannot? Suppose a man and a woman of equally-godly lives, superior intellects and stature among their peers, both learned in matters of faith, were considered for priesthood. One would be elevated to the office, while the other would not—based solely on the nature of their genitals. Suppose now, that the man is of lesser learning, his life somewhat less admirable, and his faith somewhat weaker than the woman's—will it not again be the man who is elevated to the holy priesthood, and again solely on the nature of his genitals, for he has no other notable advantage over the woman? Of course, men and women are different

⁹⁹ Tertullian. *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, ch. 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

¹⁰¹ "Instructional Information." *Service Book: The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*. Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1999, p. 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 39

not only in the shape of their genitals; most correctly, the difference is hypostatic. But in practice, no hypostatic test or inquiry is necessary for ordination. Similarly, a man's "manhood," level of testosterone, or any psychological or other quality is never questioned. No special "manly" personality is required, and a feminine man will still be ordained over a masculine woman. If the genitals matter so much, would it not be wise to consider them and the way they function?

In "theologese," one and the same human nature is shared by all human hypostases, male or female, or as Tertullian wrote: "the souls of everyone are all of one nature."¹⁰³ Yet this nature becomes incarnate differently, following the hypostatic distinction between men and women. And although some have argued that flesh is previous to soul,^{104, 105} it is the divine purpose pronounced by the Word of God that is both previous to and a guiding principle for the formation of both flesh and soul. Thus, our flesh with its gender distinctions which are most notable in things other than a deep voice or facial hair (or the lack of both), is not only a direct result of God's creative purpose, preordained and predestined by His Word, but also is the most suitable companion for the soul; both must be restored in order for the whole person to become a partaker in the resurrection into the eternal life with God. Mechanically, when we speak of the general resurrection into the eternal life with God, we are not speaking of the resurrection of souls, for they neither die nor are in need of resurrection. Rather, we speak of the restoration and resurrection of bodies, and the return of souls to their bodies, so that the whole person may enter into life. In the words of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, "All await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, the soul and body."¹⁰⁶

The exact nature of these resurrected bodies is unknown to us. This, however, does not mean that our bodies will be androgynous or asexual. Such a proposal would also mean that Christ's resurrected Body is androgynous or asexual. Yet there is nothing in the Scripture or the Fathers to support this view. While some of Christ's disciples failed to recognize Him after the resurrection,¹⁰⁷ this was not due to Christ's asexuality. On the contrary, all of the post-resurrection accounts suggest that it was Christ's divinity which was hidden from the disciples, not His humanity. According to His humanity, Christ appeared to His disciples as an average man. On the other hand, Christ's command to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side,"¹⁰⁸ and His exhibition meal before the disciples,¹⁰⁹ seem to be instrumental in confronting their disbelief in His humanity. Thus, first, the disciples needed to be convinced that a human body could be joined to divinity, then—that divinity could have a human body. But in both cases, the body was in all respects human: it walked, its hands and side could be touched, it ate (presumably,

¹⁰³ Tertullian. *A Treatise On the Soul*, ch. 41.

¹⁰⁴ —. *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, ch. 5.

¹⁰⁵ The teaching our bodies are previous to our souls, and that God creates souls to "fill" the bodies was an argument against the doctrine of reincarnation, in which the soul is previous to the body, or the many bodies, which it changes like gloves.

¹⁰⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against Heresies* 4:20.

¹⁰⁷ John 20:15; Luke 24:16

¹⁰⁸ Luke 20:27

¹⁰⁹ Luke 24:41-3

with teeth, tongue, esophagus, etc.)... Of course, it also went through walls,¹¹⁰ but this “feature” adds to Christ’s humanity, not detracts from it. Perhaps, the strongest language concerning Christ’s full humanity can be found in the *Divine Hymns* of Saint Symeon the New Theologian:

In this manner, all members of each one of us individually become the members of Christ, and all unsightly members He will make pleasing to sight, adorning them with beauty and glory of His Divinity. ... you are not afraid or ashamed to acknowledge that [both] my finger is Christ, and [so is] my sexual member? But God was not ashamed to become like you...¹¹¹

Christ said that in the resurrection, people neither marry nor are given in marriage,¹¹² but these words can hardly be seen as a condemnation of marriage or gender or a denigration of them as temporal. Perhaps the best indication that marriage is not just a condition of the fallen man but belongs to the kingdom not of this world is the fact that the Church considers marriage to be a sacrament just like baptism, ordination, and communion. In another biblical passage, we read about the miracle in Cana in Galilee where Christ turned water into wine.¹¹³ Some have noted that this miracle indicates God’s blessing on our normal human pleasures—after all Christ turned water into wine and not the other way around, and He did this for people who were already “under the influence.”¹¹⁴ Others see this as God’s blessing of marriage: “The Son of God went to the wedding so that marriage, which had been instituted by His own authority, might be sanctified by His blessed presence.”¹¹⁵ Both are most certainly correct, but there is another theme to which we continue to return in our discussion of marriage—the mystical vision of human marriage as an icon of its prototype, the eschatological marriage of Christ and His Church.

Saint Theodore Stratelates draws a direct parallel between the mystical wedding of the Word of God and the feast in Cana in Galilee:

[Christ] convened the wedding [of the Word of God and His bride] on the third day [after His baptism], that is, the last times of the age. For He struck the transgression that was in Adam and again bandaged us on the third day, that is, in the last times when, becoming human for us He took on the whole fleshly nature that He resurrected in Himself from the dead. Therefore, because of this [John] mentions the third day as the day when He consecrated the wedding.¹¹⁶

This mystical connection between a neighborhood wedding and the age to come appears to be at the forefront of the Gospel account. If we once again remind ourselves of the fact that the Gospels (especially the Gospel of John), are not biographies of a famous person or a collection of short stories, but a sacred, mystical, and liturgical text of the Church, we may treat the account of Christ’s first miracle as an icon or window, through which spiritual light

¹¹⁰ John 20:26

¹¹¹ Преп СИМЕОН НОВЫЙ БОГОСЛОВ. *Божественные гимны*. Сергиев Посад, 1917, pp. 261-2.

¹¹² Mark 12:25; Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35

¹¹³ John 2:1-11

¹¹⁴ This thought was once voiced by Protodeacon Andrei Kuraev.

¹¹⁵ Maximus of Turin, *Sermon 23*.

¹¹⁶ Theodore Stratelates. *Fragment on John 12*.

can enter our human world. Considering that the images of a wedding feast and wine are among the most heavily-loaded with New-Testament sacramental symbolism, it is most probable that Christ's presence at the wedding and His miracle convey much more than a blessing of a couple or even all couples. Saint Romanus Melodus, for example, places the wedding at Cana directly into the liturgical context:

When Christ, as a sign of His power, clearly changed the water into wine all the crowd rejoiced, for they considered the taste marvelous. Now we all partake at the banquet in the church for Christ's blood is changed into wine and we drink it with holy joy, praising the great Bridegroom, for He is the true Bridegroom, the Son of Mary, the Word before all time who took the form of a servant, He who has in wisdom created all things.¹¹⁷

Similarly, Saint Theodore of Mopsuestia appears to imply that the wine was not merely a festive drink, but also a spiritual one: "According to the will of the one who gave the command, the water was changed into wine, slaking the thirst of those who drank but also providing wine more abundantly for the couple's future."¹¹⁸ Perhaps, it would be a stretch to assume that Saint Theodore is speaking about the future in the eternal sense of the word as it is used in Christian eschatology, but there is certainly nothing which would preclude us from arguing that love and marriage possess those eternal values.

This is not to suggest that sexual intercourse is an eternal part of marriage and it also possesses eternal properties. It is intimately tied to the task of procreation, and if God willed for the procreation of the human race to be completed in this age, then the conceptual need for sex in the age to come would cease to exist much as it does for humans of advanced biological age. But such thinking should not result in a conclusion that we must already fly about in white robes, go through walls, and reject all food unless it is leaves from the tree of life¹¹⁹—"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."¹²⁰

The Apostle Paul writes that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹²¹ This, however, does not mean that the Apostle Paul was not a free male Jew, but some transnational, transgender being of uncertain social status. I shall not bore the reader with testimony to the contrary found in the same Apostle's epistles. In the same vein, the Church insists that there are males and females. The Church does not bless marriages of two individuals who are neither sex, but only those marriages where one spouse is decidedly male and the other is decidedly female. The tradition of the Church makes clear distinctions between males and females in matters that pertain to our Christian lives in this world, while treating both as equal before God. Indeed, the fact that we are one in Christ does not in itself imply that we are all the same, that being in Christ means losing our unique personality, experience, character, way of being human, including our gender. Such a view would be more descriptive

¹¹⁷ Romanus Melodus. *Kontakion on the Marriage at Cana* 7:20.

¹¹⁸ Theodore of Mopsuestia. *Commentary on John* 1.2.6-7.

¹¹⁹ See Rev. 22:2

¹²⁰ Qoh. 3:1

¹²¹ Gal. 3:28

of a life in a Borg Collective¹²² than of that in Christ. But most importantly, life in Christ does not begin at some future time, it begins here and now. Life in Christ includes not only the eternal bliss of Paradise, but equally a child playing “pooh sticks,”¹²³ a first love, a wedding, children sitting on their father’s lap and listening to fairytales, the blessing of the fruit of our labors on the Feast of Transfiguration, and memorial services for those who lived and labored before us—all is to be sanctified. To be sure, in the Second Coming we will not be concerned with either “pooh sticks,” or wedding cakes, or fairytales. But in the unwaning day of God’s kingdom, even Holy Communion is said to be “more perfect” than it is now.¹²⁴ This, however, is certainly no reason to reject the Gifts that Christ gave to us here and now, and which are not only beneficial to us in our temporal state, but lead us to the eternal life with God.

Why Does God Care?

If sexual relations between husband and wife were a “by-product” of the original sin or were exclusive to our fallen nature and had no connection to reality beyond our temporal world, then it would be understandable why the Church should regulate such relations, limit them, or forbid them altogether, even at the expense of limiting or eliminating population growth. After all, can anyone really argue that any individual man or woman is obliged to produce offspring, Genesis 1:28 notwithstanding? On the other hand, if sexual relations between husband and wife are natural or even have a certain spiritual dimension, why then should God care how precisely we do it?

Of course, it would be presumptuous to try to answer the question of why God cares, but we can try to address the question of why the Church cares, that is to say, why the faithful should care. And in this, the answer could be quite simple: the Church regulates sacraments. In fact, regulation of sacraments can be seen as one of the functions of the Church. Of the many views on what a sacrament is, St. Augustine’s of Hippo seems to best capture the most important aspect of it: “a visible sign of an invisible reality.” This definition establishes a clear connection between our actions within the temporal, physical world and their implications in the spiritual, “invisible” reality; conversely, this connection denotes the relationship of the invisible reality to the temporal physical reality through actions that are visible and tangible.

Earlier in this paper we discussed three primary commandments that could be seen as the primary sacraments: marriage, eating, and labor. Labor can undoubtedly be understood as the work of tilling the garden of one’s soul, as fighting against the “thorns and thistles” of sins that it produces¹²⁵—the labor of repentance necessary for becoming the likeness of God, the highest fruit of which—the mystical union with God—is represented in the Liturgy:

¹²² The Borg are a fictional pseudo-race from the television series *Star Trek*. They lack individuality and instead make up a “hive mind” or a superorganism.

¹²³ See Milne, A.A. *The House At Pooh Corner*, Chapter VI “In Which Pooh Invents a New Game and Everyone Joins In”

¹²⁴ From the Resurrection Hymns after the communion of clergy in the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

¹²⁵ cf. Gen. 3:18

The purpose of this [God's withholding His likeness from man—see Gen. 1:27] was that man should acquire it [God's likeness] for himself by his own earnest efforts...¹²⁶

But it is proper that one part [God's image] is given to you, while the other [God's likeness] has been left incomplete: this is so that you might complete it yourself...¹²⁷

Eating is one of the most sacramental acts that humans perform. Even when taken outside of any religious context, eating sustains life, provides for growth, and gives us the most intimate connection to the physical world—we literally devour it. In the religious context, Christ Himself became “the food of the whole world”¹²⁸ and is consumed in the *sacramentum sacramentorum*—Communion.¹²⁹ Some find *theophagy* in many ancient religious systems that predate the birth of Christ,¹³⁰ yet Christian thinkers place *theophagy* at the very creation of the first man. Saint Jerome, for example, alluded to the Tree's of Life being Christ,¹³¹ and rightfully so—it gave eternal life to those who partook of it.

Finally, the union of man and wife—similarly to labor and eating—can be seen as having both the natural side and its mystical, sacramental, “invisible reality”:

Even in the beginning, when woman was made from a rib in the side of the sleeping man, that had no less a purpose than to symbolize prophetically the union of Christ and His Church.¹³²

If the union of Adam and Eve is a great mystery in Christ and in the Church, it is certain that as Eve was bone of the bones of her husband and flesh of his flesh, we also are members of Christ's body, bones of His bones and flesh of His flesh.¹³³

Thus, all three sacraments work together to achieve the same goal—the union of God and man—which can be identified as the true goal of any “official” sacrament, however many of them one chooses to count. Of course, the quotes above do not specifically refer to sex, but Saint Augustine postulates that it also was a natural and divinely ordained part of the union of man and wife in paradise:

...I do not see what could have prohibited them [Adam and Eve] from honorable nuptial union and “the bed undefiled” even in paradise. God could have granted them this if they had lived in a faithful and just manner...¹³⁴

All three of these primary sacraments—labor, eating, and marriage—are guarded by the Church precisely because they are sacraments and as such fall under the jurisdiction of the Church. They are the commandments of paradise, and the medicine given to us by our

¹²⁶ Origen. *On First Principles* 3.6.1.

¹²⁷ Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Origin of Man*.

¹²⁸ From the Prayer or Oblation at the service of prothesis (the *proskomedè*). *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*. Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1999, p. 23.

¹²⁹ It must be noted that the words *sacramentum sacramentorum* are referred to the Eucharist within which Communion takes place.

¹³⁰ See Frazer, Sir James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890)

¹³¹ Jerome. *Homilies* I.

¹³² Augustine of Hippo. *City of God* 22:17.

¹³³ Ambrose of Milan. *Letters to Laymen* 85.

¹³⁴ Augustine of Hippo. *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 9:3:5-6.

Creator after we became infected with sin. They are also the areas of our lives that can get corrupted—either by the devil or by our own volition. Our eating can become gluttony, as we turn into slaves of our flesh; our marriage can become fertile ground for lust, pride, and other passions; and our labor can turn into the pursuit of earthly rather than heavenly treasures.¹³⁵ Traditionally, the Church guards our labors through liturgical rites, our eating—through the Eucharist and in the fasts and blessed feasts, and our marriage in all its aspects—through the rite of Christian wedding and continually through spousal fasting and the rite of confession.¹³⁶ Another indicator of the sacramental nature of spousal relations is the Church’s insistence on their exclusivity. The Church, for example, does not regulate with whom or when we shake hands, but it tells us exactly with whom to enter into the labor of the Liturgy, precisely of what to partake in the Eucharist, and exclusively with whom to enter into sexual intercourse. Until relatively recently, the Church also appeared to regulate the specifics of the marital sexual relationship.

In modern times, however, the situation has changed and the Church remains mostly silent on the matter of marital sex (although all other spousal relationship issues are featured prominently both in confession and counseling). As one parish priest wrote to me, “I would characterize the contemporary situation in Confession among traditional Orthodox as ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’—we don’t ask, and they don’t tell.”¹³⁷ Perhaps it is too early to tell which approach is more productive, as the “don’t ask, don’t tell” principle appears to still be a work-in-progress. Marital sex is not the only area that is a work-in-progress in Russian Orthodoxy. Ancient strict fasting rules, for example, are being replaced by an individualist approach: “A fast must be kept, but according to one’s own strength [measure].”¹³⁸ It is most often emphasized that the ancient fasting rules are monastic in origin, and that a variety of indulgences from the rules are allowable to people who work, have children, suffer from an illness, etc.—which includes virtually every layman.

Strangely enough, no indulgence is usually offered in fasting from marital sex. As much is attested by the head of the Catechetical Department of the Dnepropetrovsk Diocese, Archpriest Alexander Nemchinov, who writes: “As for intimate relations [during Lent], I have not heard of any indulgences.”¹³⁹ Others, however, have heard of some indulgences. The oldest-serving pastor of the Western American Diocese, Archpriest Alexander Lebedev, implies that the rules may not be so strict not only for laymen, but even for clergy:

The scriptural admonition is for married couples *not* to deny each other sexual relations, except by mutual consent for the purpose of prayer and fasting. Abstinence from sexual relations (by mutual consent) is certainly appropriate the evening before receiving the Holy Sacraments, and during the day that one receives them. It is

¹³⁵ See Matt. 6:19-21

¹³⁶ Even though some are accustomed to referring to “wedding” (“crowning”) and “confession” as sacraments, methinks, more properly, they are rites, whereas marriage and repentance respectively are indeed sacraments.

¹³⁷ Fr. James Baglien of St. Martin the Merciful Russian Orthodox Church in Corvallis, OR, private correspondence with author, 24 May 2010.

¹³⁸ Гумеров, свящ. Афанасий. *Вопросы священнику*. <<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/answers/6360.htm>>.

¹³⁹ Немчинов, прот. Александр. “В пост главным должны стать наши отношения с Богом”. <<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/guest/4792.htm>>.

certainly *not* an absolute “requirement” of the Church to abstain on all fast days (and on the eves of fast days), or during the 11 days after the Nativity when marriages are not permitted. The Russian Church in the 13th century issued guidelines for married clergy on these issues, and they included as days of mandatory abstinence only the first and last week of Great Lent, the two weeks of Dormition Lent, and Wednesdays and Fridays during Nativity Lent and the Lent of the Holy Apostles. The married state is blessed and the marriage bed is undefiled. The Holy Church in protecting the sanctity of marriage and the well-being of the spouses, as well as encouraging procreation and the raising of “fair children” has no interest in creating artificial impediments to preclude spouses from “rejoicing in one another.”¹⁴⁰

This does not seem to be the official majority opinion within the Russian Church, although if I were to guess, this may be very close to the common practice, at least among many laymen.

This short study does not pretend to draw any definitive conclusions on which tradition of spousal fasting is correct, and certainly not on which specific sexual positions or techniques are allowed or appropriate. My hope was to raise questions, not to settle them. The task of proposing answers to these questions, however, promises to be a unique one. Most often, saintly monastics act as the experts in any matter pertaining to Christian asceticism. The logic is simple: the monks and nuns know from first-hand experience what effect ascetic praxis has on our souls and what specific practices are beneficial and in what measure. The problem is that in the case of marital sex, the monastics are not qualified to offer their advice for reasons that are quite obvious—they do not (or should not) have any first-hand experience. Even in the case of those saintly elders who were once married, their decision to follow a path of celibacy puts them in a dubious position for guiding married couples in matters of sexuality. The resulting attitude seems to follow in the way of a common misunderstanding of the words, “man shall not live by bread alone.”¹⁴¹ In popular consciousness, these words often get interpreted through Christ’s refusal to turn stones into bread. But Christ did not say that man shall not live by bread; He said by bread, just not bread alone—the exchange between Christ and His tempter is infinitely more complex than a simple rejection of bread. Consider, for example, God’s saying, “it is not good that the man should be alone.”¹⁴² God is not saying that it is not good for the man to be; on the contrary: he should be, and he should not be alone.

One interesting example of the clash between the married state and monasticism may be observed in the evening prayer rule that the Russian Orthodox faithful are encouraged to observe.¹⁴³ All of the evening prayers are either directly attributed to monks of great ascetic lives or appear to be monastic in origin. As such, they are concerned with matters specific to monastic nocturnal struggles and do not take into account the way that married people deal

¹⁴⁰ Archpriest Alexander Lebedev, a post to the Western American Diocese clergy discussion group, 21 February 2001.

¹⁴¹ Matt. 4:4

¹⁴² Gen. 2:18

¹⁴³ For a detailed discussion on prayer rules, see Sveshnikov, Sergei, “Morning and Evening Prayer Rules in the Russian Orthodox Tradition,” <<http://frsergei.wordpress.com/2009/12/22/morning-and-evening-prayer-rules-in-the-russian-orthodox-tradition/>>.

with their temptations. Not a single prayer in the evening rule asks for a blessing of the spousal union, a sanctification of the couple's love for each other, or even for a healthy and God-pleasing conception of a child! If we did not take into account that these prayers were written by monks for monks, it may appear that the Church simply ignores the reality of the lives of the overwhelming majority of the faithful.

The monastic attitudes toward the married state are perhaps best summarized by Abbot Sergii (Rybko): "...I am a maximalist. A short while after my coming to Church, I understood that something was lacking for me in secular, married Christianity. And when monasticism was opened to me, I realized that it was something for which it was worth living, to which it was worth devoting, myself because it is the whole fullness of life. To live to the maximum, to take from life everything—this is monasticism."¹⁴⁴ As laudable as this position is for one who has devoted his life to the path of monasticism, it also implies that, due to their married state, an overwhelming majority of Christians, including Abbot Sergii's own parents and the parents of every saint and hierarch of the Christian Church, are cut off from the fullness of life in God, and that their lives are somehow not "worth living," not "worth devoting" oneself to. Clearly this view must be treated as some individual calling, since, if taken generally, it would contradict not only the basic beliefs of the Christian faith, but also the corpus of Orthodox liturgical theology, which "witnesses as nowhere else to the goodness, the glory, and the excellence of marriage."¹⁴⁵

Thus, the task of developing the Church's position on marital sex—if such a task were to be undertaken—would fall on married clergy and their wives, who are uniquely qualified to both have first-hand experience with the topic and to offer pastoral guidance to the faithful. Ironically, however, any such efforts may need to receive hierarchal approbations, and Orthodox hierarchy is comprised exclusively of monks. Of course, what happens in a private confession could be a uniquely privileged experience mostly outside of hierarchal control, but any consorted efforts to develop an official position would necessarily fall under the guidance of a bishop. How these efforts unfold or whether they even begin, depends on the intricate interplay between the monastic tradition of the Church and its married clergy and the lay faithful. Between the two competing views—that marital sex is begrudgingly allowed only on certain days, only in the missionary position, and only for the purpose of procreation (oh, and don't even think about playing footsies), and the "don't ask, don't tell" approach, in which anything goes as long as nobody knows—can there be found a middle ground consistent with both the sacramental significance of marriage and the Church's role in protecting sacraments? Can the Church offer any guidance to a young married couple without forcing them to look at their relationship from the point of view of a monastic struggle—a path they have not chosen for themselves? Or, to use the sacrament of Communion as an analogy, can the Church protect the sanctity of the use of sacramental wine without on the one hand implying that grape juice or even water would be much better, or on the other hand hesitating to address the issue even if whiskey is being used? It appears

¹⁴⁴ Рыбко, иг. Сергий. "Неформалы и монах, или Евангелие на рок-концерте", интервью с Валерией Посашко. *Православие и мир*. <<http://www.pravmir.ru/neformaly-i-monax-ili-evangelie-na-rok-koncerte/>>.

¹⁴⁵ Zion, William Basil. *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1992, p. 121.

that in its fullness, the Church possesses both the theological workup and the practical expertise necessary for answering these and similar questions.

A contemporary Russian theologian, when asked why parents should baptize their child and raise him in the Orthodox faith instead of waiting for the boy to grow up and make up his own mind, said that the parents could indeed wait, but who gave them a guarantee that the devil would also wait and not attack this child until he is baptized? Could a similar argument be made with respect to the Church's involvement in marital guidance? We can pretend that an official position is unnecessary because there is no sex in the Church and even have ascetic hagiography to prove it, but who can give us a guarantee that the devil will also play pretend with us?

THE PARABLE OF THE BUDDING FIG TREE (Mark 13:28-31)

J. Lyle Story¹

Introduction

Jesus' teaching about the end times contains a paradox: No one knows the time of the coming of the Son of Man, not even Jesus, yet his disciples are told to be ready, take heed and watch, and be attuned to the signs of the times. They are to "learn the lesson (μάθετε τὴν παραβολήν) from the fig-tree." Jesus intends that his disciples live with a view towards the future; indeed, the heart of the message about the future lies in the imperatives. The Bible provides no basis for eschatological charts of coming events. Such charts are dubious guides, demanding nothing from God's people. On the other hand, the biblical imperatives demand a great deal. The future is introduced for the purpose of warning, thoughtful preparation and hope.

Where there is belief in Jesus there is joy, fruitfulness, and eschatological fulfillment. The Parable of the Budding Fig-Tree is used as a promise of: 1) the nearness of the Parousia, and 2) eschatological fulfillment.

The people of God are not directly portrayed in this metaphor as in the pericope of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree (Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25). However, there is an indirect allusion, as the people of God are enjoined to hope and expect the Messianic Age with all of its fullness. Since the cursing pericope (Mk. 11:20-25) constitutes a negative verdict over the fig-tree (Temple and old people of God—11:12-19) and is followed by the positive counterpart (faith, prayer, forgiveness), so the budding fig-tree (13:28ff.) expresses a positive promise for the new people of God.

The Larger and Immediate Context

Among the difficulties of interpreting the Apocalyptic Discourse is the paradox of two different perspectives on the Parousia: 1) a sudden Parousia, the timing of which no one knows and 2) a Parousia that is preceded by signs:

13:32 "But of that day or that hour *no one knows*, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father

13:29 So also, when you see *these things* taking place, *recognize* that he is near, at the very gates.

It is important to recognize that the commands are given in the second person plural and refer to the disciples and Early Church. In other apocalypses, the third person is used. We should reckon with the possibility, even probability, that there is an intentional paradox concerning the Parousia.²

In terms of apocalyptic material, we need to take seriously the warnings wherein the disciples are enjoined to observe the signs and act accordingly. We must also reckon with the

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² See II Cor. 4:7-11; 6:8-10.

fact that the disciples (then and now) cannot know the exact moment of the Parousia, knowledge to which even the Son is not privy. At the same time, it is incumbent on disciples to be aware that signs of the times are vital pointers to the Blessed Hope of the Coming of the Lord Jesus. Cranfield says, “Once more the two elements of the paradox must be held together, so that each may control, and help to interpret the other.”³ Present events point the community to eschatological hope:

Lk. 21:28: Now when these things begin to take place, *look up* and *raise your heads*, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Recognizing signs is quite different from predicting dates.⁴

The occasion for the Apocalyptic Discourse is the disciples’ fascination with the Temple and its beauty (Mk. 13:1-2), and the question concerning the timing of the Temple’s destruction:

Mk. 13:3 And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,

13:4 “Tell us, *when will this* be, and what will be *the sign when these things* are all to be accomplished?”

The clearest referent of “these things” is the destruction of the Temple, “there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (13:2). And yet, with regard to “these things”, the focus is broader than the destruction of the Temple. Excited and disturbed by Jesus’ prediction, the disciples question the timing of the event. Thus, they also ask for some sign by which they may know that the final consummation is approaching. According to Matthew’s account, the disciples link the coming of Jesus with the destruction of the Temple and the close of this age (Matt. 24:3). Jesus’ answer points to various “signs” in stages, instead of one conclusive sign before the end.

Stage 1: Labor-Pains (13:4-14)

False Messiahs (vss. 5-6)

World upheaval (v. 8)

Deception (v.6)

Calamity in the human sphere (vss. 7-8)

Calamity in the natural sphere (v. 8)

Preaching of the Gospel to all nations amid persecution (vss. 9-13)

Stage 2: Abomination of Desolation⁵ and Ensuing Warnings (vss. 14-23)

Enjoiners for speedy flight (vss. 14-17)

³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972), 389.

⁴ See Cranfield, 391.

⁵ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως means the “abomination that makes desolate” from the LXX of Daniel 12:11. See also Daniel 11:31; 9:27 and references to Antiochus Epiphanes IV in I Macc. 1:541 6:7 and his desecration of the Temple in BCE 168

Tribulation (vss. 18-20)

False messiahs (vss. 21-22)

Stage 3: The Coming of the Son of Man (vss. 24-27)

Cosmic disorders signaling his return on clouds of heaven (v. 24-25)

The Parousia (vss. 26-27)

The Parable of the Budding Fig-Tree (vss. 28-31) follows the various “stages” and affirms the nearness of the Parousia and the antecedent events. The Parousia comes as a solid affirmation of the triumphant “end” (τέλος) in a world fraught with upheaval, hatred and cataclysmic disorder.

As it appears in Mk. 11, the fig-tree is the object of Jesus’ curse against the Temple and Israel. In contrast, the fig-tree in Mk. 13 looks ahead with positive anticipation.

Mark 11	Mark 13
“to the Mount of Olives” (v. 1) πρὸς τὸ Ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν	“on the Mount of Olives” (v. 3) εἰς τὸ Ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν
Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem would mean rejection of Messiah/Son of God/Lord (vss. 1-10)	Jesus’ triumphant return (Parousia) will mean vindication of the rejected Son of Man (vss. 24-27; 32-37)
Jesus visits the Temple (vss. 11, 15)	Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time (v. 1)
Jesus curses the Temple (v. 17)	Jesus pronounces the Temple’s destruction (v. 2)
Jesus’ authority is questioned (vss. 27-33)	Jesus’ authority will be made manifest (vss. 4-27)
The fig-tree withers as a sign of judgment (vss. 12-14)	The fig-tree blossoms as a sign of the impending Parousia (vss. 28,29)

The symmetry and contrast between these two chapters reveals that Mark is a careful redactor, who included these two accounts of the fig-tree.⁶ In Mk. 11, the cursing of the fig-tree (vss. 12-14) served to interpret the divine cursing of the Temple and old people of God (vss. 15-19). Correspondingly, the same juxtaposition between Temple and fig-tree appears in ch. 13; here, however, the fig-tree is used as a promise of eschatological fulfillment. The theological concerns of ch. 11 are present in ch. 13, but they open to a wider dimension of hopeful expectation.

⁶ See William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, (Sheffield, Redwood Burn, Ltd., 1980) for several points of contact between the two chapters.

Structural Analysis

Introduction to Parable (13:28a)

Parable: Natural Process (13:28b)

Veiled Meaning (13:29)

Parousia's Nearness (13:29)

Eschatological Fulfillment (13:29)

Parousia's Nearness Underscored (13:30-31)

Translation

Introduction to Parable (13:28a). Now learn the lesson from the fig-tree:

Parable: Natural Process (v. 28b) when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

Veiled Meaning (v. 29)

Parousia's Nearness (v. 29) Even so you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that he is near, right at the door.

Eschatological Fulfillment (13:29)

Parousia's Nearness Underscored (13:30-31) Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Interpretation

Introduction to parable (13:28a). At the outset, it may be questioned whether the term “parable” is appropriate. Luke designates it as a “parable,” “and he spoke a parable to them” (καὶ εἶπεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς—Ik. 21:29), while Mark (also Matthew) begins abruptly, “From the fig tree *learn its lesson...*” ἀπὸ τῆς συκῆς μάθετε τὴν παραβολὴν (Mk. 13:28 = Matt. 24:32). It may well be understood in the sentence, “Learn the lesson that the fig-tree has to teach.”⁷

Parable: natural process (13:28b). The word-picture clearly deals with human awareness of the natural process of the fig-tree. The point of comparison is expressed by the temporal clause, *as soon as*.

“...*as soon as* its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near”,

⁷ Friedrich Hauck, “παραβολή”, *TDNT*, V, 751-760. Hauck notes how the word παραβολή covers a considerable range of narration that can designate the specific teaching content; thus, the term “lesson” is appropriate here. Lambrecht follows MUnderlein’s point that the “fig-tree” is used in the general sense, not the specific fig-tree of Mk. 11:12-14 (Schwartz). Jan Lambrecht, *Die Redaktion Der Markus-Apokalypse*, (Rome: E. Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1967), 194. See also G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen*, (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1957), 94 for remarks on Schwartz and Wellhausen.

. . . ὅταν ἤδη ὁ κλάδος αὐτῆς ἀπαλὸς γένηται καὶ ἐκφύη τὰ φύλλα, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγύς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν.

“The fig-tree is distinguished from the other trees of Palestine . . . by the fact that it casts its leaves, so that the bare spiky twigs which give it an appearance of being utterly dead, make it possible to watch the return of the rising sap with special clearness.”⁸ Consequently, this new life is a clear sign that winter, i.e., the period of deadness, is past.

Veiled meaning: Parousia’s nearness (13:29). The ability to “*know*”, i.e., *recognize*, is found in the point of comparison (“just as”), between the natural process of the fig-tree and its veiled meaning.

Natural Process		Veiled Meaning
whenever, of budding of fig-tree ὅταν		“when you see these things happening” ὅταν ἴδητε ταῦτα γινόμενα
“you know” γινώσκετε	“thus even you” οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς	“recognize” γινώσκετε
“that summer is near” ὅτι ἐγγύς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν		“that he is near, <i>right</i> at the door” ὅτι ἐγγύς ἐστίν ἐπὶ θύραις

The budding fig-tree is equated with “these things” (ταῦτα; Matt. 24:33—πάντα ταῦτα); the nearness of summer is equated with his nearness, right at the door, “right around the corner.”⁹

In spite of its apparent simplicity, this “lesson” raises several questions: Is the reference to the fig-tree to be understood generically or is there a conscious allusion to the fig-tree of Mk. 11:12-14? Does the word “summer, harvest-time” θέρος, designate the time of year or does it too have an eschatological thrust?¹⁰ What are the moods of the two verb forms,

⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 120. P. Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Marc*, (Paris: Libraire Lecoffre,), 347. Crossan notes, “one cannot see summer, but especially in contrast with its nondeciduous neighbors in Palestine, the budding of the fig-tree is the epiphany of its advent and its presence.” John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables*, (New York: Harper & Row Publ., 1973), 38. James Hastings, *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. 1, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1906), 592.

⁹ Pesch has emphasized convincingly the theme of the Parousia’s nearness. Rudolph Pesch, *Nabernwartungen: Tradition und Redaktion in Mk. 13*, (Dusseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1968), 178-181.

¹⁰LS note that in classical usage *qevro* “either means “summer” or “summer-fruits”, 794. There is a clear paronomasia between *Cyīqa* ! “summer-fruit” and *Cq’* “end” in Amos 8:1-3:

Amos 8:1 Thus the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of *summer fruit*.

2 And he said, “Amos, what do you see?”

3 And I said, “A basket of *summer fruit*.”

Then the LORD said to me, “The *end* has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” says the Lord GOD; “the dead bodies shall be many; in every place they shall be cast out in silence.”

γινώσκετε –indicative, imperative, or indicative in the one case and imperative in the other? How is the transition to be understood, “So also even you,” (οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς), which suggests a change of person? What is the antecedent to “these things” ταῦτα? What is the subject of “he is near” (ἐγγύς ἐστιν)? The “lesson” from the fig-tree is rather complex.

The antecedents of “these things” (ταῦτα), are signals for the Parousia and cannot be the events of 13:26-27, for then a very awkward anti-climax would exist:

“They will see the Son of man coming in clouds”

ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέαις (v. 26)

↓

“these things”

ταῦτα (v. 29)

↓

“He is near, right at the door”

ἐγγύς ἐστιν ἐπὶ θύραις (v. 29)

The words, “these things” (ταῦτα) in v. 29 and “all these things” (ταῦτα πάντα) in v. 30, embrace the dreadful portents including the catalogue of warning signs listed in ch. 13:

6 Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ (ἐγὼ εἰμι) and they will lead many astray.

7 And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet (ἀλλ’ οὕτω τὸ τέλος).

8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but *the beginning of the birth-pangs* (ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων ταῦτα),” including:

vss.9, 11, 13 Persecution of disciples

vss.14-20 Abomination of Desolation and Messianic Woes

v. 22 False Christs and false prophets

The question was posed by the disciples, “Tell us when *these things* (ταῦτα) shall be, and what is *the sign* (σημεῖον) when *all these things* (ταῦτα πάντα) are about to be fulfilled” (v. 4). The antecedent of “these things” is the future of the disciples including the destruction of the Temple which Jesus prophesies:

2...There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.”

2...οὐ μὴ ἀφεθῆ ᾧδε λίθος ἐπὶ λίθον ὅς οὐ μὴ καταλυθῆ /.

Jeremias draws attention to words such as “harvest”, “wedding”, “wine” which symbolize in particular the Last Judgment which begins in the New Age, *Parables*, 119, countered by Dupont, 526-548. Beasley-Murray correctly notes “the language, both of the parable and of its application, has the future in mind...Both the signs that herald the anticipated climax are yet in prospect.”, 95

The catalogue of premonitory signs looks back to the Temple’s destruction,¹¹ and forward to the events prior to the climactic Parousia. In turn, these premonitory signs are linked with the signal for the disciples to know *he is near, right at the door* (εγγύς ἐστὶν ἐπὶ θύραις --v. 29). His nearness is equated with the Parousia, the climactic event of ch. 13, rendered by Luke as “the Kingdom of God” (Lk. 21:31).

The first γινώσκετε (v. 28) is probably an indicative, “you know” leading to the second γινώσκετε (v. 29), an imperative, “recognize.” Based upon their knowledge of the fig-tree’s natural process, disciples are to recognize the Parousia’s nearness by the catalog of warning signs. The entire purpose of the discourse is forewarning:

23 But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand.

23 ὑμεῖς δὲ βλέπετε προεῖρηκα ὑμῖν πάντα

Throughout the discourse are several imperatives, linked to certain future events. The future condition (aorist subjunctive with ὅταν) calls for a corresponding attitude from the disciples, which is stated in the imperative.¹² The fig-tree lesson is drawn from nature and

¹¹ The language intimates the fearful nature of the Roman siege and destruction of the Temple and city by the Roman armies; the Temple fell in 70 CE.

¹²

Future Condition	Imperative--Command
Mark 13:7 And <i>when you hear</i> of wars and rumors of wars; this must take place, but the end is not yet. Mark 13:7 ὅταν δὲ ἀκούσητε πολέμους καὶ ἀκοὰς πολέμων	<i>do not be alarmed</i> (v. 7) μὴ θροεῖσθε
Mark 13:11 And <i>when they bring</i> you to trial and deliver you up, Mark 13:11 καὶ ὅταν ἄγωσιν ὑμᾶς παραδίδότες	<i>do not be anxious beforehand</i> μὴ προμεριμνᾶτε say whatever τοῦτο λαλεῖτε (v. 11)
Mark 13:14 “But <i>when you</i> see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be Mark 13:14 ὅταν δὲ ἴδητε τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως	<i>let</i> those who are in Judea <i>flee</i> to οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ <i>φευγέτωσαν</i> (v. 14) “ <i>let him not go down</i> ” (v. 15) μὴ καταβάτω “ <i>let him not enter</i> ” (v. 14) μὴδὲ εἰσελθάτω “ <i>let him not turn back</i> ” (v. 16) μὴ ἐπιστρέψάτω “ <i>pray</i> ” (v. 18) προσευχεσθε
Mark 13:28 as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, Mark 13:28 ὅταν ἤδη ὁ κλάδος αὐτῆς ἀπαλός γένηται καὶ ἐκφύη τὰ φύλλα, you know that summer is near. γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγύς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν.	

eschatological language, and consequently there is no need to interpret **γινώσκετε** as an imperative—it is self-evident, which forms the basis for the imperative “recognize” **γινώσκετε** (v. 29). As they are exhorted to “learn” (**μάθετε** -v. 28) the “lesson” from the fig-tree, they are compelled to “recognize” (**γινώσκετε**--v. 29) the nearness of the Parousia.

Veiled meaning: eschatological fulfillment (13:29). The fig-tree is chosen for this “lesson” because of its dramatic annual cycle, its connection with the Temple (Mk. 11) and because of its special connection with the Messianic Age. Derrett notes, “there is a connection between nature as we know it and nature as it reacts to the Messianic Age.”¹³ It was purported that Adam ate of the fig, i.e., the forbidden fruit.¹⁴ In the Age to Come, all trees will have edible fruit; this idea is found in several Old Testament passages¹⁵ and the rabbinical literature is replete with such expectations:

...in the world to come a man will bring one grape on a wagon or a ship, put it in the corner of his house and use its contents as (if it had been) a large wine cask...(Kethuboth 111b).¹⁶

Jesus himself expected table-fellowship including the “fruit of the vine” (Mk. 14:25) with the new people of God in the Messianic Age,¹⁷ as he had often experienced table-fellowship with his own on earth.

Certainly, from Mk. 13:31b one can obtain the impression that there is a link between the present age and the one to come: Jesus’ “words” are the link, and what is valid for his ministry is not invalid for that age, in which the conditions of life as we know them cease to apply.¹⁸

The eschatological thrust is also seen in the word-play between **θέρος** (“harvest”) and **θύραις** (“doors”) in vss. 28-29. We can compare the similar word play in Amos 8:1-3 between **Συῖθα** “summer fruit” and **ἄθρο** “end.”

<p>Mark 13:29 So also, when you see these things, Mark 13:29 ὅταν ἴδητε ταῦτα</p>	<p><i>know</i> that he is near, at the very gates γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγύς ἐστιν ἐπὶ θύραις <i>Take heed, watch</i> (v. 33) βλέπετε ἀγρυπνεῖτε <i>watch</i> (v. 35) γρηγορεῖτε <i>watch</i> (v. 37) γρηγορεῖτε</p>
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¹³ Derrett, 258. We refer to Grant, Hiers, and Telford for extensive references in Rabbinic literature which point undeniably to the connection of the fig-tree, etc., with the Messianic Age.

¹⁴ Ginzberg, *Legends*, I, 75, 96-97; V, 97-98.

¹⁵ Zech. 8:12; Ezek. 34:27; 36:8-11, 29f., Jer. 31:12; Lev. 26:4-6; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10; Hagg. 3:17. See also the images of the idealized promised land and Solomonian era (Deut. 8:8; Numb. 13:20,23; I Kgs. 4:25).

¹⁶ Rabbi Gamaliel (ca. A.D. 90) said “trees are destined to yield fruit every day..just as the boughs (exist) every day, so shall there be fruit every day.” Shabbat 30b. See Stract-Billerbeck, IV, 2, 886ff.; 948-54. See also Enoch 24:1-25:5; II Baruch 29:5.

¹⁷ Matt. 8:11=I.k. 13:29; I.k. 22:29f.; Rev. 19:9f.

¹⁸ Derrett, 259.

Parousia's nearness underscored (13:30-31). On the one hand, vss. 28-29 relate to the disciple's previous question concerning *the sign when* all these things are going to be fulfilled:

4 "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?"

εἶπον ἡμῖν πότε ταῦτα ἔσται, καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα

On the other hand, vss. 30-31 point to the *when* of v. 4 with a similar question from the disciples. The two sayings of vss. 30-31 indicate that "these things", i.e., the catalogue of warning signs, will take place within the existing generation. The text does not say that the Parousia needs to be included in "these things." Verse 32 points to the Son's uncertainty of the precise time in terms of day and hour of the Parousia. It naturally follows that the disciples are also likewise ignorant of the time.

The parable claims that the Parousia is near. Does this mean that Jesus was mistaken (Schweitzer, T.W. Manson, Barrett, et. al)? What are we to make of the paradoxical threads in vss. 7, 29, 32? Since Jesus did not know when the end of the world would come, it likewise follows that he would also be ignorant of whether human history would continue after the Temple's destruction. The text suggests that that the fearful events including the Temple's destruction would occur within Jesus' generation.¹⁹ However, it does not follow that the fearful events are necessarily linked in time with the coming of Jesus. Jesus does not know nor does Mark claim to know more than Jesus. The warning is clear concerning those who think they know the time of the Parousia (vss. 5-6, 21-22). The thrust of the discourse, with its joint affirmation of the Parousia's certainty and ignorance of its time, becomes the central motive for committed and steady discipleship. Cranfield notes, "It was, and still is, true to say that the Parousia is at hand—and indeed this, so far from being an embarrassing mistake on the part either of Jesus or of the early Church is an essential part of the Church's faith."²⁰

The destruction of the Temple (v. 2) and the catalogue of premonitory signs (vss. 5-23) precede the Parousia. The fig-tree logion expresses an eschatological lesson regarding the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent Messianic Woes: The Parousia is near. The new people of God are to learn from "these things", i.e., from the destruction of the Temple and the warning signs, that Jesus is right at the door. Because of his nearness, the people of God are enjoined to steadfast hope. The labor pains and Messianic Woes will give way to the coming of the Son of Man.

The Cursing of the Fig-Tree/Temple/God's people-Israel (11:12-19) served as the negative background for the positive lesson for the new people of God (11:20-25), the lesson consisting of faith, prayer, and forgiveness. The parallelism of chapters 11 and 13 suggests a positive "lesson" for God's new people, i.e., hope in the Parousia's nearness following the actualized curse (destruction) of the Temple and premonitory signs.

¹⁹ Matthew's text includes the adverb, "immediately" in the expression "immediately after the tribulation of those days (Matt. 24:29). Paul appears to expect an immediate Parousia during his lifetime (I Thess. 4:15-17).

²⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972), 408.

The unique contribution that this parable, i.e., “lesson” makes, is a promise, contrasted with the scathing judgment pronounced over the Temple in Mk. 11:12-14. We have noted the symmetry and contrast between chs. 11 and 13 with similar redactional and theological concerns. The people of God in Mk. 13:28-31 are to learn from this “lesson”: 1) a sense of hope in the Parousia’s nearness, 2) the joy of eschatological fulfillment when nature itself will fully respond to the Son of Man.

Implications

The earlier fig-tree (Mk. 11:12-14) had not responded to the presence of the Messiah. As a precursor to the Age to Come, the fig-tree of Mark 13 puts forth leaves as a response to the immediate Parousia of the Son of Man. It serves as a “lesson” from its natural process of growth to its veiled meaning, the destruction of the Temple and the bright future yet in store for the people of God. As a budding fig-tree, it signifies the destruction of the Temple and premonitory signs, representing hope in the nearness of the Parousia and a participation in the eschatological fulfillment of the New Age. Because the Son does not know the day or the hour, then his disciples will certainly not know the exact “when.” Therefore the call is, “Be ready.”

Through the parable, Jesus sees beyond the historical judgment that fell upon Jerusalem (66-70 A.D.) to a better day; God’s will, not exhausted in the destruction of the Temple, expresses his powerful message of hope in the context of a parable and chapter filled with upheaval and suffering. Not intending to terrorize his people, but instill confidence in the midst of their impending struggles, he prepares his people (then and now) by historical events--“natural” disasters, world-conflict, false messiahs, and personal suffering. Things must get worse before they get better. In the interval, Jesus assures his people of the ever-present Holy Spirit and their mission to proclaim the Good News to all peoples (13:9-10) before the end comes. Since these “labor-pains” (13:8) will occur again and again in history, the community ought not to be taken by surprise, but look with expectation for the actual birth, when this age will give way to the age to come. The parable is a “lesson” on Jewish unpreparedness for his first coming, manifested in the Temple’s destruction and a confident expectation in the future of the new people of God. The parable affirms that he will establish his own kingdom with a fulfillment far exceeding human expectation as the new heaven and earth which knows no end (Rev. 21:1).

BOOK REVIEWS

He Was a Deist—A Limited Review of *Einstein: His Life and Universe*. By Walter Isaacson. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007, 551 pp.

After reading Walter Isaacson's biography, *Einstein: His Life and Universe*, a book which I highly recommend, I thought it would be interesting to write a limited review focusing on Einstein's beliefs about God and religion. The book contains very many references to, and marvelous quotes on, these topics, and this review attempts to give a brief summary thereof.

Einstein came from a non-religious family. When, at the age of six, he had to attend school and there was no Jewish school nearby, his parents sent him to the local Catholic school. Einstein took the required course in the Catholic religion and did so well that he ended up tutoring his classmates. Around the age of nine, Einstein developed an intense interest in Judaism and he became strictly observant. However, at age ten he was introduced to science and mathematics by a medical student who was a frequent dinner guest at the Einstein home. Einstein immediately took to the sciences, quickly mastering the subject matter. Einstein's exposure to science fostered a rebellion against religion by the time he was twelve. He came to believe that the stories of the Bible could not be true. From then on, and for the rest of his life, he avoided dogma and rituals.

Nevertheless, Einstein believed in something larger than himself. When asked if he was religious, he said: "Yes, you can call it that. Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible laws and connections, there remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion. To that extent I am, in fact, religious." Einstein's book, "What I Believe", concluded with an explanation of what he meant when he called himself religious: "The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I am a devoutly religious man."

When asked if he believed in God, Einstein said: "I am not an atheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child only dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand those laws."

Einstein consistently refuted the charge that he was an atheist. He told a friend: "There are people who say there is no God. But what makes me really angry is that they quote me for support of such views." He said: "What separates me from most so-called atheists is the feeling of utter humility toward the unattainable secrets of the harmony of the cosmos." He

wrote in a letter that "...atheists are creatures who – in their grudge against traditional religion as the 'opium of the masses' – cannot hear the music of the spheres."

Einstein did not believe in a personal God. To a Rabbi's direct question: "Do you believe in God?" Einstein answered: "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of all that exists, but not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind." Answering another question he said: "I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals or would sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation...My religiosity consists of a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we can comprehend about the knowable world. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God." Einstein's belief in causal determinism conflicted not only with the concept of a personal God but to Einstein it was also incompatible with human free will. He wrote: "I do not at all believe in free will in the philosophical sense. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity." When he was asked if he believed that humans are free agents Einstein said: "No, I am a determinist. Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect as well as the star. Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible player." Einstein did not believe that God would have created beautiful and subtle rules that determined most of what happened in the universe while leaving a few things completely to chance. To his friend, Max Born, he wrote: "Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing. But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but it does not really bring us any closer to the secrets of the Old One. I at any rate am convinced that He does not play dice." When asked if he believed in immortality Einstein answered: "No. And one life is enough for me."

As to the relationship between religion and science, in a speech at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Einstein said that the role of science was to ascertain what was the case, but not evaluate human thoughts and actions about what should be the case. Religion had the reverse role. "Science can be created only by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion." Einstein famously concluded the talk by saying: "The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." He also wrote: "I have no better expression than 'religious' for this confidence in the rational nature of reality and in its being accessible, to some degree, to human reason. When this feeling is missing, science degenerates into mindless empiricism."

There is much more in Isaacson's biography which is a very well researched tome on Einstein and his life, full of interesting information. Readers also benefit from a more "organic" understanding of the development of the theory of relativity. Concerning Einstein's "religious" stance, however, there can be little doubt that deism best describes his outlook.

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***Why I Am Not a Calvinist.* By J.L. Walls and J.R. Dongell. Downers Grove: IVP, 2004, 230pp.; *Why I Am Not an Arminian.* By R.A. Peterson and M.D. Williams. Downers Grove: IVP, 2004, 224 pp.**

The two volumes under review came out in the same year and were helpfully devised as companion volumes. The idea is a good one: to present the fundamental objections of each system by advocates of the opposing system. The discussion throughout these volumes is marked by an irenic tone, a healthy respect for the other system and its advocates, and an appreciation for the Great Tradition from which both streams of thought flow. A welcome omission in these works is the often-uncharitable polemical nature of the debate that has marked more than one interchange on this topic in the past. This does not mean that the two volumes are not direct, hard hitting, and at times blunt. Both present a coherent, consistent, and lucid discussion of the issues and as such provide a useful overview of these historic systems.

The issue of Arminianism and Calvinism is a perennial one amongst evangelical Christians and in recent years the discussion has become something of a flashpoint, at least in North American evangelicalism. In an Australasian context this may not be quite so acute but systems of theology, especially these two, are back on the agenda of many, especially baptistic churches. This makes these volumes timely. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* is written by philosopher Jerry Walls and biblical scholar Joseph Dongell of Asbury Theological Seminary, while *Why I Am Not an Arminian* is written by systematic theologians Robert Peterson and Michael Williams of Covenant Theological Seminary. The two works have much in common but they are not carbon copies of the other. They are, in fact, very different books. The following review is in three parts: first; a review of *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, second; a review of *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, and third; a critical review of the two works in comparison.

I. *Why I am Not A Calvinist*

Why I Am Not a Calvinist is divided into two parts: the first primarily by Dongell and focuses on the biblical objections to Calvinism; the second primarily by Walls and focuses on the philosophical objections to Calvinism. In the first section Dongell spends a chapter “Approaching the Bible”; as the title states. This is a very fine introduction to the nature of theological discourse and method and on its own would be of great value. While much wider in its concerns than the Arminian-Calvinist debate it does provide a useful reminder to readers, many of which will be seminary students or pastors, of how to formulate theological ideas and how to present them in gracious dialogue. This chapter is required reading for any who wish to take part in such a debate as this one. Dongell then gets to work in the second chapter “Engaging the Bible” where he surveys the issues of God’s sovereignty, the gracious nature of salvation, and predestination. For each issue the Calvinist position is stated and then an Arminian critique is offered. Not surprisingly Dongell presents a view of corporate election over individual election, and in his focus on Romans 9-11 provides some useful counters to a standard Calvinist exegesis. One of the disappointing things of this chapter, however, was the actual scarcity of biblical texts directly referred to. This tended to diminish the usefulness of this chapter and was an obvious weakness of the book.

Jerry Walls then tackles the philosophical/theological issues that divide Arminians from Calvinists, including the issues of human freedom, divine sovereignty, and pastoral applications. Walls writes with precision, and is not afraid to draw conclusive summaries

from his philosophical surveys. For Calvinists reading this work Walls presents some serious objections and issues that need to be addressed. Walls pays special attention to the works of Packer, Sproul, Piper, Carson, and McGregor-Wright as he mounts an impressive argument against the consistency of Calvinism. Walls surveys the positions of Molinism, libertarian freedom, determinism, and compatibilist freedom in this section of the work and shows how, in his view, libertarian freedom is the only viable option for a consistent theology which makes sense of Scripture and works in the real world. He shows up weaknesses in the determinist worldview, not in terms of philosophical coherence, but pastoral viability. He also points out, quite effectively, how many Calvinist writers are inconsistent in their application of theology, holding to a determinist view of God's sovereignty but presenting either a compatibilist or a libertarian freedom view of human responsibility. Walls asks that Calvinists be consistent in their theology and if they cannot do this, then their theology is quite obviously faulty. Of the Calvinists who are consistent, including John Piper, Walls is adamant their pastoral application is woefully inadequate.

Throughout this work Westminster or Federal Calvinism is the only form of Calvinism that is interacted with and critiqued; but what of the other streams in this tradition such as the Puritans, or the Scottish Presbyterian Calvinism of the Torrance's? Due to the limited but unstated focus of the critique a slight caricature of Calvinism was implicit throughout the work, despite the occasional but useful citation of Calvin himself. The form of Arminianism represented in these pages is a Wesleyan version, it may be suggested, given the prominence Wesley plays in this account. What was missing, however, was a more nuanced presentation of Wesley's Arminianism, influenced so heavily as it was by Eastern Orthodox theology as mediated through the patristic thinkers predominantly. Arguably, John Wesley's view of divine sovereignty and human freedom was such a nuanced view of Arminianism, but not quite Calvinistic, that it may indeed be a middle-way and deserves more thorough investigation in its own right (something Peterson and Williams address).

Despite the weak biblical section and the rather limited focus on one stream of Calvinism this work succeeds in presenting an honest and polite articulation of why these two thinkers are not Calvinists. This is useful reading and thought provoking, even if it would not be sufficient to persuade Calvinists to change their minds.

II. *Why I am Not An Arminian*

Why I am Not An Arminian consists of nine chapters which canvass the thought of Augustine, the theology surrounding the Synod of Dort, the Arminianism of Wesley and his successors. After a useful introduction the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy is examined as the necessary background to these two systems, with a focus on predestination and perseverance. Next the Synod of Dort is canvassed followed by a chapter each on freedom, inability, grace, and atonement. As such this is a more systematic work than the earlier volume and exhibits a far greater unity between the two authors than Walls and Dongell achieve. In addition, this work has as its focus a theological exposition of Scripture, something the Walls and Dongell work never succeeded in doing well.

Peterson and Williams point out in the Introduction that they would have preferred to author a book on *Why I am a Calvinist*, pointing out that the false-choice fallacy is a weaker form of argument than that of a constructive argument for a position. They also distance themselves from a polemic against Arminianism and aim to be advocates for Calvinism as

the most faithful and coherent way to systematize the biblical material, noting that no system, Calvinism included, is devoid of rough edges and difficulties. In order to achieve this goal the work begins with the following affirmation to show that Arminianism is not a heresy in their opinion: “The Arminian Christian believes that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh to save sinners and that the saving work of Christ comes to the sinner by way of the grace of God received through faith. Whatever issues relevant to salvation we disagree upon, let us agree on this: the Calvinist and the Arminian are brothers in Christ” (13). Such a strong affirmation of soteriological solidarity is a welcome start to this irenic volume. In order to be fair this volume interacts with thinkers whom Arminian writers cite as precedent for their own arguments, namely, Jacob Arminius (especially his “Declaration of Sentiments” and the subsequent “Remonstrant Articles”), John Wesley, H. Orton Wiley (*Christian Theology*, 3 vols. [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940-1943]), H. Ray Dunning (*Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988]), and J. Ken Grider (*A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1994]).

In the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy the authors are careful not to paint Pelagius as an arch heretic and then develop a guilt by association tactic for subsequent Arminians (although they do believe Pelagianism to be heretical). In fact, the authors state: “Arminianism is not Pelagian” (39). Peterson and Williams do a superb job in this section of outlining the differing views of freedom between these two adversaries. For Pelagius, the human will is autonomous and possesses a libertarian freedom. For Augustine, the human will attains freedom by grace such that redemption is monergistic. The authors then state: “Yet as stark as the difference is between Augustine and Pelagius on sin and grace, they share one thing in common. The structure of each person’s understanding of sin and redemption is monergistic” (34). Augustine’s was a monergistic view of God’s salvation; Pelagius’ was a monergistic view of the meritorious nature of human works. A second point of division was the basic asymmetrical understanding of salvation in the Augustinian tradition such that sin and salvation cannot be treated in the same way. God saves the elect and yet passes over the reprobate. According to Peterson and Williams, Augustine did not hold to double predestination, a point which reappears in the later sections on the theology of Calvin and the Synod of Dort.

In response to the theologies of Augustine and Pelagius the subsequent tradition wrestled with the nature of sin and salvation. In the wake of the Synod of Orange in 529, the theological stage was divided between Augustinians (gracious monergism), Pelagians (meritorious monergism) at the poles, with two mediating groups: Semi-Augustinians (gracious synergism), and the Semi-Pelagians (synergism). In answer to their question “Where do Calvinism and Arminianism fit?” (39ff), Peterson and Williams reply: “The Calvinist... closely conforms to Augustine’s gracious monergism” (39). The Arminian is not a Pelagian, as already stated, so that leaves either Semi-Pelagian or Semi-Augustinian. According to the authors, Arminians are not Semi-Pelagian as the Semi-Pelagians thought of salvation as beginning with human beings, arguing that we must first seek God; and his grace is a response to our seeking. The Arminians of the 17th century held that the human will has been so corrupted by sin that a person cannot seek grace without the enablement of grace. They therefore affirmed the necessity and priority of grace in redemption. “This suggests that Arminianism is closer to Semi-Augustinianism than it is to Semi-Pelagianism” (39). Thus “Semi-Augustinianism was not a Pelagianism that had moved toward Augustine but rather a softening of Augustinianism that sought to modify or excise elements of Augustine’s

teaching that were found offensive..." (40). This is a helpful schema and establishes clear lines of division between these two systems.

In the subsequent chapter on predestination a theological exposition of Scripture is provided, in which the Arminian position is given, followed by a volley of texts which are claimed to show the individual, unconditional, gracious election of individuals to salvation based on grace not divine foresight of people's faith. The authors move through the election of Abraham, Jacob, and Israel before examining predestination texts in the gospels, focusing especially on the gospel of John, before moving on to Acts, Revelation, and Paul's epistles. The chapter on perseverance examines nine texts claimed to prove that God preserves his people for final salvation (Lk 22.31-32; Jn 6.37, 39-40, 44; 10.27-30; Rom 5.9-10; 8.28-39; Eph 1.13-14; Heb 6.17-20; 7.23-25; and 1 Pt 1.3-5). Arminian objections are raised, taken seriously, and while respected, are rebutted throughout, concluding with statements such as the following: "The Arminian rejection of the doctrine of preservation is not due to any lack of clarity in the scriptural witness but is due to a prior commitment to the freedom of the human will in matters pertaining to salvation" (77).

In the second part of the book concerning the Synod of Dort, the Remonstrants, and contemporary Calvinism and Arminianism, Peterson and Williams develop a compelling case that much of the Arminian argument against Calvinism centres around a rebuttal of Calvinistic supralapsarianism (the view that God decreed 1) to save the elect and damn the reprobate, 2) to create both the elect and the reprobate, 3) to permit the fall of humans, 4) to provide salvation for the elect). Peterson and Williams accept the general thesis that Calvinism post-Calvin adopted a greater emphasis upon philosophical and metaphysical concerns than Calvin entertained. Under the leadership of Theodore Beza, Calvin's son-in-law and successor at the Geneva Academy, this scholastic approach led to the dominance of double predestination in Calvinist circles to such an extent that many, Calvinist and Arminian alike, equate Calvinism with supralapsarianism. The authors set themselves the task of correcting this misconception and show that Augustine, Calvin, and the Canons of Dort all affirm an infralapsarianism, and thus all polemic against supralapsarian Calvinism is a caricature of what the authors call "evangelical" Calvinism. Infralapsarianism (the view that God decreed 1) to create human beings, 2) to permit the fall, 3) to save some and condemn others, 4) to provide salvation for the elect) is presented as the dominant confessional position among Reformed churches (although there is no real support in their work for this contention from the Reformed confessions). Infralapsarianism fits with Augustine's asymmetrical view of the work of Christ and his presentation of passive reprobation. It was Beza's supralapsarianism that Arminius reacted to so strongly in his 1608 "Declaration of Sentiments" in twenty objections. The thesis that true Calvinism is infralapsarian in nature and not supralapsarian is one of the linchpins of Peterson and Williams' argument. In objecting so strongly to supralapsarianism, Arminius also showed his objections to any infralapsarianism as well. For Arminius neither election nor reprobation is causal in any way.

In another crucial move, Peterson and Williams develop the thesis that Arminius was advocating a consistent Molinism as developed by Luis de Molina (1535-1600) and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). Citing Muller, the authors write: "Although Arminius nowhere cites either thinker, 'his argument is quite similar to, and probably based upon, Molina's hypothesis of a divine middle knowledge or *scientia media*: here God provides the conditions for the future contingent acts of individual human beings.'" Like the Molinists, Arminius

sought to bring together a doctrine of divine decree with an affirmation of human freedom through the construct of a cognitive, noncausal divine prescience: God elects or reprobates on the basis of a prior knowledge of human response to sin and the gospel” (106).

In presenting such a hypothesis Peterson and Williams are following the lead of Richard Muller and other contemporary Calvinists. This is an important move for, if correct, it shows several things: first; Arminius was not a Pelagian or a Semi-Pelagian, second; Arminius was a Semi-Augustinian and it is this synergistic conception of salvation which is enshrined in the 1610 Remonstrance. Accordingly, “We believe that the Arminian notion of libertarian free will is false both experientially and biblically. It enshrines an almost idolatrous doctrine of the autonomous human being that is in fact closer to a biblical description of sin than true humanity” (117). The 1619 Canons of Dort represent a rebuttal of the 1610 Remonstrance and include the now (in)famous “Five Points of Calvinism” which respond to the Five Points of the Remonstrance. Peterson and Williams make clear that the Five Points “Do not sufficiently define Calvinism, and certainly do not say all there is to be said about the Reformed faith” (120). What it does say, however, is important; namely, that a Calvinistic infralapsarianism is faithful to Scripture and thus the Five Points of Calvinism must stand: Total Depravity (not that the Canons of Dort used this terminology), Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.

The authors conclude their examination of Dort with the comment: “The central point of contention between the Calvinists and the early Arminians was whether election is unconditional or conditional upon human acceptance of the gospel, whether salvation is to be understood monergistically – God exercising his sovereign right to choose and save whom he will – or synergistically – God offering salvation to all, but leaving it up to each person to accept the gospel and thus complete the act of salvation: All other issues of dispute emanated from this core disagreement” (134). What follows is a discussion of differing views of freedom and free will: libertarian (Arminian), compatibilism (Reformed), and determinism (hyper-Calvinist). Through theological exposition and philosophical argument Peterson and Williams attempt to show the superiority of the compatibilist view over any others.

The final chapters examine some of Wesley’s views on prevenient grace and Grotius’ governmental view of the atonement and further the argument made throughout the book that the Arminian system of theology is not as biblical, or orthodox as that of infralapsarian evangelical Calvinism.

Why I Am Not an Arminian is an important work and makes a clear and consistent case for the superiority of Calvinism over that of Arminianism. The authors are articulate, polite, and erudite, include copious amounts of theological exegesis, and support their arguments with appeals to tradition, philosophy, and pastoral praxis. This is a compelling work which will hold its own against most Arminian protests and, even if not accepted by Arminians, will have to be argued against for Arminians to further a defence of their system.

III. Critical Comparisons

A critical comparison of the two works under review highlights the fact that these are two very different volumes. *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* is more lightweight, includes far less theological exegesis of Scripture, and while strong on philosophical argumentation never

quite succeeds in dealing with the heart of the Calvinistic system. As a result its critique lacks compulsion, the theological analysis lacks depth and nuance, and the final appeal rings hollow. *Why I Am Not An Arminian* on the other hand, is a highly nuanced, theologically erudite work which presents Arminianism in the best possible light and then shifts the focus onto a positive construction of Calvinism to counter Arminian claims. Peterson and Williams show a greater understanding of the differing streams of both Arminianism and Calvinism enabling their critique to be more focused and their advocacy of Calvinism to be that much more convincing. Peterson and Williams also show a greater tendency to acknowledge the weaknesses of their own system and refer to some of the worst advocates of Calvinism in order to highlight the difference between what is at essence Calvinism and what is a caricature of it.

As the two volumes under review were not commissioned to be a rebuttal of each other's arguments directly, it is natural that each volume includes arguments not directly addressed by the other. Walls and Dongell make a number of good philosophical arguments against the consistency of Calvinism, especially Westminster Calvinism. Peterson and Williams address Augustine and Dort, but never comment directly on Westminster or Federal Calvinism (there is not a single entry in the index to Westminster). This is disappointing. If Westminster and some of the more scholastic forms of Calvinism (past and present) were also included in Peterson and Williams' discussion the work may have been of even greater use to Calvinists within those traditions and not simply to Arminians reading the work. This omission is all the more surprising given the thesis of the work that true or evangelical Calvinism is infralapsarian and not supralapsarian. Does Westminster theology support this claim or not? And what of the accusation of Walls and Dongell that many contemporary Reformed theologians oscillate between compatibilist and libertarian views of human free will? One wonders if Peterson and Williams have limited the true scope of Reformed thought on this issue in order to defend their own versions of Calvinism not only from Arminians but also from some of their fellow Calvinists. If so then a more explicit treatment of these issues would have been welcomed.

Read in tandem these two volumes provide a fine survey of the strengths and weaknesses of the two systems and show why the issue of Calvinism vs. Arminianism is a perennial point of contention in the church. In the wake of these two introductory volumes expect to see a number of more specific works come off the printing presses that seek to pick up the discussion these two works have initiated. If subsequent works can show the same irenic and Christian tone of these works then the church has much to be thankful to these authors for.

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Review Article: *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. By John Walton. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009, 192 pp.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "No philosophical theory which I have yet come across is a radical improvement on the words of Genesis, that 'In the beginning God made Heaven and Earth'" (*Miracles*, 51). Many Christians would warmly affirm that statement. But ask those same Christians to explain what it *means* that God made heaven and earth, and they may very well come to blows. Interpretations abound on the first chapters of Genesis. Is there any way to

separate the wheat from the chaff? John Walton, in *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, believes that there is. In fact, he argues that most approaches to Genesis 1 have overlooked a crucial facet of biblical cosmology. In his own view, which he terms “cosmic temple inauguration,” Walton advocates an understanding of cosmic origins that adheres to the biblical text and leaves room for scientific exploration. My purpose in this review is to analyze the viability of his view. To do this, I will present the central tenets of his argument, distinguish it from other creation views, and offer my own critique. Briefly stated, I plan to argue for the general thrust of Walton’s approach while suggesting two possibilities for refinement. Let us look now to the contours of his view.

Cosmic Temple Inauguration (CTI)

Walton divides his interpretation of Genesis 1 into twelve propositions. Though space limitations prohibit us from discussing each claim, it will help to delineate the suppositions underlying his approach. First, a word about methodology. Walton is an ANE scholar, so it is no surprise that these sources make their way into his discussion of cosmic origins. However, it is critical to understand why this is so. For Walton, when we approach a text such as Genesis 1 we must attend to its linguistic *as well as* its cultural context. Ancient literature is thus an invaluable resource, not for dictating the meaning of Scripture, but for helping the interpreter immerse himself in thought patterns that may be historically closer to the biblical text than his own. Walton is careful to maintain the primacy of the biblical witness, but he also contends that ancient near eastern literature can shed light on what the biblical witness may be saying. In his words, “Though our understanding of ancient culture will always be limited, ancient literature is the key to a proper interpretation of the text, and sufficient amounts of it are available to allow us to make progress in our understanding” (22).

This methodological strategy leads Walton to a distinctive trait of ancient cosmology: the preference for a functional over a material ontology. In other words, the ancients defined existence in terms of proper function. Thus, creation entails assigning responsibilities within an ordered system. Material ontology, on the other hand, concerns substance: How did a thing come to possess its form? According to Walton, functional rather than material ontology governs the Genesis account. That is, over the course of six twenty-four hour days, chaos – in the words of Milton – hears the voice of God (*Paradise Lost*, 7.221). In days one to three, God “creates” (here understood as assigning functions, not generating matter) time, weather mechanisms, and the basis for food, respectively (cf. Gen. 8:22). In days four to six, God installs his “functionaries.” Celestial lights, swarming creatures, and beasts of the earth inhabit their functional spheres and carry out their regulating and multiplying roles. As the climax of creation, God installs the man and woman as his supreme representatives to exercise godlike dominion.

With day seven, the creation account culminates in what Walton terms a “temple inauguration.” This is the essential element of his interpretive approach. The six days of creation parallel in many ways the later construction of the tabernacle. Moses spends considerable time assembling the materials for God’s dwelling place (Ex. 35-39), but the structure does not properly exist – is not truly created – until God takes up residence (Ex. 40). For this reason, when Genesis 2:2 explains that God “rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done,” we should understand this resting in terms of “engagement

without obstacles rather than disengagement without responsibilities” (73). God’s “rest” involves his assumption of kingly rule over an ordered universe. Walton summarizes:

[Genesis 1] ... is describing the creation of the cosmic temple with all of its functions and with God dwelling in its midst.... The most central truth to the creation account is that this world is a place for God’s presence.... Prior to day one, God’s spirit was active over the nonfunctional cosmos; God was involved but had not yet taken up his residence. The establishment of the functional cosmic temple is effectuated by God taking up his residence on day seven. This gives us a before/after view of God’s role. (84-85)

But what about creation *ex nihilo*? According to Walton, this is the wrong question to ask of Genesis 1 because it assumes a material ontology. Genesis presents the *functional* origins of the cosmos. Material origins are no less God’s work and involve at some point creation out of nothing; however, the text is unconcerned with those details. This means that God may have utilized both instantaneous and prolonged processes in generating cosmic material.

Distinction from Other Creation Views

Walton distinguishes his approach from other popular treatments of the text. According to *young earth creationism* (YEC), the entire cosmos was generated in six 24-hour days. Furthermore, YEC’s hermeneutic requires a young earth 6,000-10,000 years old. Though Walton’s view (CTI) would affirm YEC’s interpretation of *yom* (“day”), he believes it errs in requiring a material ontology of the creation account. The situation reverses with *old earth creationism* (OEC, or *Day-Age Theory*), which argues that the days of creation are metaphorical and represent long eras, thus accommodating the scientific data that suggests the universe is substantially older than YEC allows. Walton would sympathize with OEC’s sensitivity to chronology, but would disagree with their twisting the text to make an argument it never intended to make. In his estimation, both YEC and OEC go too far with the text. On the other hand, the *framework hypothesis* (FH) does not go far enough. Positing that the six creation days are literary devices for communicating theological assertions, FH risks reductionism by neglecting a serious engagement with the details of the text. The *gap theory* (or “*Ruin-Reconstruction Theory*”) affirms two creations: the first described in Genesis 1:1 (ruled by Satan before his rebellion) and the second detailed in Genesis 1:2ff, occurring after the fall of Satan and a gap of considerable time. Walton and many other scholars reject this view as shoddy Hebrew exegesis. Though each of these views offers distinct perspectives, they are united under a material ontology and for this reason misconstrue the meaning of Genesis 1.

Analysis of CTI View

In critiquing the CTI view of creation, I will say at the outset that I agree with the general thrust of the argument. It is plain from a reading of Genesis 1 and 2 that this record defies post-Copernican, post-Darwinian categories. This does not mean that the record is inaccurate. Quite the opposite. It may be that our definition of accuracy is inadequate. I am unconvinced that a modern cosmology addresses all that constitutes the cosmos. I fear we are often like Eustace discussing astronomy with the star Ramandu:

“In our world,” said Eustace, “a star is a huge ball of flaming gas.”

“Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.”
(*Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 226; cf. Ward, *Planet Narnia*)

Genesis 1, I would argue, explains for us what the world *is*: God's cosmic temple.

Nevertheless, I have two critiques of the CTI view. My hope is that these are not grounds for dismissing the argument but are instead opportunities for further refinement. First, in discussing alternative creation views, Walton neglects to deal with Sailhamer's *limited geography* theory. In brief, Sailhamer asserts that Genesis 1:1 concerns the creation of the universe and Genesis 1:2ff explains how God prepared the land of promise for Adam and Eve to inhabit. Now it may be that Walton considers Sailhamer's view as a variation of the gap theory (which, in a manner of speaking, it is) and felt it was unnecessary to discuss. Or perhaps he felt the view was not prominent enough to include among the other more traditional approaches. Whatever the case, I think this oversight is detrimental. This is not because Sailhamer's theory is unassailable or thoroughly contradicts CTI (in fact, Walton mentions Sailhamer in a footnote for a lexical argument! [177, n.8]). Rather, I feel there may be opportunity for greater clarity by comparing and contrasting the two views.

Secondly, Walton evidences a bias against New Testament contributions to Old Testament studies that is difficult to overlook. For example, he writes, "The human author gives us access to the divine message. It has always been so. If *additional divine meaning* is intended, we must seek out another inspired voice to give us that additional divine meaning, and such an inspired voice can only be found in the Bible's authors" (106, italics added). To be fair, Walton is not here discussing the New Testament contributions to our understanding of Genesis. However, I believe that in this statement he is tipping his hermeneutical hand. Earlier he writes, "By New Testament times there was already a growing interest in material aspects and so also a greater likelihood that texts would address material questions" (97). He makes passing reference to Hebrews 11:3 ("By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible"), but does not give sufficient attention to how the author could legitimately infer this from Genesis 1. If Walton believes this is a case of "additional divine meaning," so be it. However, he should state this explicitly rather than leave the reader to wonder.

My point is that I think Walton's argument would be enhanced by engaging the New Testament witness more rigorously. For example, there is profound room for exploration in the doctrine of the incarnation, as the biblical authors are more concerned with teaching that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (read "function" and "temple") than with postulating how the divine essence could unite with a virgin's egg (read "material").

Conclusion

In this review article, we have investigated the viability of Walton's "cosmic temple inauguration" view of creation. I believe that, on the whole, he makes a compelling case. Viewing Genesis 1 in terms of functional ontology and temple inauguration helps demonstrate the coherence of the text and its profound theological message. Though his view could use refining by interacting with Sailhamer and the New Testament handling of Genesis 1, I would commend it for the consideration of the church.

This leads me to my closing comment. How could I preach Genesis 1 from this "cosmic temple inauguration" perspective? Walton incorporates substantial ANE parallels in the preliminary sections of his work, and it is clear that he believes the ancient literature can give

us a fresh perspective on the text. Should this ever make its way into the pulpit? I would argue that it should not. In other words, if I were to preach Genesis 1 from a functional perspective, I would want to labor with my people to see it *in the biblical text*. Though there is certainly a place for historical background study, I believe it belongs in a book like Walton's or a Sunday School discussion and should rarely, if ever, feature in a sermon. Admittedly, I am still wrestling through this (I realize, for example, that a similar argument could be made against original language comments). I probably assume the contributions of secondary literature more than I realize, but it seems to me that an uncritical appeal to these sources runs the risk of detracting from the primary business of helping people study the Bible for themselves. In the case of Genesis 1, I believe the biblical text could carry the argument on its own and would render ANE discussion unnecessary at the least.

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THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS OF CHRISTIANITY

The Apostles' Creed (Old Roman Form)

I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; [and] the resurrection of the flesh.

The Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons, or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty is co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such is also the Holy Spirit. The Father is uncreate, the Son uncreate, the Holy Spirit uncreate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal; just as there are not three uncreates or three infinities, but one uncreate and one infinite. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately to be both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but all three persons are co-eternal with each other and co-equal. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both trinity and unity and unity in trinity must be worshipped. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.

It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.

He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and He is man from His mother's substance, born in time. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh, equal to the Father in respect of His divinity, less than the Father in respect of His humanity.

Who, although He is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ. He is one, however, not by the transformation of His divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of His humanity into God; one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person. For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead; at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds; and those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved. Amen

The Definition of Chalcedon

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.