



AMERICAN  
THEOLOGICAL  
INQUIRY

A BIENNIAL JOURNAL

*OF*

Theology, Culture & History

*Apostolorum, Nicæno,  
Quicunque, Chalcedonense*

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Volume 6, No. 1.

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MINNEAPOLIS

2013.

# AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

A Biannual Journal  
of  
Theology, Culture & History

ISSN: 1941-7624

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To provide an inter-tradition forum for scholars who affirm the historic Ecumenical Creeds of Christianity to communicate contemporary theologies, developments, commentaries, and insights pertaining to theology, culture, and history toward elevating Western theological discourse. ATI seeks a *critical* function as much or more so as a quasi-ecumenical one. ATI's intention is not to erase or weaken the distinctives of various ecclesial traditions, but to widen the dialogue and increase inter-tradition understanding while mutually affirming Christ's power to transform culture and the importance of strengthening Western Christianity with special reference to her historic, creedal roots.

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Volume 6, No. 1., January 15, 2013.  
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Minneapolis, Minnesota

# AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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BAPTIST COLLEGE  
*Te Kareti Iriiri O Carey*

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## PATRISTIC READING

St. Basil on Atheism and Creation

Hexaemeron, 1.2-11

2 ... The philosophers of Greece have made much ado to explain nature, and not one of their systems has remained firm and unshaken, each being overturned by its successor. It is vain to refute them; they are sufficient in themselves to destroy one another. Those who were too ignorant to rise to a knowledge of a God, could not allow that an intelligent cause presided at the birth of the Universe; a primary error that involved them in sad consequences. Some had recourse to material principles and attributed the origin of the Universe to the elements of the world. Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and ducts, form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance. To guard us against this error the writer on the creation, from the very first words, enlightens our understanding with the name of God; "In the beginning God created." What a glorious order! He first establishes a beginning, so that it might not be supposed that the world never had a beginning. Then he adds "Created" to show that which was made was a very small part of the power of the Creator. In the same way that the potter, after having made with equal pains a great number of vessels, has not exhausted either his art or his talent; thus the Maker of the Universe, whose creative power, far from being bounded by one world, could extend to the infinite, needed only the impulse of His will to bring the immensities of the visible world into being. If then the world has a beginning, and if it has been created, enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was the Creator: or rather, in the fear that human reasonings may make you wander from the truth, Moses has anticipated enquiry by engraving in our hearts, as a seal and a safeguard, the awful name of God: "In the beginning God created"—It is He, beneficent Nature, Goodness without measure, a worthy object of love for all beings endowed with reason, the beauty the most to be desired, the origin of all that exists, the source of life, intellectual light, impenetrable wisdom, it is He who "in the beginning created heaven and earth."

3. Do not then imagine, O man! that the visible world is without a beginning; and because the celestial bodies move in a circular course, and it is difficult for our senses to define the point where the circle begins, do not believe that bodies impelled by a circular movement are, from their nature, without a beginning. Without doubt the circle (I mean the plane figure described by a single line) is beyond our perception, and it is impossible for us to find out where it begins or where it ends; but we ought not on this account to believe it to be without a beginning. Although we are not sensible of it, it really begins at some point where the draughtsman has begun to draw it at a certain radius from the centre. Thus seeing that figures which move in a circle always return upon themselves, without for a single instant interrupting the regularity of their course, do not vainly imagine to yourselves that the world has neither beginning nor end. "For the fashion of this world passeth away" and "Heaven and earth shall pass away." The dogmas of the end, and of the renewing of the

world, are announced beforehand in these short words put at the head of the inspired history. "In the beginning God made." That which was begun in time is condemned to come to an end in time. If there has been a beginning do not doubt of the end. Of what use then are geometry—the calculations of arithmetic—the study of solids and far-famed astronomy, this laborious vanity, if those who pursue them imagine that this visible world is co-eternal with the Creator of all things, with God Himself; if they attribute to this limited world, which has a material body, the same glory as to the incomprehensible and invisible nature; if they cannot conceive that a whole, of which the parts are subject to corruption and change, must of necessity end by itself submitting to the fate of its parts? But they have become "vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Some have affirmed that heaven co-exists with God from all eternity; others that it is God Himself without beginning or end, and the cause of the particular arrangement of all things.

4. One day, doubtless, their terrible condemnation will be the greater for all this worldly wisdom, since, seeing so clearly into vain sciences, they have wilfully shut their eyes to the knowledge of the truth. These men who measure the distances of the stars and describe them, both those of the North, always shining brilliantly in our view, and those of the southern pole visible to the inhabitants of the South, but unknown to us; who divide the Northern zone and the circle of the Zodiac into an infinity of parts, who observe with exactitude the course of the stars, their fixed places, their declensions, their return and the time that each takes to make its revolution; these men, I say, have discovered all except one thing: the fact that God is the Creator of the universe, and the just Judge who rewards all the actions of life according to their merit. They have not known how to raise themselves to the idea of the consummation of all things, the consequence of the doctrine of judgment, and to see that the world must change if souls pass from this life to a new life. In reality, as the nature of the present life presents an affinity to this world, so in the future life our souls will enjoy a lot conformable to their new condition. But they are so far from applying these truths, that they do but laugh when we announce to them the end of all things and the regeneration of the age. Since the beginning naturally precedes that which is derived from it, the writer, of necessity, when speaking to us of things which had their origin in time, puts at the head of his narrative these words—"In the beginning God created."

5. It appears, indeed, that even before this world an order of things existed of which our mind can form an idea, but of which we can say nothing, because it is too lofty a subject for men who are but beginners and are still babes in knowledge. The birth of the world was preceded by a condition of things suitable for the exercise of supernatural powers, outstripping the limits of time, eternal and infinite. The Creator and Demiurge of the universe perfected His works in it, spiritual light for the happiness of all who love the Lord, intellectual and invisible natures, all the orderly arrangement of pure intelligences who are beyond the reach of our mind and of whom we cannot even discover the names. They fill the essence of this invisible world, as Paul teaches us. "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" or virtues or hosts of angels or the dignities of archangels. To this world at last it was necessary to add a new world, both a school and training place where the souls of men should be taught and a home for beings destined to be born and to die. Thus was created, of a nature analogous to that of this world and the animals and plants which live thereon, the succession of time, for ever pressing on and



passing away and never stopping in its course. Is not this the nature of time, where the past is no more, the future does not exist, and the present escapes before being recognised? And such also is the nature of the creature which lives in time,—condemned to grow or to perish without rest and without certain stability. It is therefore fit that the bodies of animals and plants, obliged to follow a sort of current, and carried away by the motion which leads them to birth or to death, should live in the midst of surroundings whose nature is in accord with beings subject to change.

Thus the writer who wisely tells us of the birth of the Universe does not fail to put these words at the head of the narrative. “In the beginning God created;” that is to say, in the beginning of time. Therefore, if he makes the world appear in the beginning, it is not a proof that its birth has preceded that of all other things that were made. He only wishes to tell us that, after the invisible and intellectual world, the visible world, the world of the senses, began to exist.

The first movement is called beginning. “To do right is the beginning of the good way.” Just actions are truly the first steps towards a happy life. Again, we call “beginning” the essential and first part from which a thing proceeds, such as the foundation of a house, the keel of a vessel; it is in this sense that it is said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” that is to say that piety is, as it were, the groundwork and foundation of perfection. Art is also the beginning of the works of artists, the skill of Bezaleel began the adornment of the tabernacle. Often even the good which is the final cause is the beginning of actions. Thus the approbation of God is the beginning of almsgiving, and the end laid up for us in the promises the beginning of all virtuous efforts.

6. Such being the different senses of the word beginning, see if we have not all the meanings here. You may know the epoch when the formation of this world began, it, ascending into the past, you endeavour to discover the first day. You will thus find what was the first movement of time; then that the creation of the heavens and of the earth were like the foundation and the groundwork, and afterwards that an intelligent reason, as the word beginning indicates, presided in the order of visible things. You will finally discover that the world was not conceived by chance and without reason, but for an useful end and for the great advantage of all beings, since it is really the school where reasonable souls exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God; since by the sight of visible and sensible things the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things. “For,” as the Apostle says, “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.” Perhaps these words “In the beginning God created” signify the rapid and imperceptible moment of creation. The beginning, in effect, is indivisible and instantaneous. The beginning of the road is not yet the road, and that of the house is not yet the house; so the beginning of time is not yet time and not even the least particle of it. If some objector tell us that the beginning is a time, he ought then, as he knows well, to submit it to the division of time—a beginning, a middle and an end. Now it is ridiculous to imagine a beginning of a beginning. Further, if we divide the beginning into two, we make two instead of one, or rather make several, we really make an infinity, for all that which is divided is divisible to the infinite. Thus then, if it is said, “In the beginning God created,” it is to teach us that at the will of God the world arose in less than an instant, and it is to convey this meaning more clearly than other interpreters have said:

“God made summarily” that is to say all at once and in a moment. But enough concerning the beginning, if only to put a few points out of many.

7. Among arts, some have in view production, some practice, others theory. The object of the last is the exercise of thought, that of the second, the motion of the body. Should it cease, all stops; nothing more is to be seen. Thus dancing and music have nothing behind; they have no object but themselves. In creative arts on the contrary the work lasts after the operation. Such is architecture—such are the arts which work in wood and brass and weaving, all those indeed which, even when the artisan has disappeared, serve to show an industrious intelligence and to cause the architect, the worker in brass or the weaver, to be admired on account of his work. Thus, then, to show that the world is a work of art displayed for the beholding of all people; to make them know Him who created it, Moses does not use another word. “In the beginning,” he says “God created.” He does not say “God worked,” “God formed,” but “God created.” Among those who have imagined that the world co-existed with God from all eternity, many have denied that it was created by God, but say that it exists spontaneously, as the shadow of this power. God, they say, is the cause of it, but an involuntary cause, as the body is the cause of the shadow and the flame is the cause of the brightness. It is to correct this error that the prophet states, with so much precision, “In the beginning God created.” He did not make the thing itself the cause of its existence. Being good, He made it an useful work. Being wise, He made it everything that was most beautiful. Being powerful He made it very great. Moses almost shows us the finger of the supreme artisan taking possession of the substance of the universe, forming the different parts in one perfect accord, and making a harmonious symphony result from the whole.

“In the beginning God made heaven and earth.” By naming the two extremes, he suggests the substance of the whole world, according to heaven the privilege of seniority, and putting earth in the second rank. All intermediate beings were created at the same time as the extremities. Thus, although there is no mention of the elements, fire, water and air, imagine that they were all compounded together, and you will find water, air and fire, in the earth. For fire leaps out from stones; iron which is dug from the earth produces under friction fire in plentiful measure. A marvellous fact! Fire shut up in bodies lurks there hidden without harming them, but no sooner is it released than it consumes that which has hitherto preserved it. The earth contains water, as diggers of wells teach us. It contains air too, as is shown by the vapours that it exhales under the sun’s warmth when it is damp. Now, as according to their nature, heaven occupies the higher and earth the lower position in space, (one sees, in fact, that all which is light ascends towards heaven, and heavy substances fall to the ground); as therefore height and depth are the points the most opposed to each other it is enough to mention the most distant parts to signify the inclusion of all which fills up intervening Space. Do not ask, then, for an enumeration of all the elements; guess, from what Holy Scripture indicates, all that is passed over in silence.

8. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” If we were to wish to discover the essence of each of the beings which are offered for our contemplation, or come under our senses, we should be drawn away into long digressions, and the solution of the problem would require more words than I possess, to examine fully the matter. To spend time on such points would not prove to be to the edification of the Church. Upon the essence of the heavens we are contented with what Isaiah says, for, in simple language, he

gives us sufficient idea of their nature, "The heaven was made like smoke," that is to say, He created a subtle substance, without solidity or density, from which to form the heavens. As to the form of them we also content ourselves with the language of the same prophet, when praising God "that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." In the same way, as concerns the earth, let us resolve not to torment ourselves by trying to find out its essence, not to tire our reason by seeking for the substance which it conceals. Do not let us seek for any nature devoid of qualities by the conditions of its existence, but let us know that all the phenomena with which we see it clothed regard the conditions of its existence and complete its essence. Try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses, and you will arrive at nothing. Take away black, cold, weight, density, the qualities which concern taste, in one word all these which we see in it, and the substance vanishes.

If I ask you to leave these vain questions, I will not expect you to try and find out the earth's point of support. The mind would reel on beholding its reasonings losing themselves without end. Do you say that the earth reposes on a bed of air? How, then, can this soft substance, without consistency, resist the enormous weight which presses upon it? How is it that it does not slip away in all directions, to avoid the sinking weight, and to spread itself over the mass which overwhelms it? Do you suppose that water is the foundation of the earth? You will then always have to ask yourself how it is that so heavy and opaque a body does not pass through the water; how a mass of such a weight is held up by a nature weaker than itself. Then you must seek a base for the waters, and you will be in much difficulty to say upon what the water itself rests.

9. Do you suppose that a heavier body prevents the earth from falling into the abyss? Then you must consider that this support needs itself a support to prevent it from falling. Can we imagine one? Our reason again demands yet another support, and thus we shall fall into the infinite, always imagining a base for the base which we have already found. And the further we advance in this reasoning the greater force we are obliged to give to this base, so that it may be able to support all the mass weighing upon it. Put then a limit to your thought, so that your curiosity in investigating the incomprehensible may not incur the reproaches of Job, and you be not asked by him, "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?" If ever you hear in the Psalms, "I bear up the pillars of it;" see in these pillars the power which sustains it. Because what means this other passage, "He hath founded it upon the sea," if not that the water is spread all around the earth? How then can water, the fluid element which flows down every declivity, remain suspended without ever flowing? You do not reflect that the idea of the earth suspended by itself throws your reason into a like but even greater difficulty, since from its nature it is heavier. But let us admit that the earth rests upon itself, or let us say that it rides the waters, we must still remain faithful to thought of true religion and recognise that all is sustained by the Creator's power. Let us then reply to ourselves, and let us reply to those who ask us upon what support this enormous mass rests, "In His hands are the ends of the earth." It is a doctrine as infallible for our own information as profitable for our hearers.

10. There are inquirers into nature who with a great display of words give reasons for the immobility of the earth. Placed, they say, in the middle of the universe and not being able to incline more to one side than the other because its centre is everywhere the same distance from the surface, it necessarily rests upon itself; since a weight which is everywhere equal

cannot lean to either side. It is not, they go on, without reason or by chance that the earth occupies the centre of the universe. It is its natural and necessary position. As the celestial body occupies the higher extremity of space all heavy bodies, they argue, that we may suppose to have fallen from these high regions, will be carried from all directions to the centre, and the point towards which the parts are tending will evidently be the one to which the whole mass will be thrust together. If stones, wood, all terrestrial bodies, fall from above downwards, this must be the proper and natural place of the whole earth. If, on the contrary, a light body is separated from the centre, it is evident that it will ascend towards the higher regions. Thus heavy bodies move from the top to the bottom, and following this reasoning, the bottom is none other than the centre of the world. Do not then be surprised that the world never falls: it occupies the centre of the universe, its natural place. By necessity it is obliged to remain in its place, unless a movement contrary to nature should displace it. If there is anything in this system which might appear probable to you, keep your admiration for the source of such perfect order, for the wisdom of God. Grand phenomena do not strike us the less when we have discovered something of their wonderful mechanism. Is it otherwise here? At all events let us prefer the simplicity of faith to the demonstrations of reason.

11. We might say the same thing of the heavens. With what a noise of words the sages of this world have discussed their nature! Some have said that heaven is composed of four elements as being tangible and visible, and is made up of earth on account of its power of resistance, with fire because it is striking to the eye, with air and water on account of the mixture. Others have rejected this system as improbable, and introduced into the world, to form the heavens, a fifth element after their own fashioning. There exists, they say, an æthereal body which is neither fire, air, earth, nor water, nor in one word any simple body. These simple bodies have their own natural motion in a straight line, light bodies upwards and heavy bodies downwards; now this motion upwards and downwards is not the same as circular motion; there is the greatest possible difference between straight and circular motion. It therefore follows that bodies whose motion is so various must vary also in their essence. But, it is not even possible to suppose that the heavens should be formed of primitive bodies which we call elements, because the reunion of contrary forces could not produce an even and spontaneous motion, when each of the simple bodies is receiving a different impulse from nature. Thus it is a labour to maintain composite bodies in continual movement, because it is impossible to put even a single one of their movements in accord and harmony with all those that are in discord; since what is proper to the light particle, is in warfare with that of a heavier one. If we attempt to rise we are stopped by the weight of the terrestrial element; if we throw ourselves down we violate the igneous part of our being in dragging it down contrary to its nature. Now this struggle of the elements effects their dissolution. A body to which violence is done and which is placed in opposition to nature, after a short but energetic resistance, is soon dissolved into as many parts as it had elements, each of the constituent parts returning to its natural place. It is the force of these reasons, say the inventors of the fifth kind of body for the genesis of heaven and the stars, which constrained them to reject the system of their predecessors and to have recourse to their own hypothesis. But yet another fine speaker arises and disperses and destroys this theory to give predominance to an idea of his own invention.

Do not let us undertake to follow them for fear of falling into like frivolities; let them refute each other, and, without disquieting ourselves about essence, let us say with Moses

“God created the heavens and the earth.” Let us glorify the supreme Artificer for all that was wisely and skillfully made; by the beauty of visible things let us raise ourselves to Him who is above all beauty; by the grandeur of bodies, sensible and limited in their nature, let us conceive of the infinite Being whose immensity and omnipotence surpass all the efforts of the imagination. Because, although we ignore the nature of created things, the objects which on all sides attract our notice are so marvellous, that the most penetrating mind cannot attain to the knowledge of the least of the phenomena of the world, either to give a suitable explanation of it or to render due praise to the Creator, to Whom belong all glory, all honour and all power world without end. Amen.



## HUMILITY WITHOUT HUMILIATION: A CAPACITATION FOR LIFE IN ELFLAND IN THE THOUGHT OF G. K. CHESTERTON

David W. Fagerberg\*

For those of you who like a road map, here is my destination: most of us avoid the steep ascent to the mountaintop of humility because to reach it we must go through the valley of humiliation. So long as there is an ounce of egotism in us, humility will feel like humiliation. But Chesterton would have us realize that humility is in fact ingredient to happiness, and by its practice we can be capacitated to live in a state of wonder that he called “Elfland.” He writes,

Humility is the thing which is for ever renewing the earth and the stars. It is humility, and not duty, which preserves the stars from wrong, from the unpardonable wrong of casual resignation; it is through humility that the most ancient heavens for us are fresh and strong. The curse that came before history has laid on us all a tendency to be weary of wonders.<sup>1</sup>

What we need is to be delivered from that curse, to not be weary of wonders, to find that humility is the travel companion we need in order to journey from creation to the Creator.

For those of you who like a road map, here is the route we will be taking to our destination. I will organize into four segments Chesterton’s scattered clues to our transfiguration: first, humility comes from growing smaller; second, its brothers are wonder and gratitude; third, its sisters are romance and adventure; and fourth, its mother is God.

### 1. The Advantage of the Pygmy

In the preface to a collection of essays entitled *Tremendous Trifles*, Chesterton invites us to be “ocular athletes” by having us “exercise the eye until it learns to see startling facts that run across the landscape as plain as a painted fence.”<sup>2</sup> To make his point, in the first essay he tells a parable of two little boys whose chief playground was the front garden: “One morning while they were at play in these romantic grounds, a passing individual, probably the milkman, leaned over the railing and engaged them in philosophical conversation.”<sup>3</sup> This being a Chesterton parable, the milkman was also magical, and he granted them anything they asked for. The first boy, Paul, explained that he had long wished to be a giant so the milkman produced a wand and waved it, and in an instant the front yard in which Paul had been standing was like a tiny doll’s house at his feet: “He went striding away with his head above the clouds to visit Niagara and the Himalayas. But when he came to the Himalayas, he found they were quite small and silly-looking, and when he found Niagara it was no bigger than the tap turned on in the bathroom. He wandered round the world for several minutes

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\* David W. Fagerberg is Associate Professor of Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of several books, including: *The Size of Chesterton’s Catholicism*, *On Liturgical Asceticism*, and *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?*

<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* in *G. K. Chesterton Collected Works*, Vol. I. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 128.

<sup>2</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1920), vi.

<sup>3</sup> Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles*, 2.

trying to find something really large and finding everything small, till in sheer boredom he lay down on four or five prairies and fell asleep.”<sup>4</sup> Then an intellectual backwoodsman came out of his hut carrying an axe in one hand and a book of Neo-Catholic Philosophy in the other, in which book he found the statement that “the evil of pride consists in being out of proportion to the universe.” So, “the backwoodsman put down his book, took his axe and, working eight hours a day for about a week, cut the giant’s head off; and there was an end of him.”<sup>5</sup>

Peter made the opposite request, as usually happens in parables so that we can understand the consequences of our choice.

He said he had long wished to be a pigmy about half an inch high; and of course he immediately became one. When the transformation was over he found himself in the midst of an immense plain, covered with a tall green jungle and above which, at intervals, rose strange trees each with a head like the sun in symbolic pictures... [Chesterton often used dandelions to make his point about mundane marvels.] There were mountains before Peter’s eyes, of romantic and impossible shapes and he has not come to the end of his adventure yet.<sup>6</sup>

Chesterton’s conclusion is threefold. First, he thinks that “Peter and Paul are the two primary influences upon European literature to-day.” I leave for others more qualified than I to fill in the authors Chesterton might have meant. Second, he states proudly, “I need scarcely say that I am the pigmy. The only excuse for the scraps that follow is that they show what can be achieved with a commonplace existence and the sacred spectacles of exaggeration.” And third, “I will sit still and let the marvels and the adventures settle on me like flies. There are plenty of them, I assure you. The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.”<sup>7</sup> This is one of Chesterton’s most effective and frequent maneuvers in his writings: as we stammer about what we would change in the world so it could make us happy, he traces the problem to a different source, to something gone wrong inside us. The world does not want for wonders, but we need to recultivate our capacity for wonder.

Size is a metaphor Chesterton uses in order to grasp what it means to be humble: “Alice must grow small if she is to be Alice in Wonderland.”<sup>8</sup> “Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are – of immeasurable stature.”<sup>9</sup> To see reality we must come down to where reality is, and this is an act of humility. To feel the abounding good in all things requires what Chesterton calls a “process of mental asceticism.”<sup>10</sup> This is a worthwhile reminder to members of the academy who occupy a seat in the ivory tower and sometimes look down upon the citizens below:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>8</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* in *G. K. Chesterton Collected Works*, Vol. I. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 298.

<sup>9</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1902), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 102.



Looking down on things may be a delightful experience, only there is nothing, from a mountain to a cabbage, that is really *seen* when it is seen from a balloon. The philosopher of the ego sees everything, no doubt, from a high and rarified heaven; only he sees everything foreshortened or deformed. Whatever virtues a triumphant egoism really leads to, no one can reasonably pretend that it leads to knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

It may be difficult to appreciate the average father because he is not a Michelangelo or Rembrandt. But Chesterton defends the little homeowner:

The average man cannot cut clay into the shape of a man; but he can cut earth into the shape of a garden; and though he arranges it with red geraniums and blue potatoes in alternate straight lines, he is still an artist; because he has chosen. The average man cannot paint the sunset whose colors he admires; but he can paint his own house with what color he chooses, and though he paints it pea green with pink spots, he is still an artist; because that is his choice.<sup>12</sup>

It may be difficult to appreciate the average mother if she is not a professional woman. But Chesterton defends the home where she is as “Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays;” and as a whole shopping mall in another area, “providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes, and books;” and as “Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene.” Further:

I can understand how [being a mother] might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people’s children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one’s own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone?<sup>13</sup>

The average home has an inside bigger than its outside, for within the four walls is opportunity for laughter and love and creativity and prayer. Despite the fact that Caesar or Genghis Khan are not interested in little homes and little lives as they gallop by on their way to conquer empty stretches of empire, this is precisely the world which rivets Chesterton’s attention. The plan of God, the mind of man, the glory of love, and eternal truths all fit within the home, if we are humble enough to discover them there. It is, Chesterton says in one place, where “a fresh free will [can be] added to the wills of the world.”<sup>14</sup> It is, he says in another place, “the one anarchist institution. That is to say, it is older than law, and stands outside the State.”<sup>15</sup> The family is older than the Fall into sin, and the scholastics called marriage the first sacrament God crafted for man and woman.

Enjoyment depends upon humility, upon making ourselves smaller:

The pagan set out, with admirable sense, to enjoy himself. By the end of his

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>12</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* in G. K. Chesterton *Collected Works*, Vol. IV. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>14</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows* in G. K. Chesterton *Collected Works*, Vol. III. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 441.

<sup>15</sup> Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*, 67.

civilization he had discovered that a man cannot enjoy himself and continue to enjoy anything else. Now, the psychological discovery is merely this, that whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by extending our ego to infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by reducing our ego to zero.<sup>16</sup>

Humility does not mean putting on a pained face as we deny the world; to the contrary, humility means we find a hundred thousand things to enjoy because we no longer get in the way of them: “To the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sun is really a sun; to the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sea is really a sea.”<sup>17</sup> Humility gives us one flash of what Adam and Eve must have seen when they looked at the sun setting over Eden and knew it had been ordained so by God.

## 2. The Twin Brothers of Wonder and Gratitude

Recovering our proper proportionality to the universe will awaken wonder and gratitude. They are like two twins who look so alike that you sometimes call one by the other’s name. Gratitude enables wonder, but it is also the result of wonder:

If we saw the sun for the first time it would be the most fearful and beautiful of meteors. Now that we see it for the hundredth time we call it, in the hideous and blasphemous phrase of Wordsworth, ‘the light of common day.’ We are inclined to increase our claims. We are inclined to demand six suns, to demand a blue sun, to demand a green sun. Humility is perpetually putting us back in the primal darkness. There all light is lightning, startling and instantaneous. Until we understand that original dark, in which we have neither sight nor expectation, we can give no hearty and childlike praise to the splendid sensationalism of things.<sup>18</sup>

Elfland operates with a conditional joy which says the proper form of thanks to this marvelous world “is some form of humility and restraint: we should thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them.”<sup>19</sup> It says “Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman.”<sup>20</sup> Fail at this gratitude, and neither six suns nor six wives will make you any happier; fail at this wonder, and a green sun would not please you any more than a red rose. A hundred more things will not solve the problem of unhappiness if we are unable to be happy with one of those things. “The aim of life is appreciation,” writes Chesterton. “There is no sense in not appreciating things; and there is no sense in having more of them if you have less appreciation of them.”<sup>21</sup> If a man’s mouth is taped shut, no number of pies thrown in his face will feed him; and if a man’s capacity for appreciation is gagged, no number of whiskies or wives thrown in his face will bring him happiness. Chesterton’s diagnosis: “The real difficulty of man is to enjoy enjoyment.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chesterton, *Heretics*, 127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 268.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>21</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography* in *G. K. Chesterton Collected Works*, Vol. XVI. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 322.

<sup>22</sup> Chesterton, *The Autobiography*, 323.

Sever humility from its twin brothers of gratitude and wonder, and you will produce a pinched and painful and false kind of humility. Most people believe that humility is a matter of trying (usually unsuccessfully) to think of themselves as worse than they are, to deny their accomplishments and regret the rank to which they have risen, somehow denigrating themselves. However, this is not true humility; it is false modesty. We don't believe it ourselves, and neither does God. He would rather sharpen our vision. God is our spiritual ophthalmologist.

Religion has had to provide that longest and strangest telescope – the telescope through which we could see the star upon which we dwelt. For the mind and eyes of the average man this world is as lost as Eden and as sunken as Atlantis. There runs a strange law through the length of human history – that men are continually tending to undervalue their environment, to undervalue their happiness, to undervalue themselves. The great sin of mankind, the sin typified by the fall of Adam, is the tendency, not towards pride, but towards this weird and horrible humility.<sup>23</sup>

Humility itself must be brought back from this weird and horrible state, and the hammer and tong that will reshape it are wonder and gratitude. Christianity is not an anthropological pessimism, which beats us about the head until we think less of ourselves than is true. Christianity will wash pride clean from envy, purifying it by love. And as every lover knows, there is no humiliation in surrendering to one's beloved. It is not a humiliating position to bend the knee and tie the shoelace of a child, or bend the knee to propose to one's wife, or bend the knee in prayer. Such a humble posture is simply getting in exactly the right position.

### 3. The Twin Sisters of Humility: Romance and Adventure

If we mistake the character of humility, then we miss the paradoxical combinations it can take with other virtues. If we think humility makes a person passive, limp, uninteresting, boring in demeanor and depressing in speech, then we will find it hard to champion humility in our own lives, or that of others. To remedy this, Chesterton links humility to pride in a way that neither the ancient pagan nor the modern moralist can understand. (“It is impossible without humility to enjoy anything – even pride”<sup>24</sup>). When we start with the recollection that we do not merit any of our graces, and then “the soul is suddenly released for incredible voyages. ... Thus comes the thing called Romance, a purely Christian product. A man cannot deserve adventures; he cannot earn dragons and hippogriffs. The mediaeval Europe which asserted humility gained Romance; the civilization which gained Romance has gained the habitable globe.”<sup>25</sup> Chesterton has connected humility to its sisters of romance and adventure, who accompany us on our journey to Elfland:

It is the humble man who does the big things. It is the humble man who does the bold things. It is the humble man who has the sensational sights vouchsafed to him. Adventures are to those to whom they are most unexpected—that is, most romantic.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 234.

<sup>25</sup> Chesterton, *Heretics*, 71-72.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Chesterton thinks the old eulogy that said “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed,” had it exactly wrong. “The truth is ‘Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall be gloriously surprised.’ The man who expects nothing sees redder roses than common men can see, and greener grass, and a more startling sun.”<sup>27</sup> What else do we want in an adventure story of romance than a world more fiercely inspiring than the one that has been grayed over by the cataracts of sin on our eyes? When that happens, we are elevated. Humility is uplifting. Humility is hilarious.

Modern investigators of miraculous history have solemnly admitted that a characteristic of the great saints is their power of ‘levitation.’ They might go further; a characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity. Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly.... [But] the kings in their heavy gold and proud in their robes of purple will all of their nature sink downwards, for pride cannot rise to levity or levitation. Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity.<sup>28</sup>

This underscores a point Chesterton frequently makes about the difference between pagan virtues and the Christianized virtues that rescued them for us: “Paganism declared that virtue was in a balance; Christianity declared it was in a conflict; the collision of two passions apparently opposite. Of course they were not really inconsistent; but they were such that it was hard to hold simultaneously.”<sup>29</sup> In *Orthodoxy* he offers a series of examples of how “Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, “Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.”<sup>31</sup> Or, “We must be much more angry with theft than before, and yet much kinder to thieves than before.”<sup>32</sup> Or, “It is true that the historic Church has at once emphasised celibacy and emphasised the family; has at once (if one may put it so) been fiercely for having children and fiercely for not having children. It has kept them side by side like two strong colours, red and white, like the red and white upon the shield of St. George. It has always had a healthy hatred of pink.”<sup>33</sup> In the pagan combination, the two colors dilute one another; in the Christian combination, you get twice as many colors, twice as many virtues, because they are both maintained. Finally, apply this act of paradoxical combination to humility and pride: “In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before.”<sup>34</sup>

The average pagan, like the average agnostic, seems to think humility is found in a neutral center, like finding a pH balance between our moral acidity and alkalinity. The modest pagan is pleased with himself, but not too much so; he is content with himself, but not too much

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 325-26.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 297.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 299.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 297.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 300.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 301-2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 298.

so. It is all very proper. But this does a wrong to both pride and humility, in Chesterton's opinion.

Being a mixture of two things, it is a dilution of two things; neither is present in its full strength or contributes its full colour. This proper pride does not lift the heart does not lift the heart like the tongue of trumpets; you cannot go clad in crimson and gold for this. On the other hand, this mild rationalist modesty does not cleanse the soul with fire and make it clear like crystal; ... Thus it loses both the poetry of being proud and the poetry of being humble. Christianity sought by this same strange expedient to save both of them.<sup>35</sup>

As a result, Christianity has puzzled every generation for being simultaneously and paradoxically glorious and threadbare. It is made up of fasts and feasts, sinners and saints, penance and hope, humility and glory, Vatican purple and Franciscan brown. "Christianity thus held a thought of the dignity of man that could only be expressed in crowns rayed like the sun and fans of peacock plumage. Yet at the same time it could hold a thought about the abject smallness of man that could only be expressed in fasting and fantastic submission, in the gray ashes of St. Dominic and the white snows of St. Bernard."<sup>36</sup> Chesterton understands that the combination of glory and abasement, power and servanthood, supremacy and effacement will appear hypocritical to those who cannot maintain the paradox. It will be felt "as a piece of humbug, that a man should be very punctilious in calling himself a miserable sinner, and also very punctilious in calling himself King of France."<sup>37</sup> There are many things which cannot be combined: the King of France cannot truthfully call himself a peasant; he cannot truthfully call himself a pauper; it is doubtful he can call himself a democrat; but there is no reason why he cannot call himself both the King of France and a miserable sinner. It is most likely a fact about him, as it is for each one of us.

Out of this poised tension comes romance, as every romantic knows:

The truth is that there are no things for which men will make such herculean efforts as the things of which they know they are unworthy. There never was a man in love who did not declare that, if he strained every nerve to breaking, he was going to have his desire. And there never was a man in love who did not declare also that he ought not to have it.<sup>38</sup>

The paradox lies deep within the human heart, and Christian doctrine is the only teaching which does justice to the adventure springing forth from the human heart. It involves a precarious balance of combining opposites that must be in exact proportion, like mixing the ingredients for dynamite. In *Heretics* he gives two examples. First,

...all the beauty of a fairy-tale lies in this: that the prince has a wonder which just stops short of being fear. If he is afraid of the giant, there is an end of him; but also if he is not astonished at the giant, there is an end of the fairy-tale. The whole point

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 298.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 299.

<sup>37</sup> Chesterton, *Heretics*, 71.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

depends upon his being at once humble enough to wonder, and haughty enough to defy.<sup>39</sup>

Second,

We must have in us enough reverence for all things outside us to make us tread fearfully on the grass. We must also have enough disdain for all things outside us, to make us, on due occasion, spit at the stars. Man must have just enough faith in himself to have adventures, and just enough doubt of himself to enjoy them.<sup>40</sup>

Christian humility finds this precarious balance, and from it comes romance and adventure. “Humility will always, by preference, go clad in scarlet and gold...”<sup>41</sup>

Humility can be applied wrongly, just as we can apply our love to the wrong object, our appetite to the wrong desire, our hands to the wrong task. The capacity for humility needs the guidance of an enlightened intellect, and yet, paradoxically enough, the intellect will never become enlightened without humility—they work synergistically. And each must operate in its required sphere. We ought not be humble about the intellect’s grasp of truth, for if we are, then we will have applied humility to the wrong place. “Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed.”<sup>42</sup> This is how the old, true humility is different from the new, corrupted humility:

The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping; not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.<sup>43</sup>

Since sin has affected every part of our human nature, including our ability to be humble, therefore humility itself needed to be cleansed. And this has been Christianity’s task as it perfects nature with grace, adventure with chivalry, sentimentality with romance. It perfects humility by giving it its proper grounds, by taking the true measure of man, and by placing man over the earth but under heaven. Once this happened, the Christians felt more secure in the world than any pagan could ever boast of being. “[T]hey believed themselves rich with an irrevocable benediction which set them above the stars; and immediately they discovered humility. It was only another example of the same immutable paradox. It is always the secure who are humble.”<sup>44</sup> The source of that security, which permits humility, is our fourth and final point.

#### 4. The Mother of Humility

Chesterton saw life itself as possessing four characteristics of a fairy tale. First, it was undeserved: “Until we realize that things might not be we cannot realize that things are.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 318.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 234-5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>44</sup> Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 99.

Until we picture nonentity we underrate the victory of God.<sup>45</sup> Elfland is a string of gratuitous gifts—undeserved, unexpected, unbidden—and they all the more charming and thrilling for being so. Why we find it easier to notice that the existence of a fairy castle is undeserved than to notice it about our own house puzzles Chesterton. If someone asks in the fairytale, “‘Explain why I must not stand on my head in the fairy palace,’ the other might fairly reply, ‘Well, if it comes to that, explain the fairy palace.’ If Cinderella says, ‘How is it that I must leave the ball at twelve?’ her godmother might answer, ‘How is it that you are going there till twelve?’”<sup>46</sup> Chesterton asks the same fairytale question about his real life in the real world in an early poem:

*Evening*

Here dies another day  
During which I have had eyes, ears, hands  
And the great world round me;  
And tomorrow begins another.  
Why am I allowed two?<sup>47</sup>

Second, even if life is mysterious, it is not capricious. The ethics of Elfland seem to say: “Resist a rule if it is evil, but not merely because it is mysterious.” We cannot explain the rule, but, then again, neither can we explain the fairy palace or the pumpkin coach. Mere existence is mysterious enough, but we have forgotten this because our humility has atrophied, and that has upset our ethics. Already in his day Chesterton found that a whole generation “has been taught to talk nonsense at the top of its voice about having ‘a right to life’ and ‘a right to experience’ and ‘a right to happiness.’ The lucid thinkers who talk like this generally wind up their assertion of all these extraordinary rights, by saying that there is no such thing as right and wrong.”<sup>48</sup> The fact that life is a gift leads Chesterton to conclude that we cannot take our candy and run, as if we have a right to either the candy or our legs to run away with it.

Third, it should not be a surprise that precious realities, because they are precious, command a price. It rather led him to conclude that we “owe an obedience to whatever made us.”<sup>49</sup>

If I leave a man in my will ten talking elephants and a hundred winged horses, he cannot complain if the conditions partake of the slight eccentricity of the gift. He must not look a winged horse in the mouth . . . Surely one might pay for extraordinary joy in ordinary morals. Oscar Wilde said that sunsets were not valued because we could not pay for sunsets. But Oscar Wilde was wrong; we can pay for sunsets. We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Chesterton, *Heretics*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 260.

<sup>47</sup> Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 62.

<sup>48</sup> Chesterton, *The Autobiography*, 324-5.

<sup>49</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 268.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

And fourth, the magic in Elfland has meaning, “and meaning must have some one to mean it.”<sup>51</sup> Fittingly then, “The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.”<sup>52</sup> Here Chesterton connects the subjective state of humility to objective grounds for it. The one giving order to existence—or, if you like, the one giving the orders—is to be obeyed even if he is mysterious. Chesterton knows this will be a bone of contention, but he believes that:

For the first thing the casual critic will say is ‘What nonsense all this is; do you mean that a poet cannot be thankful for grass and wild flowers without connecting it with theology; let alone your theology?’ To which I answer, “Yes; I mean he cannot do it without connecting it with theology, unless he can do it without connecting it with thought. If he can manage to be thankful when there is nobody to be thankful to, and no good intentions to be thankful for, then he is simply taking refuge in being thoughtless in order to avoid being thankless. There can only be fairy godmothers because there are godmothers; and there can only be godmothers because there is God.”<sup>53</sup>

I submit that humility is a relational term and that it matters what its mother is. Humility is a virtue which is summoned forth by contact with something great. I am not just generally humble; I am humble before another in a relationship. And the other term of that relationship will produce different kinds of humility in me. Before the sword of Caesar I may be submissive, but my humility will be colored by fear; before my employer I may be cowed, but my humility will take the color of resentment; before an Inner Ring I wish to enter I may be deferential, but my humility will taste of envy. The higher the face before whom I am humble, the deeper will be my humility: deeper before an angel than before a man. Deeper, still, before God. Chesterton thought he would do well to associate with people who were conscious of this.

I was more and more disposed to seek out those who specialised in humility, though for them it was the door of heaven and for me the door of earth.

For nobody else specialises in that mystical mood in which the yellow star of the dandelion is startling, being something unexpected and undeserved. There are philosophies as varied as the flowers of the field, and some of them weeds and a few of them poisonous weeds. But they none of them create the psychological conditions in which I first saw, or desired to see, the flower.<sup>54</sup>

What doctrine would create the psychological conditions for this new sight, this new mind (a *meta-nous*)? Chesterton shares with us his existential doctrine of creation. For most of us, the doctrine of creation is an abstract, distant metaphysic concerning the past, but Chesterton feels it press upon him every hour of every day. When a person has started from zero, in true

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>52</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* in *G. K. Chesterton Collected Works*, Vol. II. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 75.

<sup>53</sup> Chesterton, *The Autobiography*, 325.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 324.



humility, then he enjoys all things in a more intense fashion, “for there is no way in which a man can earn a star or deserve a sunset.”<sup>55</sup>

The person who is most specialized in purified humility is the ascetic, because asceticism is a lifelong purification of humility. The ascetic’s obedience is not obsequious. His efforts chip away his selfishness, the way an artist chips away stone to reveal the statue. Ascetics are not abject; rather, these specialists in humility have discovered an infinite debt.

It may seem a paradox to say that a man may be transported with joy to discover that he is in debt ... [But] It is the key of asceticism. It is the highest and holiest of the paradoxes that the man who really knows he cannot pay his debt will be forever paying it. He will be for ever giving back what he cannot give back, and cannot be expected to give back. He will always be throwing things away into a bottomless pit of unfathomable thanks ... We are not generous enough to be ascetics; one might almost say not genial enough to be ascetics...<sup>56</sup>

Chesterton observes the same principle in romantic love, which connection to humility we have already noticed. If ever romance fell out of fashion, he thought we would find it impossible to explain the lover’s behavior.

Men will ask what selfish sort of woman it must have been who ruthlessly exacted tribute in the form of flowers, or what an avaricious creature she can have been to demand solid gold in the form of a ring; just as they ask what cruel kind of God can have demanded sacrifice and self-denial. They will have lost the clue to all that lovers have meant by love; and will not understand that it was because the thing was not demanded that it was done. The whole point about St. Francis of Assisi is that he certainly was ascetical and he certainly was not gloomy.<sup>57</sup>

Certainly not gloomy so long as an eye is trained upon the shower of gifts from God. Normally the person who admits his debt to a friend, a parent, or a spouse, is not humiliated by the admission, and neither is the ascetic. Instead, the admission purifies his religion and leads him to the altar of thanksgiving. By our daily encounter with the Creator we are reminded, like Cinderella was reminded by her fairy godmother at the stroke of midnight, that all creatures, though temporal, are pointers toward the Creator. This is the function that they serve; this is the Creator whom they serve. All the bits of creation are made as transparent to God (this is their sacramental capacity), and all the bits of creation, like water and bread and oil, yearn to be put to liturgical use by Adam’s hand (this is their sacrificial capacity). Being contingent gifts, and being good gifts, they elicit from us humility’s highest state, which is religion. Chesterton says he would better trust the sweeping vision of his good friend, George Bernard Shaw, if it was so for him.

That Mr. Shaw keeps a lifted head and a contemptuous face before the colossal panorama of empires and civilizations, this does not in itself convince one that he sees things as they are. I should be most effectively convinced that he did if I found him staring with religious astonishment at his own feet. “What are those two beautiful

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<sup>55</sup> Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 73.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 76-7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

and industrious beings,' I can imagine him murmuring to himself, 'whom I see everywhere, serving me I know not why? What fairy godmother bade them come trotting out of elfland when I was born? What god of the borderland, what barbaric god of legs, must I propitiate with fire and wine, lest they run away with me?'

The truth is, that all genuine appreciation rests on a certain mystery of humility and almost of darkness.<sup>58</sup>

If God is the mother of humility, humility also leads us back to God. It's like a supernatural water cycle in which the cause of our ascending religion is the grace that fell to earth and moistened our humility to make us capable of that religion.

It is the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve who have grown old, weary of wonders, weary of seeing the same sun, in the same sky, following the same path; but the God who choreographed its sky-dance is not bored. This God is strong enough to "exult in monotony." Humility—with its sibling brood of wonder and gratitude, romance and adventure—finds that the mother which gave it birth is an existential doctrine of creation, and it leads us back to a creating Father in Heaven who is younger than we are.

Now to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, 'Do it again'; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.<sup>59</sup>

It is a common aphorism to warn against thinking that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, and the maxim works well enough as a light tap on the shoulder of our envy. But there is one fence on whose other side I suppose the grass *was* greener, the river water sweeter, the sun brighter than a dozen of ours, and that is on the other side of the fence erected around Eden, and guarded by the fiery sword of the angel such that there is only one way back in—through the baptistery. The world was more beautiful in Adam's humble eyes than in our proud ones. Chesterton writes, "It is a strange thing that many truly spiritual men, such as General Gordon, have actually spent some hours in speculating upon the precise location of the Garden of Eden. Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 68-9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-4.

<sup>60</sup> Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 3.

Here is the one place where I will grant the subjectivist his point. He is wrong when he says morality is in the eye of the beholder, or that truth is different in every man's eye, but the subjectivist is right when he says that the problem is not that God's good cosmos has degenerated. The problem is that we have suffered a macular degeneration of our spiritual eyes, and the path of humility is needed in order to recover clear ones.



## METAPHYSICS AS HISTORY: ON KNOX ON COLLINGWOOD

Hugo Anthony Meynell, F.R.S.C.\*

R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943) was one of the most original thinkers of his generation. At the time he taught and wrote—Oxford in the 1920s and 30s—analytical philosophy, under the leadership of Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, was beginning to establish its ascendancy in English universities and was making professional philosophers proud of the irrelevance of their work to what most people would think were burning questions of morality, politics, and the living of one's life. The movement was justifiably opposed to undue pretentiousness in philosophy; it also disliked system-building, was friendly both to science and common sense, and had more or less contempt for the "idealism" that had prevailed among the previous two generations or so of English-speaking philosophers.

Collingwood was vehemently opposed to these new fashions. Though hardly an idealist himself, at least in his mature thought, he had great respect for such paradigmatic cases of idealism as Hegel and F. H. Bradley, and for such system-builders among his contemporaries as A. N. Whitehead and Samuel Alexander. He always thought that a philosopher should attempt to construct a system, and maintained—as philosophers of earlier times had generally done—that philosophy ought to be relevant to the general problems of human living. He argued that the reasons generally given or assumed for adopting the contradictory view were spurious. If philosophers could not provide, for example, sound reasons for being a liberal democrat rather than a fascist in the Europe of the 1930s, things had come to a pretty pass.

Collingwood was generally regarded as a brilliant but eccentric reactionary by his colleagues. Still, in the wake of a widespread impression at the present time that "analytical philosophy" in general—however broadly conceived and whether taken in its positivist or ordinary-language form—has had its day, Collingwood's work is being taken with steadily-increasing seriousness. There is now an international society devoted to the study of his work.

Collingwood considered T. M. (Malcolm) Knox his principal disciple and, as it were, heir-apparent. Knox therefore seemed just the right person to prepare Collingwood's *The Idea of Nature* and *The Idea of History* for publication after his untimely death. Within the circle of Collingwood's devotees, among whom I certainly count myself, Knox is not a much-favored figure. Yet I believe there is something to be learned from his view that Collingwood underwent a conversion to "radical historicism" between 1936 and 1939 and that this change of viewpoint was importantly mistaken. I also maintain that, if adjusted to meet Knox's points, Collingwood's thought tends to approximate to the "transcendental Thomism" outstandingly exemplified in the work of Bernard Lonergan. The historically relativist tendencies in Collingwood's later work, to which Knox rightly took exception, have been hailed in some quarters as anticipating elements in the thinking of the later

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Wittgenstein and Thomas Kuhn. I find this an ambiguous recommendation. I should say immediately that I hold no brief for Knox's editorial practices; nor for the pseudo-respectability which is said to have prevented him from consulting Collingwood's second wife Kate, on matters which could have been relevant to his editorial task.<sup>1</sup>

## I

As Knox sees the matter, though Collingwood always claimed that philosophy should be systematic, his own writings make up not so much a system as a series of systems, of which the first, up to and including *Speculum Mentis* (1924)<sup>2</sup>, was considered immature by Collingwood himself. The second begins with *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933), and continues with *The Idea of Nature*, which dates on the whole from 1934,<sup>3</sup> and much of *The Idea of History* (from 1936).<sup>4</sup> The final phase is represented by the *Autobiography* (1939), the *Essay on Metaphysics* (1940), and *The New Leviathan* (1942). *The Principles of Art* (1938) has some features redolent of the second phase, some of the third.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to the transition from the second phase to the third, is the development of Collingwood's conception of the relation between philosophy and history. In the *Autobiography*, he said that his aim as a philosopher had been to bring about a *rapprochement* between the two disciplines.<sup>6</sup> Knox considers that Collingwood actually achieved this aim in what he wrote at the zenith of his powers, during the second phase.

In the *Essay on Philosophical Method*, Collingwood argues that the subject matter of philosophy is more like history than nature;<sup>7</sup> since both philosophy and history, as distinct from the investigation of nature as pursued by the natural sciences, are essentially concerned with the human mind. For Knox, it is the great merit of *The Idea of History* that it "forces on the attention of philosophers the epistemological problems to which the existence of history gives rise, and ... shows how philosophical questions can be illuminated and solved by an historical approach." One can even say that, since the publication of *The Idea of Nature* and *The Idea of History*, philosophers "will be able to continue ignoring history only by burying their heads in the sand."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Fred Inglis, *History Man. The Life of R. G. Collingwood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 316. "It is hard nowadays not to feel sorry for Knox. He is so rightly convicted of sanctimonious error and sheer misunderstanding towards Collingwood. He ignored Kate, he disapproved of Collingwood's late style, he even destroyed some of the papers after transcribing them, but he was devoted and he was assiduous." But I was glad to find support for my main contentions in Alan Donagan's article, "Collingwood, Robin George" (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York and London: Macmillan 1967, Vol. I).

<sup>2</sup> Oxford: Clarendon. The same will apply to the other works of Collingwood cited, unless differently assigned.

<sup>3</sup> It was published in 1945, edited by T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press).

<sup>4</sup> Published in 1946, ed. Knox. I quote from the 1966 edition.

<sup>5</sup> *The Idea of History*, vii (from Knox's "Editor's Preface").

<sup>6</sup> Knox, "Preface", vii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Collingwood was quite strongly influenced on these matters by the work of Benedetto Croce, although, according to Knox, it would be wrong to call him a disciple of Croce.

In the *Essay on Philosophical Method*, “distinctions are drawn between historical study and philosophical criticism, between historical thought as concerned with the individual and philosophical thought as concerned with the universal.” The core of the account of philosophy presented there is “the doctrine that philosophical concepts are specified on a scale of forms related to one another as lower to higher in a process of development.” We cannot understand the physical world properly without making use of the concept of evolution; and we cannot understand the British Constitution without taking into account the historical process from which it emerged. Similarly, Collingwood argued, “we must not treat pleasure, utility and moral goodness as mere specifications of goodness, existing side by side (like the biological species of pre-evolutionary biology) since a simultaneous creation; we must discover their genetic interconnexion and exhibit them as stages through which the conception of goodness has developed.”<sup>9</sup> So philosophy is like science in dealing with universals; like history “in that the specifications of this universal are linked together somewhat like the stages in an historical process.”<sup>10</sup>

Knox claimed that he had documentary evidence to the effect that, before 1936, Collingwood thought that metaphysics, in the sense of study of the One, the True and the Good, was something quite distinct from history; but by 1939 he thought that it could be subsumed under history. So Knox felt compelled to conclude that Collingwood’s views had changed radically, even though no such change is recorded in the *Autobiography*, and though others insist that the development of Collingwood’s views on the matter was gradual, and always in the same direction. At the earlier stage, he still maintained that a philosopher should try to construct his own cosmology, as well as describing the conceptions of nature maintained by other philosophers; that as well as setting out the views of other philosophers on philosophy in general, he should work out a philosophy of his own. As Knox sees it, the price of Collingwood’s later subsumption of philosophy under history, his assessment of it as a form of history, is philosophical skepticism.<sup>11</sup> There were indeed skeptical (and dogmatic) strands in Collingwood’s earlier philosophy; but Knox thinks that these had been temporarily overcome in his thought between 1932 and 1936.<sup>12</sup>

What are we to say about the facts discovered and theories successfully propounded by scientists—say, the achievements of Newton, Adams or Pasteur? According to Collingwood, at least in the late phase of his thought, “(E)very scientist who says that light is split up by the prism, or that fermentation is prevented by a certain degree of heat is still talking history: he is talking about the whole class of historical facts which are occasions on which someone has made these observations. Thus a “scientific fact” is a class of historical facts, and no one can understand what a scientific fact is unless he understands enough about the theory of history to understand what an historical fact is.” This applies to scientific theories as well. Such a theory “not only rests on certain historical facts and is verified or disproved by certain other historical facts, it is itself an historical fact, namely, the fact that someone has propounded or accepted, verified or disproved that theory.” Suppose that we wish to know,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, viii-ix.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, ix.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, x-xi.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, xi.

for example, what the classical theory of gravitation is. Then “we must look into the records of Newton’s thinking and interpret them.”<sup>13</sup>

## II

I intend to cover a good deal of ground in what follows; so it may be worth offering the reader a preliminary sketch of the topics I intend to discuss and why. Collingwood’s thought as a whole, especially as represented by his “logic of question and answer,” appears to me to be moving in the direction of the right position in epistemology and metaphysics, and so of philosophy as a whole, particularly in light of Lonergan’s transcendental Thomism. The later philosophy of Collingwood takes some steps which are retrograde in relation to this overall direction; these correspond closely to the deficiencies pointed out by Knox. To show this, I give a very brief account of cognitional self-transcendence, of the apparent capacity of human beings, by dint of the proper use of their minds on the basis of their experience, to come to know a world which exists, and largely is as it is, prior to and independently of that experience and this use of their minds. There follow consequences, pursued in the rest of the paper, for Collingwood’s conception of history as the most general “science of mind” which should absorb philosophy; for his aspersions on “realism”; for his notion of the historian’s business as the “re-enactment” of past thought; for his critique of politics and society; and for his conception of the role of religion and its bearings on science. Since my remarks in what follows will be largely critical, I would like to pay tribute immediately to the enormous range and fertility of Collingwood’s thought, and to his virtues as a stimulus to thinking even where one is driven to conclude that he is wrong.

As I see it, the conversion to radical historicism indeed happened—but it did surprisingly little harm. It is as though the Trojan horse had been brought into the city, but the Greeks who emerged were cordoned off so that the damage they did was limited. How far the historical relativism was anticipated by the earlier Collingwood’s thought, and how far it represents a break with it, is a matter which I prefer to leave to Collingwood specialists. Since writing the last three sentences, I have been glad to find my view largely confirmed by Alan Donagan. “Collingwood did not acknowledge what must have been obvious to his readers, that in the *Autobiography* and the *Essay on Metaphysics* he had jettisoned the metaphysics of the *Essay on Philosophical Method*.” All the same,

...(a)lthough in his *Autobiography* Collingwood repudiated his earlier idealist conception of philosophy, his views about religion, natural science and history remained virtually unchanged. Nor were his views on art altered by his later historicism in metaphysics. This suggests that his change of mind in 1938 may be less fundamental than has been thought.<sup>14</sup>

In a forthcoming article,<sup>15</sup> I argue for the following conclusions, which I must now present in summary form. Collingwood’s doctrine of “presuppositions” and his “logic of question and answer” are on the right lines; but, in the light of Lonergan’s “generalized empirical method”, they need rather substantial modification. As Collingwood sees the

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<sup>13</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 177.

<sup>14</sup> Donagan, “Robin”, 143. He adds that Knox’s preface to *History* is “indispensable” for a proper understanding of this issue (144).

<sup>15</sup> To be published by the *Ibero-American Journal of Philosophy*.



matter, some of our presuppositions are justified by others; but some are absolute. It is the business of the metaphysician to study the absolute presuppositions of particular epochs; thereby functioning more as a historian. Aristotle was consequently in error when he said that metaphysics was the study of “being qua being”; such a study is impossible. In accordance with Lonergan’s “generalized empirical method”, there are no “absolute presuppositions”, since all presuppositions can be justified as it were from the ground up, as derivable from the contradictories of judgments which self-destruct. Questions may be divided into (at least) two kinds: questions for intelligence, and questions for reflection.<sup>16</sup> Questions for intelligence ask for a possibility or hypothesis (“what may this be?”, or “why may that be so?”) with regard to an item or a range of our experience. Questions for reflection are those which may be answered “yes”, “no”, or “perhaps” (is this so? does that exist?). The second presupposes an answer to the first. At this rate, I argue that Aristotle’s view—that metaphysics is the study of “being qua being”—is in a sense to be preferred after all. “Reality” or “the actual world” is and can be nothing other than what is to be known by a reiteration of the two kinds of questions to experience as illustrated by the whole of science, natural and human, and also by history as usually conceived. Let us, following Lonergan, call the capacity to ask and answer the first kind of question “intelligence”; and to ask and answer the second kind of question, “reasonableness.”

At this rate, Knox’s criticisms of the final phase of Collingwood’s thought come out as basically correct. I would add that modifications which Collingwood might have made to meet the criticisms would have turned him into a kind of transcendental Thomist in the manner exemplified by Lonergan.<sup>17</sup> The concerns of Knox, and to a lesser extent those of Peter Johnson,<sup>18</sup> correspond exactly to the correctives that would be applied to Collingwood’s metaphysics, and so to his theory of science (and indirectly to his ethics and his normative political theory), on a transcendental Thomist account. In accordance with the transcendental Thomist position, it is the basic thesis of metaphysics that reality in general is what is to be known as the result of putting the two kinds of question to experience; while the conclusions of the sciences, natural and human, consist of what is to be known by putting them to particular ranges of experience.

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<sup>16</sup> There is a third kind of question, that for deliberation (what am I to do, on the basis of the judgment at which I have arrived?); but that is not immediately relevant to the present context.

<sup>17</sup> The distinction between the questions, *quid sit?* (what may it be?) and *cur ita sit?* (why may it be so?) on the one hand, and *an sit?* (whether it exists or is so?) on the other, fleetingly noted by Aristotle, is at the basis of Thomas Aquinas’s epistemology, which grounds his metaphysics of “essence” and “existence”. See Lonergan, *Verbum. Word and Idea in Aquinas* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968). He did not treat epistemological questions systematically and at length, however, since philosophers of his time were not obsessed with epistemological questions as they have been apt to be since Descartes and Kant. Aquinas was applying, in a uniquely thorough and comprehensive manner, a distinction already well known among the Aristotelians of his time; at what point it became established among them, I do not know. On this matter, I have benefited greatly from conversations with Professor Ernest McCullough.

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Johnson, R. G. *Collingwood. An Introduction* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2005), chapters 9 and 10. Johnson’s main point there is that the tendency to historical relativism blunts the edge of the profound socio-political criticism to be had in *The New Leviathan*, and in Collingwood’s many shorter essays on political philosophy. Cf. Collingwood, *Essays on Political Philosophy*, ed. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

Surely, all the great figures in the history of science have held what amounts to the same presupposition—that by putting the two kinds of question to our experience, we can come closer to stating the truth about the world, which already contained oxygen, genes, electrons, pulsars, and Higgs bosons, before we ever conceived of such things; and presumably will be found to have included even more weird and wonderful things as we approach closer to the ideal term of the Grand Unified Theory. There is a continuity here which is underestimated by Collingwood, as it has been more recently by Thomas Kuhn, with his notion of mutually incommensurable “paradigms” which replace one another over time.<sup>19</sup> According to what one might call the meta-paradigm of intelligent and reasonable inquiry into experience, we can appreciate why Galileo was right in his dispute with his Aristotelian rivals in regard to experiments in free fall. They triumphantly pointed out small divergences from what was observed in what was predicted in Galileo’s theory; failing to notice, or at least to acknowledge, the fact that the divergences of what was observed from their own predictions were much greater.<sup>20</sup> And while it is no doubt true that scientists do not bother to justify a prevailing paradigm to their fellow-scientists, what is “taken for granted” within a paradigm can easily be justified, in terms of the meta-paradigm of intelligent and reasonable inquiry into experience, if need be. For example, anyone who doubts that water is a chemical compound, rather than an element, can be shown the school experiment where an electrical current is passed through water, and the level of water goes down while gases appear at the two terminals, each reacting to further experiment in different ways.

Human beings have the apparent capacity, on the basis of evidence available to their senses and the proper use of their minds, to gain knowledge of, or arrive at well-founded and true judgments about, things and states of affairs which exist or obtain, and are largely as they are, prior to and independently of human beings and their experiences and mental operations. One may take as examples of such things and facts, igneous and sedimentary rocks, helium atoms, and apatosauri; that Jupiter has moons, that uranium is a radioactive element, and that the European chiffchaff is a migratory bird. Let us call this capacity “cognitional self-transcendence”.<sup>21</sup> This would also seem to be possible in relation to historical inquiries. By the right use of their minds upon the available evidence, present-day historians are able to establish that Julius Caesar conquered Gaul in the fifties of the first century B. C. E., and that he was assassinated in 44; yet that he did and underwent these things is in no way dependent on the evidence available to us or on the mental processes which we perform here and now. Short of extreme subjective idealism, in accordance with which things come into existence only when human individuals or social groups come to affirm that they do, these things and states of affairs existed or obtained before any human being asserted that they did on the basis of the available evidence. (Some qualifications have to be made in the case of the historical example; but it will be seen by the sympathetic reader that the general point is not affected.)

If cognitional self-transcendence is possible and actual, there seems to be no good reason why moral self-transcendence should not be so as well. It is of the essence of moral wrongness that human beings should not take pleasure in the agony of other sentient

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<sup>19</sup> See T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962 [second edition, 1970])

<sup>20</sup> See John Gribbin, *Science. A History. 1543-2001* (London and New York: BCA, 2002), 77.

<sup>21</sup> See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), 45, 233, 289 etc.

creatures. Hence the burning of live cats as a public spectacle, as practiced by medieval Parisians, was wrong;<sup>22</sup> as is the punishing of employees or political dissidents on the grounds that they are telling you inconvenient truths that you do not wish to hear. There is good reason for saying that genocide is wrong, not just “wrong for” the kind of person that you or I choose to consort with. If I ask, “*why* is it wrong to allow the school bully to corner all the lollipops available on the playground?”, you may reply, “Because it is unfair”; its unfairness is something about the situation, not about how you or I happen to feel about it.

Collingwood appears in some passages to deny the possibility of moral self-transcendence—as when he talks about Aristotle on slavery, and Kant’s morality in relation to German pietism.<sup>23</sup> But for all the qualifications which he makes elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> this would seem to debar these thinkers from relevance to the situation and concerns of our own times. He says that it is pointless to criticize a thinker for being too much a person of his own time; as if “a more powerful thinker than Plato would have lifted himself clean out of the atmosphere of Greek politics, or as if Aristotle ought to have anticipated the moral conceptions of Christianity or the modern world.” But human nature remains sufficiently the same for Plato’s comparison, in the *Gorgias*, of prospective leaders in a democracy to doctors and confectioners competing before a jury of children, to be frighteningly relevant to our own times. Is a presidential candidate who tells people unpalatable truths for their own good more likely to gain the favor of the electorate, than one who tells them what they want to hear? And I should say that much the same applies to Aristotle’s comments on the importance for political stability of the existence of a large middle class.<sup>25</sup> Some moral and political thinkers, like Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes and Marx, seem more capable, in this sense, of transcending their own time than do others. And heaven help us citizens, if our political leaders do not have some equivalent of Plato’s “Idea of the Good” before their minds! Otherwise, what else can we expect from them but cynical opportunism?

If cognitive and moral self-transcendence are indeed possible, it would surely be odd if the presuppositions underlying them were not true, or those incompatible with them false. Besides, I do not see what it would be to have a presupposition, without assuming that it was true. On both these matters, I take issue with Collingwood in the last phase of his thought.

### III

The logical positivists, notoriously, divided meaningful discourse exhaustively into propositions which are true or false by definition, and those which are true or false due to actual or potential verification or falsification by experience. In this they were anticipated by David Hume with his distinction between “relations of ideas” and “matters of fact.” Immanuel Kant argued for a third class of judgments; as well as analytic *a priori* judgments which were true by virtue of the meaning of their constituent terms, and synthetic *a posteriori*

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<sup>22</sup> I borrow this useful example from the work of Sam Harris.

<sup>23</sup> Collingwood, *History*, 229.

<sup>24</sup> Almost immediately afterwards, he concedes that when they are at their best they can be a help to us. One is inclined to ask, ““best” by what standard?”

<sup>25</sup> By a singular historical irony, on the very day that I write the first draft of this sentence, I read of rioting in Athens due to the fact that very rich Greeks do not take their fair share of the tax burden (*24 hours*, Calgary edition, 021112).

judgments which were to be affirmed or denied as the result of experience, there were synthetic *a priori* judgments. Inspired by Hume's skeptical arguments concerning our knowledge of cause and effect, Kant pointed out that while "all effects have causes" is true by definition, "all events have causes" is not. But we do not know it as a result of experience, since we have not observed all causes or effects. And yet it is necessarily involved in the vast majority of what we claim to know, as a matter of common sense, or in science or history. Collingwood, although apparently he had no use for Kant's synthetic *a priori*,<sup>26</sup> had in common with Kant that he wanted to keep open such a third class of items that were knowable. In effect, in accordance with Lonergan's account, two methods of (non-analytic) verification<sup>27</sup> are to be distinguished: (1) that by reference to experience, as emphasized by classical empiricism; (2) that by reference to the "synthetic *a priori*" derivable from the contradictories of self-destructive judgments.

A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*, which is of course a classic exposition of logical positivism, came out in 1936, and greatly impressed Collingwood.<sup>28</sup> In concession to Ayer, Collingwood admitted that the "absolute presuppositions" which are for him the business of metaphysics, since they could not be justified in terms of either of the logical positivist criteria, were neither true nor false. But all the same, as he saw it, they had to be tenaciously maintained. Knox compares his position on Christian theism, and the basic principles of natural science which he claims to be closely dependent on it, with that of Kierkegaard or Barth on Christianity. But I am sure that neither of these theologians would have been at all happy about Collingwood's concessions to the logical positivists with regard to truth.

I think Collingwood is profoundly right in making a connection between truth on the one hand, and justifiability in principle on the other. One is reminded of the Scholastic maxim, *quod gratis affirmatur gratis negatur*.<sup>29</sup> I believe that the answer to the resulting dilemma is to maintain that there are no "absolute presuppositions" in Collingwood's sense; that all true presuppositions can be justified as it were from the ground up, as derivable from the contradictories of judgments which self-destruct in the manner illustrated by the liar paradox. I have argued this in the forthcoming article to which I have already alluded. To recapitulate the argument very briefly: I cannot non-self-destructively assert that I never make a judgment for good reason; judgments for good reason head towards truth; to make a judgment for good reason is to have attended to the relevant evidence in experience, to have envisaged the possibilities or hypotheses which might account for this experience, and to affirm as probably or certainly true in each case the judgment which does seem best to account for it. Among Collingwood's "absolute presuppositions" are Christian theism, and the principle underlying scientific investigation, that we are confidently to expect a single self-consistent explanatory account of all phenomena; these Collingwood regards as closely

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<sup>26</sup> See Simon Blackburn's article, "Collingwood, R. G.", in the *Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Popperians would prefer to speak of "corroboration" in this context, and I have no objection. A theory is "corroborated" so far as attempts are made to falsify it empirically, and while it might well have been falsified by such tests, in fact it survives them.

<sup>28</sup> Shortly after it came out, Collingwood came across some of his colleagues chuntering about it in an Oxford bookshop. "Gentlemen," he interjected, "that book will be read when your names are forgotten."

<sup>29</sup> What is affirmed gratuitously is denied gratuitously.

bound up with one another.<sup>30</sup> I shall return later to the question of how these consequences might be thought to be derivable from the presuppositions which I have sketched.

The term “metaphysics” (*meta ta physica*, “after the physics”) is serendipitous, whatever its actual historical origins; one pursues various forms of inquiry into the nature of things (“physics” in the etymological sense) first; and then inquires what is presupposed in them about the relation of our knowledge to the world in general. We come by it by pursuing the ordinary first-order forms of inquiry—common-sense, scientific, into other minds, into the past, and into that combination of the last two which counts as “historical” in Collingwood’s sense; then we ask, in his manner, what is presupposed in this. What is presupposed is that the phenomena of nature are to be explained (rather than shrugged off as just happening to happen) within a single self-consistent scheme; and that by means of our experience, and mental operations appropriately applied to experience, we can get to know about a world which largely exists, and largely is as it is, prior to and independently of ourselves, and of our experiences and mental operations (evidently we, together with our experiences and our mental operations, are only a tiny part of that world). But no more with metaphysics than with science, in spite of Collingwood in the latest stage of his thought, do we have to confine ourselves to a history of what our predecessors have said; in both cases, we have to establish what is so or likely to be so, on the basis not only of what they have said, but of our own consideration of the relevant matters. Collingwood’s “logic of question and answer” is perfectly right as far as it goes, but needs to be supplemented, if my arguments are right, in the manner that I have outlined. But the transcendental Thomist may heartily agree with Collingwood that the issue with metaphysics is not to get rid of it, in the manner of positivists and some linguistic philosophers, but to get it right.

Collingwood writes of a future “science of mind” which, in the third and final stage of his thought, he identifies with “history”; philosophy will then be reducible to history. He hopes that “history” in this sense, once developed, will provide a basis for the direction of human affairs at all levels.<sup>31</sup> Now it is central to my argument here that this identification of “the science of mind” with “history” is crucially misleading, and that Collingwood was duly misled. Accepting, as I believe we should, Collingwood’s claim that an autonomous “science of mind”, which does not amount to a reduction of “mind” to the categories proper to the physical sciences, is something to be aimed for, we should properly distinguish two parts or aspects of such a “science”. I shall say more about this distinction later on.

There is now, much more than in Collingwood’s day, a heavy industry, built on the conviction, I had almost said the faith, that minds are nothing more than the behavior, or perhaps the electro-chemical content of, rather complicated material objects such as

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<sup>30</sup> One may compare Albert Einstein. What the scientist is seeking for, he says, is “a basis, as narrow as possible, of fundamental concepts and fundamental relations which themselves can be chosen freely (axioms). The liberty of choice, however, is of a special kind”, which is not like that of a writer of fiction. “Rather, it is similar to that of a man engaged in solving a well designed word puzzle. He may, it is true, propose any word as the solution; but, there is only *one* word which really solves the puzzle ... It is an outcome of faith that nature—as she is perceptible to our five senses—takes the character of such a well formulated puzzle. The successes reaped up to now by science do, it is true, give a certain encouragement for this faith” (“Physics and Reality”, *J. F. I.*, March 1936, 353-4).

<sup>31</sup> According to Inglis (*History Man*, 139), *The Principles of History*, written early in 1939, represents Collingwood’s maturest statement of his position on this matter.

ourselves. It is, to say the least of it, no longer true that, as Collingwood himself put it,<sup>32</sup> materialism is confined to the attics and lumber rooms of thought. But that reductive materialism cannot be true is easily shown by a transcendental argument. If it were true, it would never really be the case that anyone ever said, thought or wrote anything because they thought that there was good reason to suppose that it was so. But this, of course, must apply to reductive materialists themselves, and to the reductive materialism that they defend. The best counter-move to this argument that I know, is to the effect that such arguments are smart-alecky. Some may wonder, however, whether this means much more than that they are only too convincing, and consequently disliked by some who happen to rank high in the intellectual pecking-order.

For Collingwood, science is to be described as setting a question whose answer is history.<sup>33</sup> I had rather say that common-sense knowledge, science and history all set the question, the possibility of self-transcendence, to which one aspect of the science of mind—let us label it SMA—which is constituted by epistemology and metaphysics, provides the answer. The actual history of thought, in the usual sense of that phrase—how Plato or Berkeley, Kepler or Darwin, Hobbes or Marx, Collingwood or Lonergan, actually thought—may be distinguished from this as SMB. Collingwood is quite right, I believe, so far as he implies that SMA is to be arrived at by determining the presuppositions of other forms of inquiry into what is the case. Certainly, SMB is at least a very important aspect of history, if not actually to be identified with history.<sup>34</sup>

Again, SMB is profoundly *relevant* to SMA, for all that they are not *identical*. It would be very strange, for all that not a few have appeared to believe it, if, on the deep question of the relation of human thought to the real world, we had nothing to learn from our predecessors.<sup>35</sup> Here an excellent precedent was set by Aristotle and Hegel, both of whom made a point of giving an appreciative account of the work of their predecessors. In this respect they were the antithesis of the logical positivists, who dismissed earlier philosophies as almost entirely nonsense. This is not to imply, by any means, that there is nothing important to be learned from logical positivism itself. It is instructive to see it, in fact, as forming the thesis of a Hegelian triad. The logical positivists propounded foundations which turned out to be wrong, since, notoriously, the “verification principle” which is the cornerstone of their theory self-destructs (it is neither true by definition, nor to be confirmed by experience, that all meaningful propositions are either true by definition, or confirmable or falsifiable by experience). But the antithesis, which has largely prevailed among analytical philosophers since the demise of logical positivism, to the effect that there are no

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<sup>32</sup> I regret to say that I can no longer place the remark, which I came across several decades ago.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Inglis, *History Man*, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Collingwood would *identify* it with history; but this, for what it is worth, seems to go against ordinary usage. It is quite usual to talk of paleontology as “the history of the earth”, though it has nothing directly to do with thought, but rather with how things were before there was any (human) thought. However, it has to be admitted that, quite in accordance with Collingwood’s manner of speaking, paleontology is also referred to as “pre-history”. I should add my opinion that any dispute which may arise on this particular point is merely terminological, and that nothing of substance hangs on it.

<sup>35</sup> That they make this assumption is a frequent matter for complaint by Collingwood against his contemporaries.

foundations of knowledge, appears to be at least as unsatisfactory; are we really to say that the theory of evolution is no better founded than the view that a literally true account of how the world reached its present state is to be read from the Book of Genesis; or that there are two giant planets outside the orbit of Saturn than that there not? Transcendental Thomists would claim that their theory of knowledge and truth, and of the basic constitution of the world that is to be affirmed by true judgments, provides a satisfactory synthesis. It appears to me that Collingwood approaches this position, indeed comes tantalizingly close to it, with his “logic of question and answer”; and indeed that he would have arrived at it, and so become a transcendental Thomist, if he had distinguished sharply between the two types of questions that I mentioned above.

The case of Wittgenstein is instructively comparable, though he did not pick up the vital clue about the importance of questioning. If my account of these issues is on the right lines, Wittgenstein will have made a fundamentally retrograde step between the first and second stages in his philosophy. The *Tractatus* provides an account that is brilliantly wrong, as Wittgenstein later admitted himself, of how thought or language represents the world, and consequently of how mind can be a mirror of nature. The *Philosophical Investigations* gives up the problem of how mind can represent a world which exists prior to and independently of it, and language is presented—very usefully if one remembers that the other task is still to do—as a “toolbox” of practical and social devices.<sup>36</sup>

If you deny the possibility of cognitional self-transcendence, then you deny the presupposition of most of our knowledge-claims, including those of common sense (“It is raining”, “There is a woman in a red coat sitting within ten feet in front of me”) as well as of natural science (“hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe”, “common salt is a compound of sodium and chlorine”). But if you accept it, there is no special difficulty about our knowledge of the past or of other minds—our historical knowledge. This complex of issues is often referred to as the problem of “our knowledge of the external world.” As late as 1946, Bertrand Russell could write that philosophy had as yet found no solution to this problem.<sup>37</sup> Yet on the basis of transcendental Thomism, the problem is easily solved—though at a price. It is one thing simply to report one’s experience; another to affirm intelligently and reasonably that something is the case on the basis of that experience. However, the real world, as what is to be known by application of the transcendental precepts rather than as simply “out there”, turns out to be “external” in a sense that would never have been dreamed of by the naïve realist; and this may have metaphysical consequences which are unpalatable to many people. (That is one of the principal lessons to

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<sup>36</sup> In *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), Wittgenstein writes of “our spades being turned” when we try to justify certain judgments; and that these judgments differ from place to place and from time to time. Perhaps where our spades are turned is when it comes to questioning whether God has actually revealed, in a document supposed to be binding on all human beings in all places and times, that one should chop the right hands off convicted thieves. Why should someone not claim this to be an “absolute presupposition”, or for that matter part of a Kuhnian “paradigm”?

<sup>37</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), 635: “Empiricism and idealism alike are faced with a problem to which, so far, philosophy has found no satisfactory solution. This is the problem of showing how we have knowledge of other things than ourself and the operations of our own mind.”

be learned from Lonergan's *Insight*). I shall mention some of these consequences at the end of this paper.

#### IV

I agree with Collingwood that the actual way in which what he calls "realism" developed had disastrous results for moral and political philosophy, against which he raised a lone prophetic voice. He is surely right that the philosophical establishment perpetrated a monstrous *trahison des clercs* in this matter, leaving us in a situation where we can do no better than say "boo!" to fascism and "hooray!" to democracy.<sup>38</sup> But I think that the basic thesis of this "realism", that we do not alter a thing or event by coming to know about it, is quite correct when it comes to science or history. Yet I don't see why the central doctrine of realism, as Collingwood himself characterized it, should have the consequence that he alleges for ethics and politics. I can well maintain that von Maanen's star or the emperor Charlemagne are not affected by our coming to know about them, while insisting all the same that rational reflection on morality or politics may make a great deal of difference, and mainly for the better, on one's moral and political action. In the former kind of case, I think confusion is apt to be generated by the fact that, both in science and in history, questioning and creative hypothesizing are necessary if one is to come to know what is true on the basis of the relevant data provided by experience. Thus in one sense, sure enough, we "constitute" the world by our theories on the basis of our experience; but in another, we find it ready "constituted" for us.

Collingwood says that we cannot get out of our position in history any more than we can leap out of our own skins;<sup>39</sup> and there is a sense in which he is clearly right about this. But there is another sense in which, given self-transcendence, we can do precisely this; from within our historical situation, by the appropriate use of our minds upon the relevant evidence, we can come to state what is the case, and even what is good or bad, prior to and independently of our historical situation. Because he never engages the issue of self-transcendence head-on, Collingwood has to engage in a number of ingenious but unconvincing maneuvers in order to make up for it. Prominent among these is his conception of "re-enactment." How are the thoughts of other persons at other places and in other times supposed to be available for us to "re-enact" them? As Collingwood sees it, thoughts are not confined to positions in space and time, as are sensations, emotions and feelings<sup>40</sup> (which he regards as the proper province of the psychologist); and this enables the historian to "re-enact" them here and now. (Of course, if cognitional self-transcendence is possible, *nous n'avons pas besoin de cette hypothèse* of "reenactment"). Collingwood is right to point out that, on his conception of "history", every normal person in society is a historian,

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 35-50.

<sup>39</sup> Expressing Collingwood's position, Peter Johnson writes: "We can no more stand outside history than we can reach beyond language" (Johnson, *Introduction*, 121). But we can with good reason say things like, "When science has advanced further, we will have found out things about the world which are inexpressible within our present scheme of scientific concepts." We have here and now, one might say, a second-order conception of reality, expressible in language, in terms of which we can state that our present first-order concepts are likely to be inadequate, and in general how and why they are so.

<sup>40</sup> He compares them in this respect with the "eternal objects" of Whitehead's philosophy.



as we can hardly get along at all without knowing to some extent the thoughts of other persons within our communities.

For Collingwood, to re-enact the thought of another is of itself to subject it to criticism in the light of one's own ideas. Lonergan, on the other hand, distinguishes sharply, and I believe rightly so, between recovery of the meaning of the thought, speech or action of an agent on the one hand (the second of his "functional specialties", "interpretation"), and its subjection to criticism on the other (his fourth, "dialectic"). In his *Autobiography*, Collingwood very properly takes to task his philosophical contemporaries, such as G. E. Moore, for purporting to refute the claims of some past philosopher, say Berkeley, without taking the trouble to determine what those claims really were. In Lonergan's terms, they were engaging in the fourth functional specialty, without the necessary preliminary work in the second.<sup>41</sup>

What of Collingwood's claim that science is in some sense ultimately derivable from history? I concede that it is a matter of human history that such-and-such a theory was first conceived by a certain person at a certain place and time; that such-and-such observations were made or experiments performed in order to test it; that there was so much more or less unseemly academic wrangling in the course of the theory's reception; and so on and so on. But it does not follow that the facts or states of affairs discovered by means of these theories and experiments are themselves dependent on human history. If hydrogen and uranium, quasars and white-dwarf stars, trilobites and plesiosaurs, exist or existed at all, they exist or existed prior to and independently of human history. At least, they did so short of a subjective idealism which almost no-one would swallow ("Well, all we really mean when we say that they exist is that human beings have had and may have certain experiences, and have engaged and may engage in certain mental operations.")

Collingwood maintains "that natural science as a form of thought exists and always has existed in a context of history, and depends on historical thought for its existence." He infers "that no one can understand natural science unless he understands history: no one can answer the question what nature is unless he knows what history is."<sup>42</sup> If I am right in what I have argued, this is true in one sense, false in another. I should emend the conclusion of *The Idea of Nature* by saying that one cannot properly get the hang of either "nature" or "history", unless one sees both in terms of what I have called that aspect of the study of mind (SMA) which may be called epistemological, and grasps the way in which this issues in a metaphysics or account of "being qua being". That they are propounded on the basis of observations or experiments conducted by human beings, at particular moments in history, does not alter the fact that, unless one is to resort to extreme subjective idealism,<sup>43</sup> the facts were the case, and the theories were true, prior to and independently of their discoverers and the successors who have confirmed their findings. There was a planet Neptune, and it was the case that fermentation is prevented by a certain degree of heat, prior to and independently of the discoveries by Adams and Pasteur.

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<sup>41</sup> See Lonergan, *Method*, chapters 5, 7, and 10.

<sup>42</sup> Collingwood, *Nature*, 177.

<sup>43</sup> According to which individuals or social groups make states of affairs to be the case—for example, the fact that the nearest star is between three and five light years distant from the solar system, or that smallpox is caused by a virus—by coming to "know" about them.

A “science of mind” which consisted of the epistemology and metaphysics founded on the four “transcendental precepts”, could provide the firm basis needed for that normative science of human affairs so brilliantly heralded by *The New Leviathan*. J. L. Austin is reputed to have declared, “Importance is not important; truth is.” I acknowledge that it is both true and important that truth is more important than importance, but importance is important too; and it is surely somewhat to be deplored if, in an era renowned for politicians who are at once world-shaking and frightful, like Hitler and Stalin, the best and most prestigious philosophers have only trivial comments to make on the subject of politics, and can at best cry “Boo!” to the tyrants. In his tremendous delineation and commendation of civilization, and corresponding denouncement of barbarism, in *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood is writing about what is absolutely good and bad, better and worse; and the whole thrust of his argument depends on this. The wind is completely taken out of the sails of the book, if one qualifies this by saying that there is another standpoint, “paradigm”, or point of view, incompatible with this one but just as defensible in its own terms, for which barbarism is better than civilization, or at least no worse.

If the assumptions of theism, and of nature as a single intelligible order, and of the existence of a causal nexus between events, are not absolute presuppositions, as claimed by Collingwood, then how can they be justified, or for that matter impugned? As so often in thought, skepticism and dogmatism seem to reinforce one another; if we cannot do without “absolute presuppositions”, but in the nature of the case we cannot justify them, we will have the more unquestioningly to assert them. (It is not for nothing that Collingwood, in his approach to this issue during the final phase of his thought, reminded Knox of Kierkegaard and Barth.) But it does not appear to me that a thoroughgoing rationality can content itself with this attitude. And what is to be done with those who affirm absolute presuppositions which contradict our own, on matters of fact or value? Is not our world as a matter of fact torn apart by the resulting differences?

I can only summarize very briefly here what I have argued elsewhere at length.<sup>44</sup> Very roughly, if reality or the actual world is nothing other than what is to be known by indefinite application of the transcendental precepts, then it is an intelligible order which explains the world of our experience, and can be progressively known by re-iterated putting to experience of the same two kinds of questions that I have already distinguished. Despite some influential accounts of the nature of causality, there is no *a priori* reason why such an explanatory scheme need be deterministic, or why irreducibly statistical forms of explicability should not characterize the world of nature.<sup>45</sup> Natural science presupposes this; theism, that the existence of all else is due to an intelligent will, explains it. In fine, theism accounts for that intelligibility of the universe, including its causal connectedness (which need not be deterministic), which science at once presupposes and confirms. The Christian faith may be

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<sup>44</sup> See Meynell, *The Epistemological Argument Against Atheism* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2011). For a magisterial exposition and defense of the relevant arguments, see Lonergan, *Insight*, chapters i – iv, xix–xx.

<sup>45</sup> In spite of Spinoza, Hume, and Einstein. In evading the apparent consequences for human freedom of determinism as applied to the philosophy of nature, the “solutions” of Leibniz and Kant are more ingenious than convincing. Heinz Pagels seems closer to the mark, with his wonderful suggestion that “The God that plays dice has set us free” (*The Cosmic Code* [New York: Bantam Books, 1983], 112).

commended as what such a being might be expected to do in order to cope with the human plight; and to be confirmable in its historical truth-conditions by objective historical investigation.<sup>46</sup>

In religion and philosophy as well as science, as Collingwood sees the matter, the more advanced shows its progress over the less by retaining its insights while going beyond them. In spite of the arguments of Thomas Kuhn, it is easy to see this pattern exemplified in the relation of Einstein's physics or quantum physics to that of Newton. But one may see a similar pattern in the relation of Christianity to Judaism in the conception of God, and of some elements of Aristotle's philosophy in relation to Plato's.

Philosophy progresses in so far as one stage of its development solves the problems that defeated it in the last, without losing its hold on the solutions already achieved ... Thus, supposing it true that Plato grasped the necessity for an eternal object, the world of Ideas or Idea of the Good, and also for an eternal subject, the soul in its double function of as knower and mover, as solutions for problems with which his predecessor's work had left him confronted: but was baffled to say how these two were related; and suppose Aristotle saw that the problem ... could be solved by thinking of them as one and the same, pure intellect being identical with its own object, and its knowledge of that object being knowledge of itself; then, so far (though conceivably not in other respects), Aristotle's philosophy would mark a progress on Plato's, granted that by that new step Aristotle sacrificed nothing that Plato had achieved ... In religion, progress is possible on the same terms. If Christianity, bating no jot or tittle of what Judaism had won by its conception of one God, just and terrible, infinitely great over against man's infinite littleness and infinitely exacting in his demands on man, could bridge the gulf ... by the conception that God became man in order that we might become God, that was a progress, and a momentous one, in the history of the religious consciousness. In such senses and in such cases as these, progress is possible.<sup>47</sup>

I do not see what exception a transcendental Thomist need take to this resplendent passage.

## V

As I have touched on many issues in the foregoing, it may be as well for me to summarize my conclusions:

1. There is something of significance to be learned from T. M. Knox's criticisms of Collingwood. These show that certain doctrines characteristic of the last stage of his thought were in error; but they by no means impugn Collingwood's stature, or his usefulness as a stimulus for us early in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>46</sup> According to the *Essay on Metaphysics*, such institutions as theological colleges have the role of inculcating a society's absolute presuppositions; though Collingwood laments that in our society they have largely forgotten that they have this vitally important role, and consequently are in danger of losing it.

<sup>47</sup> Collingwood., *History*, 332-3. This also seems to be the account given in Collingwood's *Essay on Philosophical Method*.

2. Collingwood's "logic of question and answer" is a crucially important discovery, or rather re-discovery; but it needs extending in one significant respect.
3. Collingwood's identification of "history" with the "science of mind" is at least very misleading; it is better to distinguish between two aspects of "the science of mind", the first covering epistemology and metaphysics; the second describing how people have actually thought, a topic which is properly "historical".
4. A useful approach to Collingwood, and means of assessing his fundamental strengths and weaknesses, as to be found by consideration of the notions of "cognitive" and "moral self-transcendence"; whereby, by the proper use of our minds upon the relevant evidence in experience, we may come to know what is the case, and even what is good, prior to and independently of such experience and use of our minds.
5. On the basis of the generalized empirical method of Lonergan, and the transcendental Thomism which ensues from it, I can confidently and consistently maintain that civilization is absolutely better than barbarism, and not just "better from" one historical perspective; just as I can claim that it is absolutely the case, and not just the case for people of my cultural background, that helium is an inert gas; that the closest star is within five light-years of the sun; that dinosaurs once flourished on earth but have become extinct; or that King Henry VIII really existed whereas King Lear did not.

## PLANTINGA'S POINT

Paul Helm\*

In a little-discussed paper of Alvin Plantinga's, "Divine Knowledge,"<sup>1</sup> he discusses and defends the thesis that it is no objection to accepting the truth of *God knows that p* when one argues that *We do not know how God knows that p*. That we do not know how God knows some matter is a fragment of negative or apophatic theology. Accepting this fragment entails that, when we refer to God's knowledge, this bears no better than an analogical relation to our own knowledge: the two possess points in common, which make each a case of knowledge; and have points of difference—the negative theological fragment—which together ensure that the knowledge in question is either a case of our knowledge, or of God's.

Such reserve with respect to God's knowledge seems entirely biblical. Writing of the extent of God's knowledge, including his knowledge of his thoughts "from afar," the Psalmist exclaims that "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it" (Psalm 139:6).

I shall try to offer an abbreviated account of part of what Plantinga says here, but then suggest that this is an unstable outlook; that is, if our knowledge of God's knowledge is only analogical, and our knowledge of the other aspects of the mind is likewise analogical, this cannot be confined to the actual cases that Plantinga discusses. Plantinga's point cannot be restricted to ameliorating those claims about God's knowledge that we happen to accept or approve of, but it applies equally well to those claims that we disapprove of. For what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. It has implications all over the place and is on shaky ground.

Plantinga begins by discussing the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (as a constituent of Molinism) and the frequently advanced objection to their existence that it is impossible to say what grounds their truth.<sup>2</sup> The objection to such counterfactual statements—that they cannot answer the grounding objection—boils down to "We cannot see how God knows them [the counterfactuals of freedom], so there cannot be any." Plantinga's point is that the fact that we are ignorant of how God can know such counterfactuals of creaturely freedom does not affect their truth. Indeed there are good reasons why we are ignorant. There are such counterfactuals, he claims, and we can assume from his omniscience, that God knows them. End of story.

He goes on to discuss the view of Richard Swinburne (as set forth in his, *The Coherence of Theism*) that God cannot allow himself to know future free actions, since such knowledge would impede or render impossible genuine freedom and so, Swinburne holds, God averts

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<sup>1</sup> In C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 40-65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

his gaze from such propositions in order to shield our freedom.<sup>3</sup> Thus God does not know future contingencies.

But, asks Plantinga, why can't God know these propositions? Why do philosophers like Swinburne take such an unattractive position?<sup>4</sup>

The fundamental answer, [underlying Swinburne's modification of the scope of divine omniscience] I think, is that we can't see how they could be known. How could God know a thing like that, a thing about the future, or about some counterfactual situation that, as far as logic goes, could go either way? . . .

I think we must agree that we don't or can't see how God could know a thing like that. He can't know a future free choice by taking advantage of causal laws and causal regularities, for example, because the action in question would be by hypothesis *free*; therefore causal laws and antecedent conditions determine neither that the action would take place nor that it would fail to take place. So he couldn't know that action will occur by knowing causal laws and present or hypothesized conditions and extrapolating either to the action's taking place or to its failing to take place.<sup>5</sup>

After briefly discussing and giving his reasons why an appeal to God's simplicity won't help things, Plantinga proceeds to offer a reason why we cannot know how God knows. It is because he is the Creator, *our* Creator, for we are made in accordance with his design plan for us, but no one and no thing has or could have designed the way in which God knows. God's mind is uncreated. Or, to indulge in a little old-speak, we must have in mind that the difference is between God's *archetypal* knowledge and our creaturely *ectypal* knowledge. Maybe our own cognitive states and activities provide us with analogies: maybe our intuitive beliefs, or the idea of non-propositional beliefs, approximate somewhat to how God knows, but these still fall far short of proving the materials for understanding how God knows.<sup>6</sup>

It may be thought from this, and particularly from the range of examples that Plantinga uses, that appealing to our ignorance of God's ways of knowing in some way helps ease the lives of believers in libertarian freedom if they take certain instances of some types of propositions about future free actions to be true. It may be thought that if we believe that God's knowledge includes future, indeterministically free human actions and/or of counterfactuals of (indeterministic) freedom, then the fact that we fail to know how God knows these won't spoil the party. All we know is that God is omniscient; that for any proposition *p* God believes *p* if and only if *p* is true. And since, presumably, we do not know what it is like for God to believe a proposition, we haven't advanced things by very much.

Earlier we noticed that the Psalmist wonders at the extent of God's knowledge. Later on in the Psalm he extends his wonder to the whole range of God's activity; to God's omnipresence, to his causal activity, his leading, his forming.

So take a different and conflicting hypothesis to the claim of the consistency of God's knowledge and future indeterministic choices, or of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Plantinga explores these analogies at length.

Consider, for example, the anti-Molinist claim that “God’s ordaining of all that comes to pass is consistent with him not being the author of sin.” “Will” or “ordain” are fraught with the same difficulties that interested Plantinga in the case of “God knows.” How often has it been said that God cannot ordain or will the actions of human beings other than by being a programmer, or a hypnotist, or a drug-pusher? But why? If humans ordain or will in accordance with their Creator’s design plan for them, and if they were to ordain what a fellow creature will do, they might well in those circumstances have to be brainwashers or something similar. But why think that the Creator is himself hedged in by the limitations and constraints of that same design plan? Who designed the design plan of the Creator?

If so, then the defender of such a view, faced with the *prima facie* objection, *how can God ordain creaturely actions—including evil actions—without himself being the author of sin*, may appeal to our ignorance of the way in which God knows his own mind and gives effect to his purposes. Plantinga’s basic point, that God is our Creator and that we are designed and created in accordance with his design plan, applies every bit as much to his *ordaining* as to his *knowledge*. Presumably, how God wills is also beyond our ken. If we cannot understand how God wills in such a way as to preserve his holiness and purity, this does not in any way infringe upon God’s ordaining of all events being consistent with his holiness and purity. To reach this conclusion would require that we believe that it is impossible that God can have a holy and pure ordination of evil, and the prospect of showing such a thing seems remote.

The unanswerability of “How does God know?” removes constraints that would otherwise lie on Molinist shoulders. He can accept that God has middle knowledge, even though we do not know how God has such knowledge. But it has a parallel effect on the Augustinian or Calvinist: that we cannot see how God, while pure and holy, nevertheless ordains the impure and unholy actions of his creatures, ought not to surprise us, given that our ignorance stretches beyond how God knows, to how God ordains. Augustine called God’s willing permission of particular evil actions “unspeakably strange and wonderful”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the perennial “author of sin” objection, routinely produced by opponents of God’s ordaining of all that comes to pass, cannot count as a serious objection to Augustinianism, so long as Plantinga’s point holds. Indeed one might even prefer the Augustinian position to Molinism purely on the grounds of simplicity, if for no other reason, thus rendering the Molinist hypothesis otiose.

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<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, Chp. C.





## JESUS' "ENEMY" IN THE GOSPELS

J. Lyle Story\*

In an interview with me, Renè A. Gallo shared the following story concerning his childhood and adolescence in Honduras. His ancestors were “religious” people, involved in an amalgam of Roman Catholicism and witchcraft. In Central American culture, the primary motive for involvement in witchcraft is fear that if “the Great Spirit” is not placated, then, family members would experience disease and poverty. Conversely, it is believed that pleasing “the Great Spirit” ensures health, financial prosperity, and social recognition.

As Renè describes it, since his grandmother had no first-born son of her own, she dedicated him, her first-born (grand)son to Satan. She wrote out a “covenant,” sealed in blood, effectively signing Renè over to Satan before he was born. His soul and very being were thereby relegated and she deposited the blood-covenant in a “sacred chest”—to which she alone had access. She believed that such a sacrifice would secure prosperity and status for her many family members, at the expense of only one—Renè.

At the age of four, Renè began to hear “psychic” voices, see visions at night, and play with “little dwarfs” in the daytime. At times, Renè wanted to communicate his experiences with his parents, but each time he began to tell of his them, he would become mute. While his father had no knowledge of the blood covenant, his mother had suspicions since she also was attracted to witchcraft and magic. During this period of life, Renè’s parents experienced improved social recognition and financial standing. His mother was one of the advisors to the first lady of Honduras and his father was a key administrator within the government.

At the ages of seven and eight, Renè began to experience demonic presences and voices in much stronger ways in the middle of the day, in addition to his “normal” nocturnal encounters. He produced signs of accurate divination—foretelling the future—especially impending tragedies. Renè began to experience seizures, followed by repeated trips to medical doctors and psychiatrists, hospitals and clinics. He underwent a battery of tests to determine the source of his seizures. A CT test ruled out epilepsy. His grandmother, ever-present on the scene, and knowing full-well the cause of the seizures, advised assistance from local witch doctors and psychics. His parents took her counsel, and thus, Renè was treated by potions, incantations, “baths,” and received further instruction by the psychics and witch doctors. Renè was told that he was “chosen” for a purpose and was instructed more fully in occult activity and ritual. Correspondingly, he became more “familiar” with demonic presences and was particularly instructed by the apparition of a “handsome man all dressed up,” who would further his knowledge of the occult. In social life, these demonic experiences never occurred; Renè appeared entirely normal in school and athletic activity (soccer, baseball, basketball). However, when he was alone, the demonic world was all too familiar. His seizures continued, and with them, the financial and emotional collapse of his family began, with numerous and expensive trips to doctors and occult sources for help.

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The financial resources were being poured down an endless hole, feeding a monster who would not be satisfied.

From the ages of eight to sixteen, Renè was making trips to the witch doctors and psychics at least twice a week. In addition, his grandmother provided further instruction in experiencing “the Great Spirit,” the use of potions, incantations, fortune telling, Tarot cards, even the reading of playing cards. At the age of fourteen, Renè began to hear preaching at school and would respectfully listen to the message of Jesus as sole mediator between God and man. The preaching made an impact on him; however, he had also learned that the world of the occult easily accommodated itself to any one of the religious systems that he had come to know.

Renè also suspected that his upcoming sixteenth birthday was a critical event in terms of his grandmother’s blood covenant. The suspicion was later confirmed when Renè opened the “sacred chest,” subsequent to his exorcism when Renè read the blood covenant. Three alternatives were open to him, which would ostensibly break the powers of poverty and misery for his family. He would:

1. Become a Catholic priest,
2. Die, or
3. Become a *curandero*—a witch doctor.

The intensity of his experiences seemed to be “ratcheted up.” His seizures increased in frequency and severity. Three to four seizures a day gave way to one to two seizures an hour. The magical potions, baths, and trips to the witch doctors and psychics were more frequent. His encounter with the “handsome man” become more common and instruction in occult activity became more focused. Renè was also plagued by an inordinate desire to be naked in public; nakedness alone had become normal. Paradoxically, the wealth and prosperity that had been sought after was now dissipated by the incessant bills and fees to physicians, psychiatrists, clinics, hospitals, tests, witch doctors and psychics. It is striking that there were occasions of seizure in the hospitals, during which time, brain activity was registered as normal by CT scans. The family positions, wealth and recognition, were all but devastated.

Renè decided to become a *curandero* a month before his sixteenth birthday and was somewhat encouraged by his parents who were at their wits end in attempting to bring health to their son. Renè became hyperactive, aggressive, violent, and impossible to restrain. He also had to be taken to the hospital for an appendix about to rupture. During the hospital stay, when he was “dying,” a doctor came into Renè’s room and prayed for him and expressed the words, “You shall not die, but live and tell of the works of the Lord.” This doctor also broke various curses and prophesied concerning Renè and his future, particularly of his holistic health over the next two months. Such confrontation with demonic powers and related prophecies occurred while Renè was in shock and being prepared for surgery. Prior to his surgery, Renè also had a striking dream in which a figure spoke to him and assured him that God had a plan for his life and that he would not be serving “the Great Spirit” any longer. Although he did not know God at the time, he regards this experience as a profound encounter with Him.

When Renè returned home and was recovering from the surgery, he became totally possessed by “the Great Spirit.” He saw shadows moving into his body, became more violent, had experiences of floating in the air and putting holes into the ceiling and breaking all the windows in his house. A Roman Catholic priest was asked to come and exorcise the demons but the priest left within five minutes, fearing for his life. Renè experienced the demons speaking directly through him. During this period, he would climb up on the roof of his house and expose his nakedness and would manage to sometimes escape naked from his house into the neighborhood. He was also possessed by a preternatural strength; his parents would tie him up and lock him in a room but Renè was too strong to be contained. The witch doctors advised the parents to give up on their son since “the Great Spirit” had absolute power over Renè. He also began to inflict himself with cuts, particularly when he was aggressive towards family members, and would turn his aggression inwards instead. He became totally mute but would bark like a dog or coyote; the only person with whom he could converse was his grandmother.

On March 16, 1987, a neighbor woman, Sister Francisca, came to the Gallo’s home. She had received a word from God that Renè would be delivered and that he needed to go with her to a prayer meeting. She had been fasting and praying for him for three days. Even in the face of resistant parents, she was insistent, and managed to pry him away from his locked room. At the meeting, after the message, the speaker called out that there was a person who was possessed by Satan and needed deliverance. She pointed to Renè and initiated an exorcism that lasted for about an hour and a half. Similar to the Gadarene demoniac, Renè remembers calling out his name, “Legion, for we are many.” He remembers the shrieking of the demons when they left and the peace, joy, soundness of mind, and freedom when he returned home. He describes having a profound experience with the saving and delivering power of Jesus Christ. Although he had formerly worn glasses, he found his eyes were perfect, and that the glasses now gave him blurred vision.

During the next week, Renè stayed at his home but was frequently visited by people from the church, particularly Sister Francisca. He recounts that, on the next Sunday, he went back to the church and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. However, on this occasion, it was clear to him that particular matters needed to be dealt with. While his own house had been rid of occult writings and documents, his grandmother’s “magical chest” still remained. When Renè went to destroy the items inside, his father threatened him: “If you open that chest, I’ll kill you.” In spite of the threat, Renè managed to open the chest and destroy the contents by fire. Strangely enough, his grandmother called on the telephone at the very moment when Renè was destroying these items; she also “knew” what he was doing and threatened him, saying that he would be destroyed for his actions.

Since these life-changing encounters, Renè finished high school and served in the church for five years. During the first four years, subsequent to his deliverance, salvation and experience with the Holy Spirit, he experienced threatening messages from “the Great Spirit,” to the effect that he wished to repossess him. However, the threats dissipated and are now non-existent. He also sensed a call to fulltime Christian ministry, went to Christ for the Nations Institute, and recently graduated from Regent University’s School of Divinity.

## Introduction

The Gospels are full of narratives in which a colossal war is being waged between God and Satan, between life and death, between freedom and bondage, health and disease, liberation and demonic possession. Jesus' conflict with Satan and evil spirits is a frequent occurrence. Following his initial conflict with Satan and demons (beasts) in the Temptation narrative (Mk. 1:12-13), one of Jesus' first public appearances in the Capernaum synagogue issues in a dramatic encounter with a possessed man. Jesus' very presence evokes a violent and aggressive response. Throughout his ministry, through narrative, teaching, and engagement with people, Jesus assumes an aggressive posture with respect to Satan and demonic powers and their role in possession, wrong human attitudes and choices, disease, and death.

At the moment of his crucifixion, the forces of darkness and the forces of life are positioned in a cataclysmic confrontation. Death, disease, and possession are clear and observable symbols of the disorder which has broken in upon the world—all traceable to human sin. The healing of bodies, the exorcisms of possessed individuals, the forgiveness of sins, and the raising from the dead are symbols of the divine life that has invaded the broken world. The healing of disease and the exorcism of possessed persons are signs of God's redemptive grace and God's victory over the person and forces of evil. This victory has been won in a climactic way in Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death on the cross.

Healing is holistic in nature and includes the different aspects of the human person and is expressed under the broad umbrella term, "salvation":

*Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed;  
save me and I shall be saved* (Jer. 17:14).

Bless the Lord O my soul;  
and all that is within me bless His Holy name.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And forget not *all his benefits*;  
Who *forgives* all your iniquities;  
Who *heals* all your diseases (Psa. 103:1-3).

In the Gospel stories, Jesus' conflict with Satan and evil spirits can be looked at from both a cosmological and personal perspective. From a cosmological perspective, Jesus is the Stronger One who has invaded the Strong Man's house and bound him and is thus able to plunder his "furniture/possessions," that is, set free those who are in bondage to the enemy. From a personal perspective, Jesus frees individuals whose wills are controlled by a hostile, alien, and destructive power. He frees and grants new life and health to those who have been possessed by demons.

## The Terms for Jesus' Enemy and Evil Spirits

A number of terms and expressions are used to identify or characterize Jesus' enemy and the enemy of humanity:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Other terms are used outside of the Gospels: "the Serpent" (Gen. 3:1); "he who has the power of death" (Heb. 2:14); "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10).

*Devil.* The term, “devil” (διάβολος) means the “slanderer,” and was used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew שָׂטָן , “the Satan,” who appears to be a member of the heavenly court, who accuses Job and Joshua and who inspired David’s taking of a census:

“One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them, and Satan also came with them . . . Satan replied, ‘Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? . . . But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.’” (Job. 1:6, 10, 11)

“Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Is this not a burning brand snatched from the fire?’” (Zech. 3:1-2)

“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel” (I Chron. 21:1).<sup>2</sup>

In the prologue to the book of Job, “the Satan” is a member of the divine entourage, who impugns the integrity of Job’s commitment to God; he acts as an accuser or a prosecuting attorney on this given occasion. He is clearly subordinate to God and can only act with divine permission, but does not appear to be a clearly definable person who is God’s arch-enemy. In Zech. 3:1-2, Satan appears again as an accuser who challenges the worth of Joshua ben Jozadak to function as a high priest after the defiling exile. This was a time in which God was restoring the civil and religious life of the people of God after the exile. God cleanses Joshua (representative of the people of God in their religious life) from “filthy garments and iniquity” (Zech. 3:4), while Satan questions his moral fitness for the priesthood. Satan poses a threat to Jerusalem’s acquittal of guilt (3:2), the priesthood (3:3-7), and the whole land (3:9). In I Chron. 21:1, “a Satan” incites David to take a census.<sup>3</sup> The OT texts do not emphasize the Satan’s distinctive existence and deep-seated enmity with God; they do express the negative role of accusation which leads to the separation of the people from God.

In the Gospels, the Devil (ὁ διάβολος) is the adversary of Jesus who seeks to avert Jesus from his messianic task in the temptation narrative.<sup>4</sup> As the prince of this world, he is able to dispose of the world’s kingdoms and their glory (Lk. 4:6). In the Parable of the Weeds, the enemy, who sows the noxious weeds among the wheat is the Devil.<sup>5</sup> His manner of sowing is surreptitious and his purpose is that of creating a mixed community<sup>6</sup> and the resulting confusion expressed by the servants in the parable. Clearly his motive and activity are contrary to Jesus’ life-giving and expectant activity of sowing. In the Parable of the Soils, the Devil takes away the word of God from those along the path, in whom the word was not

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<sup>2</sup> “Appoint an evil man to oppose him; let an accuser (Satan) stand at his right hand” (Psa. 109:6; 108:6 MT).

<sup>3</sup> In II Sam. 24:1, we read, “Again, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.”

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 4:1, 5, 8, 11 par.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 13:39.

<sup>6</sup> In Matthew’s Gospel, the community is mixed; thus, the need for discipline (Matt. 18:15-17).

really sown<sup>7</sup>; the result of his snatching activity is that these people are unable to believe and thus be saved. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, we learn of an eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels.<sup>8</sup>

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus says that the Devil is the father of the murderous Jews; the Devil causes murderous purpose to be carried out and lies to be spoken against Jesus, the ultimate embodiment of truth.<sup>9</sup> He fathers murderous purpose<sup>10</sup> and fathers lies; both activities express his nature—in the context of religious judgment by those who “appear” to be in the right. In Jn. 7-8 a plethora of expressions and phrases highlight the Devil’s hostile activity through religious people:

7:1—Jesus avoids Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

7:13—The people in Judea were afraid even to mention his name because of the fear of the Jews.

7:19—Why do you seek to kill me?

7:25—The Jerusalemites are surprised at the boldness of one “whom they seek to kill.”

7:30—The temple police are sent to arrest him.

7:44—Certain of them were wanting to seize him, but no one laid their hands on Him.

8:37—You seek to kill me.

8:40—You seek to kill me.

8:59—Therefore, they took up stones in order that they might cast them at him.

Coupled with the murderous intent in Jn. 7-8 are the various expressions of hostile confusion and lying by the “religious” people. The two chapters are characterized by a dramatic confusion concerning Jesus, the embodiment and expression of truth:

7:12—He is a good man . . . no, he deceives the people.

7:15—How does he know the Scriptures since he has not learned in our schools?

7:20—You have a demon.

7:25-26—Paradox that Jesus is on the “hit list” and yet speaks openly.

7:27, 40-42—Confusion concerning the identity of Jesus in light of his geographical origin.

7:31—When Christ comes, will he perform more signs than this one (implication that Jesus is not the Christ).

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<sup>7</sup> Lk. 8:12.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 25:41.

<sup>9</sup> Jn. 8:44

<sup>10</sup> The indictment, “you are of your father, the Devil” expresses a genitive of origin.

7:35—Thoughts of Jesus’ suicide.

7:46—No one has ever spoken in this way.

7:48—Has any one of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in Him?

7:52—A prophet does not arise out of Galilee.

8:24—Who are you?

8:41—Charge of Jesus’ illegitimacy.

8:48—You are a Samaritan and have a demon.

8:52—We know that you have a demon.

8:53—Charge of being less than Abraham.

The evangelist has grouped the material to focus upon the divisive effect of Christ’s presence and words. Already before he appears at the feast, some say that he is a good man while others say he misleads the people (7:12). When He appears, some say, “Have the rulers concluded that this is the Messiah?” But, at once, objections are raised (7:25-27). The two chapters are knit together by a motif of dramatic confusion, caused by Satan, concerning Jesus’ identity, which appears to echo a theme found in the Synoptic Gospels, “I have not come to bring peace but a sword.”

The primary culprit for the deadly intent is the Devil who seeks to foment hostility to the point of actual murder, as well as confusion, doubt, and lying accusations. Even though the Fourth Gospel contains no exorcisms, the evangelist describes the surreptitious motives and behavior of the Devil, expressed through humans. These negative attitudes and behaviors are voiced by the self-assured religious critics. Their self-assurance is voiced in the expressions, “Abraham is our father” (8:39), and “The only Father we have is God himself” (8:41). In the same paragraph, Jesus speaks repeatedly of the truth (8:40, 44, 45, 46) to which the leaders are closed; they have “bought into” the Devil’s lie and the Devil’s perversion of the truth. That the Devil chooses and uses religious people, feeds their false self-assurance, fosters confusion and lying, and furthers hostility and murder—all in the name of religious “rightness.” The deceitful and murderous purpose is actualized, when the Devil puts it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, Judas is also called “a devil.”<sup>12</sup>

*Satan.* The term “Satan” (ὁ σατανᾶς) is a transliteration of the Hebrew term, שָׂטָן, “the adversary/slanderer/accuser.” He is the “enemy of God and all those who belong to God.”<sup>13</sup> “Satan” is used interchangeably with “Devil” and “the Tempter” (ὁ πειράζων) in the temptation narratives, but is used in the context of personal address.<sup>14</sup> Jesus uses the term in his rhetorical response to the charge of being in league with Beelzebul and using the power of the Prince of demons to effect his exorcisms, “How can Satan cast out Satan?”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jn. 13:2.

<sup>12</sup> Jn. 6:70.

<sup>13</sup> BDAG, p. 752.

<sup>14</sup> See Matt. 4:10; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:8.

<sup>15</sup> Mk. 3:23, 26; Matt. 12:26; Lk. 11:18.

In the Parable of the Soils, Satan is pictured as the “birds,” who take away the word that was sown along the path.<sup>16</sup> They become his prey since they are vulnerable and exposed, with no ability to take root. We may similarly understand that Satan causes people to give in to persecutions and the deceitfulness of riches in two other soils noted in the parable. The religious leaders likewise are infiltrated by Satan since they are unable to receive the sown word (Mk. 2:23-28; 3:4; 7:6-23; 10:2-9; 12:13-17). In Mk. 8:33, Peter is rebuked, “Get behind me Satan”<sup>17</sup> and Jesus follows the rebuke with an explanation for its severity; Peter is thinking human thoughts. It is noteworthy here that Satan is “on the human side,” willingly aligning himself with the human position, which rejects the idea of a suffering and crucified Messiah. “They are doing the very things and thinking the very thoughts that characterize my rule as ‘the god of this age’—they are OK.” Perhaps the reason for religious “tempting” of Jesus (Mk. 8:4; 10:2; 12:15) can be traced to the Tempter’s control of people. Following the return of the seventy-two on their short-term mission trip, Jesus expresses the joyful cry, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk. 10:18).

Through the disciples’ exorcisms, Jesus senses their triumphant victory over Satan, which issues in his jubilant response. To some extent, one of Satan’s spirits is responsible for binding up a woman in a crippled condition for eighteen years;<sup>18</sup> nevertheless, she remains a daughter of Abraham, who is subsequently healed and is able to stand in an erect posture.<sup>19</sup> As W. Foerster puts it, “Thus, while not all sicknesses are the work of demons, they may all be seen as the work of Satan.”<sup>20</sup>

Directly or indirectly, Satan and demon/angel powers lie behind the various human disorders. Satan also enters Judas,<sup>21</sup> who thereupon, initiates his betrayal of Jesus. At the time of Jesus’ Passion, Jesus and Satan evidently carry on some form of conversation to the effect that Satan has requested permission to sift<sup>22</sup> Peter like wheat.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, Jesus has granted Satan’s request, witnessed by Peter’s threefold denial; he “caves in” to social pressure. While permission is granted to Satan to wreak havoc and denial, Jesus’ committed intercession for Peter assures him of restoration, re-commissioning and a ministry to others, following his failure.<sup>24</sup> Clearly Satan’s role is that of separating Peter from Jesus through denial. Although Satan continues his accusing role, “he has also lost his power to harm wherever the power of Jesus is at work.”<sup>25</sup>

*Beelzebub.* The name “Beelzebub” (βεελζεβούλ) is probably derived from the Canaanite term, “lord of the dwelling” (*baal zebul*), to describe the local manifestation of a fertility God,

<sup>16</sup> Mk. 4:15.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 16:23.

<sup>18</sup> Lk. 13:11, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Lk. 13: 13, 16.

<sup>20</sup> W. Foerster, “δαίμων,” *TDNT*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 18.

<sup>21</sup> Lk. 22:3; Jn. 13:27.

<sup>22</sup> The verb σιναίω means “shake in a sieve, sift,” and is used here in a symbolic manner. BAGD, p. 759.

<sup>23</sup> In a similar way, Satan was granted permission to “test” Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).

<sup>24</sup> “But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Lk. 22:32).

<sup>25</sup> Foerster, “σατανᾶς,” *TDNT*, vol. VII, 157.



“god of the exalted dwelling.”<sup>26</sup> The term is used as an abusive epithet against Jesus by Jesus’ religious critics, used in conjunction with Satan and the Prince of Demons.<sup>27</sup> It is an epithet that will also be hurled against the disciples when they are sent out in mission.<sup>28</sup> The name “Beelzebul” is also linked to the term, “the Strong One,” expressed through Jesus’ Parable of the Strong Man and the Stronger One (Mk. 3:27). The false assumption that Satan is risen up against himself and is divided, would mean that it is all over with him and that his end has come (Mk. 3:26); both statements are untrue, since they are part of contrary-to-fact conditional sentences. Jesus’ question in Mark 3:26 is rhetorical and serves as an explicit statement as to how his exorcisms are not accomplished. In effect, Jesus says,

I am accused of using demonic power for the expulsion of demons. But this clearly would involve the break-up of the demonic world, in accordance with usual human experience of seditious activity. Now it is clear that the empire of Satan still holds out (this assumption is necessary to the argument): therefore I do not cast out demons by Beelzebul, but in some other way.<sup>29</sup>

Human experience usually shows that any kind of social organization (“kingdom, city, or house”) is threatened (“will not stand”) when there is factionalism (“in-house” fighting—”against itself”). Jesus assumes that the empire and kingdom of Satan still stand (v. 26)—a view shared by Jesus’ critics. After all, sin, sickness, demon-possession and death continue to be present realities. Since Satan is not interested in bringing about his own demise, the exorcism by Jesus cannot be by Satan’s power for Satan is not such a fool as to do himself in.<sup>30</sup>

Satan’s kingdom is strong; it is still standing and has a strong man within, but it also shows very real signs of weakening, notably in Jesus’ exorcisms. However, the point of Jesus’ argument is that the break-up and demise of Satan’s kingdom does not occur from internal factions, that is, “in-house” fighting.

The parable affirms that ransacking of the Strong Man’s house will not be accomplished by internal dissension but rather from external aggression by the Stronger One. In essence, Jesus says, “You should have realized that no one can enter the Strong One’s house and ransack his vessels,<sup>31</sup> unless he first binds the Strong Man. This can only happen through an exercise of superior strength by a still stronger man, one who is able to overpower and tie up the Strong Man. In brief, Jesus is the Stronger One who has come and bound up

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<sup>26</sup> See I Kgs. 18:16-40; 8:13; also a possible link can be found with *baal zebub*, “lord of the dunghill/flies,” the god of Ekron (II Kgs. 1:2-3, 6, 16). See also Hos. 2:18.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 12:24; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15.

<sup>28</sup> Matt. 10:25.

<sup>29</sup> C.K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit in the Gospel Tradition* (London: S P C K, 1947), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Manson, Major, Wright, *Mission and Message of Jesus*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1938), 377.

<sup>31</sup> For the term “vessel” (σκεύος) in connection with a person whom the Devil appropriates, cf. Testament of Naphtali 8:6, “But him that doeth not that which is good

Both angels and men shall curse,  
And God shall be dishonoured among through the Gentiles through him,  
And the devil shall make him as his own particular vessel (σκεύος),  
And every wild beast shall master him,  
And the Lord shall hate him.”

Satan/Beelzebul/the Strong Man. Strangely enough, the Strong Man, though bound, still exercises power.

We may see in this parable a word of confirmation to the people who are asking the question whether Jesus is Messiah, that is, “the Son of David” (Matt. 12:23). The term “Stronger One” is also a Messianic designation, since John the Baptist had promised that “One stronger than I is the coming one<sup>32</sup> who will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11).

In Jesus’ parable, he may allude to one of Isaiah’s Servant Songs wherein we find a similar pattern of rhetorical question and answer concerning the “Strong One.” “The scene is Babylon where Jewish captives lament that they are forsaken, childless, and bereft of any hope. Out of their despair, through the prophet, they register their wrenching question, “One will not take prey from the strong one, will he?”<sup>33</sup> In the Isaian context, “the strong one” means the Babylonian captors. However, the divine answer is sure:

Even *captives* shall be seized from a *strong man*

and

*plunder* be taken from the *fierce*.

The influence of this and other Servant Songs is strong in Jesus’ self-understanding and mission. Indeed the language of a Servant Song (Isa. 42:1-4) is used in the passage that immediately precedes the exorcism narrative (Matt. 12:18-21) and is especially reflected in the quiet and unobtrusive way in which Jesus carries out his ministry of healing. He may well indicate here, “I am the Servant of the Lord who accomplishes the work of binding up the Strong One and dividing the spoil—ransacking the house of the Strong One.” Every occasion of exorcism, as in Matt. 12:23, is an occasion of ransacking the property of the Strong One. The Strong Man exercises his dominion over sin, sickness, possession and death. The mission of Jesus means that the Spirit-anointed Messiah (Stronger One<sup>34</sup>) has come, overcoming and plundering the spoils of the Strong Man. He frees those who are enslaved by Satan, and in so doing, he destroys the power of the evil one. Satan’s defeat, clearly evident in Jesus’ exorcisms means freedom and wholeness for the demon possessed persons. But it is all the work of the Messiah, who will also be the agent of the demons’ final destruction.

*The Evil One.* The adjective, “evil” (πονηρός) is used substantively to refer to “the Evil One” (ὁ πονηρός) in connection with various sayings and parables:

<sup>32</sup> The term, “the Coming One” is also a Messianic allusion:

Matt. 3:11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but *he who is coming* after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

See also Matt. 21:9 where the term “Son of David” is also linked with the “*One who Comes* in the name of the Lord: 21:9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, “Hosanna to the *Son of David*. *Blessed is He who Comes in the name of the Lord*. Hosanna in the highest!”

<sup>33</sup> Isa. 49:24-25. Cullen I K Story, *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Mark*, (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Anointed as such in Mk. 1:7, 11.

“anything more than this [simple truth-telling] is *from the Evil One*” (Matt. 5:37)—in connection with oath-taking”

“deliver us *from the Evil One*” (Matt. 6:13)—in the Lord’s Prayer

“*the Evil One* comes and seizes that which had been sown” (Matt. 13:19, 38)—in the Parable of the Soils

“I pray that you would . . . keep them from the *Evil One*” (Jn. 17:15)<sup>35</sup>

*Other less common titles.* Jesus’ enemy is also called “the Tempter” (ὁ πειράζων) in the temptation narrative (Matt. 4:3). Matthew is perhaps the clearest with respect to the narrative’s purpose, and expresses it with an infinitive clause, *to be tempted* (πειρασθῆναι). The verb or its compound (ἐκπειράζω) is used in different ways in the text:

Matt. 4:1 πειρασθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου “*to be tempted* by the devil”

Matt. 4:3 ὁ πειράζων εἶπεν αὐτῷ “*the Tempter* said to him,”

Matt. 4:7 Οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου “You shall not *test* the Lord your God.”

In 4:1, the infinitive is used to refer to the *purpose* of the temptation narrative; in 4:3 the participle is used to refer to *the Tempter*, while 4:7 reflects a certain *defiant challenge* in which Jesus is challenged *to force a test* upon God.<sup>36</sup> Several aspects of the word family (πειράζω) are present in the narrative.

Satan is also called “Prince of Demons” (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων) in an epithet against Jesus (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15), the “enemy” (ἔχθρος) in a parable (Matt. 13:39) or a defeated enemy in Jesus’ jubilant cry over the disciples’ victory “over all the power of the enemy” (Lk. 10:19), the Ruler of this World (ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου—Jn. 16:11; 12:31<sup>37</sup>; 14:30).

*Demons.* The normal term “demon” (διαμόνιον<sup>38</sup>) refers to an “evil spirit” and is used “of independent beings, who occupy a position somewhere between the human and divine.”<sup>39</sup> The term is used in the gospel narratives to refer to the spiritual beings who wreak havoc upon people in a wide variety of destructive ways. The spiritual being is sometimes described as an “evil spirit” (πονηρόν πνεῦμα)<sup>40</sup> or “unclean spirit” (ἀκάθαρτος πνεῦμα).<sup>41</sup> Further, in several of the passages, there is a curious alternation between the singular and plural numbers referring to the demon-possessed one; in one instance, the name “Legion” may refer to the plurality of demons or the name “Legion” may represent an

<sup>35</sup> See also I Jn. 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19.

<sup>36</sup> BDAG, p. 646. Barrett notes, “As man he is tempted by the agent of God, that his faithfulness, his dependence upon God, may be revealed; at the same time, in tempting Jesus, Satan is tempting God.” C.K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, (London: SPCK, 1947), 51.

<sup>37</sup> The expression “now the ruler of this world shall be cast out” (Jn. 12:31) parallels the Lukan affirmation, “I was seeing Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Lk. 10:18).

<sup>38</sup> Also δαίμων in Matt. 8:31; Mk. 5:12; Lk. 8:29.

<sup>39</sup> BDAG, 168.

<sup>40</sup> Matt. 12:45; Lk. 7:21; 8:2.

<sup>41</sup> Mk. 6:7.

evasive answer from the demon(s) who does not wish to disclose its identity.<sup>42</sup> In short, the demons are obedient to Satan and are intent upon harming people in their bodies, emotions, minds, spirits and their will. In the various accounts, it is clear that demons can manifest their presence by speaking through persons and taking control over a person's body. They can cause self-injury, torment, and can enter animals and take control over them as well.

Satan appears as a distinct personality, who seeks to entice Jesus and his followers away from his messianic vocation. He tempts Jesus and his disciples to compromise their integrity by following an easier path than a divinely willed plan. Through the temptation narrative, it is clear that Satan entices people away from a relationship of daily dependence upon God and seeks to cause presumption by the people of God and compromise their worship. He seeks to hinder the proclamation and harvest of the Kingdom, which has come in the person of Jesus;<sup>43</sup> he is capable of shutting human hearts to the message of the Kingdom and is intent upon wreaking distortion and confusion even when there is a responsive people. Through possession, Satan is able to control the emotions, mental state, and behavior of people and infuse them with a supernatural strength and immunity from physical pain. "The centre of personality, the volitional and active ego, is impaired by alien powers, which seek to ruin the man and sometimes drive him to self-destruction (Mk. 5:5)."<sup>44</sup>

Satan is successful in his temptation to secure both the betrayal (Judas) and denial (Peter) of Jesus, but even so, his ability is limited by the redemptive purpose that is at work in the cross and in the restoration of a fallen leader. At times, possession by unclean spirits results in various physical maladies. He serves as the origin of murder, hatred and lying and seeks to perpetuate murder and lying through people, notably through "religious" people. Satan is able to "enter" people and put malicious plans into their hearts. Jesus' encounter with the Gadarene demoniac(s) reveals that the demons (consequently Satan) know that they have a fearful and assured end, "Have you come to destroy us before *the time*?" (Matt. 8:29). Nonetheless, in the present age, Satan controls a unified kingdom, which still stands. Satan's power and influence are powerful yet limited and can be minimized by direct aggression through exorcism or by the word of God. On at least one occasion Satan is granted permission to put a disciple into a sieve and shake him; yet, his power is limited to Jesus' permission and can be countered by the strengthening power of Jesus' intercession. He is confident that his people can either resist Satan or be restored and in a stronger condition, after they have fallen.

### **Broad Structure of the Exorcisms:<sup>45</sup>**

Although there are numerous accounts of exorcisms in summary report form,<sup>46</sup> four main stories provide the narratives in which Jesus exorcises individuals and frees them from their sorry condition. On the whole, the narratives reveal a certain structure and pattern:

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<sup>42</sup> Mk. 5:9; Lk. 8:30. In Mark 1:21-28, there is clearly an alternation between the singular and plural pronouns.

<sup>43</sup> In I Thess. 2:18, he successfully obstructs Christian mission and travel; in I Cor. 7:5, he uses sexual continence to bring about fracture in the marriage; in Acts 5:3, he prompts withholding of finances and its deceit. Although Satan is an enemy of the light and of God (Acts 26:18), he is also able to disguise himself as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14).

<sup>44</sup> Foerster, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. C.K. Barrett for the pattern, 55-57.

*Details which emphasize the needy condition of the demoniac.* An unfortunate man in Capernaum is physically present in the synagogue, but nevertheless, belongs to another sphere, “in an unclean spirit” (Mk. 1:23) and is not in control of his own life.<sup>47</sup> The Gadarene demoniac<sup>48</sup> is in a desperate condition; Mark provides three verses (5:2-5), which highlight the grievous condition<sup>49</sup> of the Gadarene demoniac: he lives a solitary existence in the sphere of the unclean (tombs), possesses a superhuman strength, shouts, cuts himself with stones and is incapable of being restrained through chains. In Mk. 9:17ff., details abound concerning the pitiful state of an epileptic son: he is robbed of speech and experiences violent seizures, being thrown to the ground, foaming at the mouth, gnashing of teeth and becoming rigid and self-destructive (thrown into the fire or water to kill him).<sup>50</sup> The deformed woman has been bound by Satan for eighteen years (Lk. 13:11, 16) and unable to stand erect. A Syro-Phoenician mother comes to Jesus on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter, who is in a needy condition (Mk. 7:24-30). Although no specific details are provided, presumably the daughter is in a condition serious enough that she cannot make the trip with her mother; we have no details in the text as to the extent to which she or her mother were subject to ridicule and embarrassment.

*The demons recognize Jesus’ identity in their confrontation with him and are resistant to Him.* The demons possess a certain knowledge of Jesus’ identity,<sup>51</sup> which they forcibly express in the very presence of Jesus. The demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue wails, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk. 1:24). The Gadarene demoniac cries out, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God not to torment me” (Mk. 5:7; “Son of God” in Matt. 8:28).<sup>52</sup> The Greek idiom, “What do I have to do with you?” is also found in other places in both testaments and is best understood, “What do we have in common?”<sup>53</sup> The answer is clear; the man in the sphere of the unclean spirit has nothing in common with “the Holy One of God.” The demons speak the truth that the boundaries between the two spheres are clearly demarcated; they intersect at no point. This truth makes the slander against the Holy


<sup>46</sup> Mk. 1:32-34, 39; 3:7-12; Matt. 9:32-34; 12:22 (par. Lk. 11:14).

<sup>47</sup> The sphere is similar to Elymas, the magician (Acts 13:8-12) and a woman with a divining spirit (Acts 16:16-18).

<sup>48</sup> In Matt. 8:28—there are two demoniacs.

<sup>49</sup> The use of the perfect infinitives Mk. 5:4, “pulled apart” and “shattered” intimate that further human effort to bind him will be in vain. Cullen I K Story, 154.

<sup>50</sup> The story of the Gadarene demoniac is congruent with Mark’s grouping of several miracle stories, which emphasize the extremity of need (distress at sea—4:35-41; Gadarene demoniac—5:1-20; Jairus’ daughter—5:21-24, 35-43; woman with a hemorrhage—5:25-34), the human impossibility of self-help, the role of trust and the wholeness of life that Jesus bestows upon each “impossible” situation. There is a clear comprehensive breadth to the works of Jesus in that they focus, in succession, on the world of nature (wind at sea), the spiritual world (demoniac), human sickness and frailty (woman with the hemorrhage) and the world of death (Jairus’ daughter).

<sup>51</sup> James 2:19 *σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς. καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσοσιν* 

James 2:19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See also Mk. 1:34; 3:11—which are all part of Mark’s *Messianic Secret* (Wrede).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the use in II Sam. 19:22; Judg. 11:12; I Kgs. 17:18; II Kgs. 3:13 in the OT and Mk. 5:7; Matt. 8:29; Lk. 4:38; 8:28.

Spirit so serious and fraught with damning consequences. The demons' cry of torment is most directly related to their awareness of their eschatological destruction, expressed in Matthew's Gospel, "Have you come to torment us *before the time?*" (Matt. 8:29). The demons' recognition of Jesus' identity is also expressed in other summary passages (Mk. 1:34; 3:11). The cry of recognition is squeezed from them, which also reflects the demons' defense of themselves against Jesus. The expression, "I adjure you" (ὄρκίζω) on the part of the demons is an attempt to bind or put a curse upon Jesus and thus, compel him to do or say something.<sup>54</sup> No doubt it is an attempt to gain control over Jesus, since they perceive his power and attempt to ward off Jesus' attack by his very presence. "It is a strange event. The possessed one, with an oath, has called on the Majestic One, the Most High God, for protection against the one who is the Only Son of the Most High God (Mk. 5:9)."<sup>55</sup>

*Jesus addresses the demon(s) in his own person and enjoins silence.* In response to the initial recognition by the demon(s), Jesus directly addresses the demons, generally to rebuke the demon(s) and charge the demon(s) to silence.

"Be muzzled . . . come out of him" (φιμόω—Mk. 1:24)

"He was not allowing the demons to speak because they knew who He was" (ἀφίημι λαλεῖν—Mk. 1:34)

"But he gave them strict orders not to tell who He was" (ἐπιτιμάω—Mk. 3:12)

"He rebuked the unclean spirit" (ἐπιτιμάω & ἐπιτάσσω—Mk. 9:25)

On one occasion, Jesus inquires concerning the demon's name (Mk. 5:9); in this case his previous attempt did not appear to be successful. In another instance, Jesus requests something of the history of an epileptic boy's illness/possession (Mk. 9:21-22). "The confession which Jesus seeks to evoke is not, however, this witness which proceeds from demonic knowledge. He forbids it."<sup>56</sup>

*Jesus expels the demon(s) by a word of command.* Coupled with the silence charge is the command to the demons to depart from the tormented person:

"Be muzzled . . . come out of him" (Mk. 1:24)

"Come out of this man, you evil spirit" (Mk. 5:8)

"You deaf and mute spirit . . . I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." (Mk. 9:25)

In this regard, the demons are commanded not to return to the same person.<sup>57</sup> In another instance, the demons plead for leniency (a "plea-bargain"), not to be sent out of the region, but to inhabit pigs.<sup>58</sup> Further, in this instance immediate obedience to Jesus' command to

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<sup>54</sup> Josh. 6:26; I Kgs. 22:16; II Chron. 18:15; Matt. 26:63).

<sup>55</sup> Story, "Unpublished manuscript on Mark's Gospel."

<sup>56</sup> Foerster, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Matt. 12:43-45; Lk. 11:24-26.

<sup>58</sup> Mk. 5:10-12. The book of Tobit provides an example of demons being associated with a particular geographical locale: "And Tobias remembered the words of Raphael, and took the liver of

come out of the man (Mk. 5:8) was delayed, although the first step towards compliance is taken as the man covers before Jesus. Three features stand out:

1. Jesus uses no mechanical or magical devices in the exorcism, e.g., incense, music.<sup>59</sup>
2. The texts do not say that Jesus was praying at the time of the exorcism or using incantation against the demons
3. Jesus does not use the oath formula or invoke a “name,” “I adjure you by . . .,” which is expressed by the demons.

Instead he confronts the demons with his own person. Through his own person and the power of the Holy Spirit, he directly enjoins silence, commands the demons to leave and never to return. As Twelftree notes, “Jesus appeared to rely on his own charismatic personal force to subdue and expel the demons.”<sup>60</sup> Jesus is conscious that he now breaks the power of the devil and his angels because he is the one in whom the dominion of God is present on behalf of humanity.<sup>61</sup> Jesus affirms the truth about the source of his exorcisms. His exorcisms are accomplished by the Spirit of God in conjunction with His messianic person and signify the presence of God’s Kingdom:

“But if it is *by the Spirit of God* that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28).

20 “But if it is *by the finger of God* that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Lk. 11:20).

It is not the fact of exorcisms *per se* that distinguishes Jesus from Jewish exorcists, but the fact that he, as *Messiah* (“I”), is casting out demons by the Spirit of God.<sup>62</sup>

*The actual exorcism is effective.* Mark narrates the violent exit of the demon in the Capernaum synagogue, “The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out with a shriek” (Mk. 1:24). The demons left the Gadarene demoniac and were transferred to some pigs, which thereupon rushed into the Sea of Galilee and were drowned. “Their wild, unchecked,

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the fish and the heart out of the bag which he had, and put them on the ashes of the incense. And the smell of the fish baffled the demon and he ran away into the upper parts of Egypt.” Tobit 8:3.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Tobit 8:3 for the use of incense. Jubilees mentions the use of medicines in exorcism (Jubilees 10:10-13, “And one of us He commanded that we should teach Noah all their medicines; for He knew that they would not walk in uprightness, nor strive in righteousness. And we did according to all His words: all the malignant evil ones we bound in the place of condemnation, and a tenth part of them we left that they might be subject before Satan on the earth. And we explained to Noah all the medicines of their diseases, together with their seductions, how we might heal them with herbs of the earth. And Noah wrote down all things in a book as we instructed him concerning every kind of medicine. Thus the evil spirits were precluded from hurting the sons of Noah.”

<sup>60</sup> Graham Twelftree, “Demon, Devil, Satan, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 168.

<sup>61</sup> Foerster, 19.

<sup>62</sup> A similar thought is present at the Baptism of Jesus. The presence of the Kingdom does not rest with Jesus alone, since He is now thirty years old, or the Spirit alone, since the Spirit of God was active in Israel’s history. Since He is anointed by the Spirit and confirmed by the voice from above (Mk. 1:10-11), it is not surprising that Jesus’ first word in public proclaims, “The Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk. 1:14-15).

reckless plunge over the cliff into the sea was proof enough of the destructive work which the demons had unleashed earlier in the life of the Gadarene man.”<sup>63</sup> However, the real proof of the exorcism is expressed in the altered condition of the man, “sitting, dressed<sup>64</sup> and in his right mind” (Mk. 5:15)—each of these expressions stand in stark contrast to the lengthy description of the man’s grievous condition, prior to the exorcism (Mk. 5:2-5). The exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician’s daughter is confirmed when the mother returns home, “She went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone” (Mk. 7:30); this is the only recorded instance where Jesus accomplishes an exorcism at a distance from the afflicted person. The subsequent effect of Jesus’ command to the deaf and mute spirit is noted: “The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, ‘He’s dead.’” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet and he stood up” (Mk. 9:26-27). In several of the exorcisms, violence characterizes the confrontation between Jesus and the demon(s).

*The effect of astonishment (fear) upon the witnesses is noted.* Consistent with numerous miracle stories, the effect upon the witnesses is noted. The onlookers in the Capernaum synagogue “were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him’” (Mk. 1:27).<sup>65</sup> When the townspeople see the dramatic and powerful change in the Gadarene demoniac, they respond with fear, no doubt in response to the numinous mystery (*mysterium tremendum*—Rudolph Otto), and they plead with Jesus to leave their region (Mk. 5:15, 17). In response to the exorcism of demons causing a man to be blind and mute, “the crowd was amazed and said, ‘Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel’” (Matt. 9:33). The exorcism of another blind and mute demon likewise causes a response of amazement: A miracle has occurred but the response to it is varied. The crowd asks, “Can this be the Son of David?”<sup>66</sup> The Messianic title “Son of David” occurs eight other times in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>67</sup> While the crowd does not make a clear verbal confession, nonetheless the question of Jesus’ identity as “Son of David” is raised.

## The Disciples and Exorcism

In Mark’s Gospel, the initial call-narratives (1:16-20; 2:13-14) and the formal appointment-narrative (3:13-19), contain a clear link, found in the verb “to do/make” (ποιέω). In 1:17, Jesus says, “*I will make*” (ποιήσω) you to become fishers of men.” In 3:14, Mark states, “*And he made*” (ἐποίησεν) twelve . . . .” It is the creative activity of Jesus in “making” disciples that binds the two narratives together. That is to say, the purpose of the call is realized in the formal appointment of the twelve. The verb “make/do” is also used when the disciples report back to Jesus of all they had done on their short-term mission trip, “And the apostles gathered together around to Jesus and announced to him all the things

<sup>63</sup> Story, 158.

<sup>64</sup> We can only presume that someone (disciples?) provided clothing for the once naked man.

<sup>65</sup> Amazement at Jesus’ authority is also present, prior to the exorcism (1:22), which is magnified by the authoritative exorcism.

<sup>66</sup> The question is rhetorical, “This one can’t be the Son of David, can he?”

<sup>67</sup> 1:20; 9:27; 15:22; 20:30; 20:31; 21:9, 15; 22:42; there are seven other occurrences of the proper name, “David” (1:1, 6, 17--twice; 12:3; 22:43, 45).



*'they had done'* (ἐποίησεν) and taught" (6:30). Such activity includes their exorcisms of possessed persons.

The initial call of the disciples (1:16-20) is formalized into an appointment as "apostles." As Mark records this appointment, he notes the three-fold purpose of their formal appointment:

1. To be with him,
2. To be sent out to preach,
3. To have authority over unclean spirits (Mk. 3:14).

The first purpose is significant; it is a call to relationship—they must be with him, learn from him by word, example and relationship before they could be sent out in mission (cf. 6:6b-13). Their work is similar to the work of Jesus: ministry of the word and manifestation of authority in exorcism. The miraculous activity, including exorcism is paired with the proclamation of the Kingdom's advent. In 6:7, the twelve are given authority over unclean spirits and therefore to cast out demons—which they do (6:13).<sup>68</sup> Such victory over unclean spirits is accompanied by the declaration, "the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mk. 1:13-14; cf. Lk. 10:9). In Matt. 12:28, the coming of the Kingdom of God is associated with three things:

1. The messianic person of Jesus, "But if I . . .,"
2. The activity of the Spirit of God, "by the Spirit of God,"
3. Exorcism, "cast out demons."

In addition, the disciples also "heal" (6:13) and "teach" (6:31). The first purpose of the formal appointment was to "be with Jesus," which is then realized after the return of the disciples from their missions trip; they return to "be with him again" (6:30). Jesus serves as a participating mentor to the Twelve; He is always personally involved in doing the work of his unique mission, yet he is ever so conscious of teaching the disciples who would "do and teach" (Mk. 6:30) what he had done and taught. Such "doing and teaching" includes their conflict with evil spirits.

The three blocks of material in Mark are bound together in a clear fashion and in a sequential manner; these are the "high points" that connect the other narratives as the disciples are observers and participants in his ministry. The close manner in which exorcism is paired with declaration of the Kingdom's presence, removes the exorcisms from the notion of incantation and magic. Just as Jesus came to "destroy the works of the Devil" (1 Jn. 3:8), so the disciples are charged with the same purpose and are granted the same authority; their exorcisms will signify the presence of the Kingdom of God in their sender.

In Lk. 10:17-20, there is a revealing interchange between Jesus and the seventy-two, following their short-term mission-trip. The disciples had been sent out in pairs to preach the Kingdom's presence and to heal; although exorcism is not mentioned in the charge (10:1-12), it certainly can be implied by virtue of the disciples' report of the subjection of

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<sup>68</sup> In 9:18, the disciples were unable to cast out the spirit from the "epileptic" son. Although they had been granted such authority and Jesus expects their efforts will be successful, nonetheless, in this instance they had failed, due to a lack of faith. Perhaps this was a particularly difficult case to which they could not adequately respond with faith.

demons to them, after their trip. It is noteworthy that the seventy-two are flushed with the excitement and joy over the subjection of demons to them in Jesus' name (10:17). Jesus responds with a jubilant cry, expressed in four clauses:

I was beholding Satan falling from heaven like lightning.  
I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions  
and to overcome all the power of the enemy;  
nothing will harm you (10:18).

In the context, Satan's fall like lightning from heaven is the immediate effect of the disciples' success in casting out demons; the exorcisms done in Jesus' name signify the inbreaking Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 12:28 = Lk. 11:20). Barrett notes, "The defeat of subordinate members of the Kingdom of evil is a proof of the sovereign activity of God, that is, of the defeat of Satan."<sup>69</sup> The overcoming of the lesser demons is a sign of the overthrow of their chief. Mention made of Satan in heaven is aligned with the OT passages, where Satan is a member of the heavenly court, from whence he can fall.<sup>70</sup> For the image we can find parallels in two texts:

How you have fallen from heaven,  
O morning star, son of the dawn!  
You have been cast down to the earth,  
You who have once laid low the nations!  
You said in your heart,  
I will ascend to heaven . . .  
But you are brought down to the grave,  
To the depths of the pit" (Isa. 14:12-15).  
"But they were not strong enough and lost their place in heaven (Rev. 12:18).

In a broader way, Satan's fall is directly related to the eschatological salvation, which has been effected through Jesus' person, words and works. Thus, the disarming of Satan is linked with Satan's fall from heaven and the cessation of his accusing prerogative.<sup>71</sup> The seventy-two, sent out on mission, extend the same mission through the same power in Jesus' name. Through Jesus, and then through the disciples' mission, we find the beginning of the end. "Something is achieved through the mission of Jesus and the disciples; and that which is thus begun must go on to its inevitable end in the complete subjection of the forces of evil and the full manifestation of the sovereignty of God."<sup>72</sup> Through these clauses, Jesus affirms the disciples' success in the subjection of demons to them and assures them of the extent of their victory<sup>73</sup> and their ongoing protection from Satan and his demonic forces. Although,

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<sup>69</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit in the Gospel Tradition*, (London: S P C K, 1966), 64.

<sup>70</sup> Job 1:6ff.; Zech. 3:1ff.

<sup>71</sup> Foerster notes, "The binding of the strong man and the fall of the accuser from heaven refer to the same thing. Mk. 3:27 and Lk. 10:17f. elucidate one another." 160.

<sup>72</sup> H.D.A. Major, T.W. Manson, C.J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1956), 550.

<sup>73</sup> The expression, "tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you" may find a parallel in Psa. 91:13, "You shall tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you shall trample under foot"; cf. also Deut. 8:15 and the picture of Satan as the serpent.

the disciples are prepared for rejection in their missions-trip, Jesus nonetheless assures them of their ultimate security and protection.

And yet, Jesus qualifies their exuberant joy; the true grounds for their joy is to be found in their position, “their names are written in heaven” (Lk. 10:20).<sup>74</sup> They are destined for the unending bliss of the coming Kingdom. The disciples’ joy is based upon their successful exorcisms. Jesus says that their joy is not to be based on exorcisms (activity)<sup>75</sup> but rather in their saved condition. It is a position of incredible privilege and not a cause for superficial triumphalism. The exorcisms “are no doubt a sign of the approaching salvation, but they are necessarily of less import than the fact that the disciples are elect participants in the salvation itself.”<sup>76</sup> Exorcisms are not the “end-all” but signs of the end, that is, the final subjugation of the force(s) of evil.

In Mk. 9:38, we find evidence of a stranger who exorcised in the name of Jesus but was not part of the twelve or seventy-two. The sons of Zebedee, surnamed “Sons of Thunder” reveal a strain of intolerance and exclusion, expressed through their unsuccessful attempt<sup>77</sup> to forbid exorcisms by another.<sup>78</sup> It is interesting that “the name of Jesus” was used in the exorcism,<sup>79</sup> although Jesus does not appeal to a “name” in his own exorcisms. The book of Acts reveals a comical, painful and humiliating attempt of certain Jewish non-Christian exorcists, who had unsuccessfully tried to use Jesus’ name in their exorcism: “‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?’ and so handled them that they fled from the house naked and wounded.” (Acts 19:16).

Jesus rebukes the Sons of Thunder for their intolerance. He does not assume exclusion or competition by the “strange exorcist” but enjoins inclusion, sympathetic toleration, and expresses to His disciples that one who exorcises in his name may actually be on Jesus’ side.<sup>80</sup> Further, Jesus may understand that it may be important to accord a time-delay to the strange exorcist to decide for Jesus.

### Satan’s Role in the Passion

The Gospels also express the role of Satan in the passion narrative, expressed by Paul, “None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Cor. 2:8). The entire passion narrative is set in motion by Satan’s “entry” into Judas (Lk. 22:3). In Luke’s version of the temptation narrative, the Devil left Jesus until an “opportune moment” (ἄχρη καίρου) should present itself. Now the Devil’s

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<sup>74</sup> For the Book of Life or of the Living (Psa. 69:29; 87:4-6; Exod. 32:32; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8).

<sup>75</sup> In Lk. 10:20, the term “spirits” is used interchangeably with “demons” (v. 17).

<sup>76</sup> Barrett, 64.

<sup>77</sup> The imperfect tense, “we tried to prevent” (ἐκωλύομεν) is a conative imperfect, which expresses an attempt that was made and then given up after unsuccessful effort.

<sup>78</sup> On another occasion, they sought to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village because they refused to accept Jesus with hospitality (Lk. 9:54).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. also Matt. 7:22f. for activity of false charismatics “in Jesus’ name.”

<sup>80</sup> A similar attitude of enjoined inclusion occurs with respect to prophecy occurs in Moses’ words, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” (Numb. 11:27-29).

opportune moment is at hand, and is followed by the insidious possession of Judas, who enacts the plan with the religious authorities, who are likewise controlled by Satan. The religious leaders continue Satan's murderous purpose and deceit. Satan also received the requested permission to "shake and sift" Peter. In the midst of Jesus' agony concerning the upcoming crucifixion "an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Lk. 22:43-44). What is it that causes such anguish? Although Jesus is secure in his Abba-relationship with his father, nonetheless the upcoming passion expresses Jesus' decisive struggle with the mystery, power and person of evil. At the time of his arrest Jesus says, "But this is your hour and the hour of the power of darkness is yours as well" (Lk. 22:53). Even the closing scene of Jesus' earthly life is narrated against a cosmic background, involving a supernatural darkness, rending of the Temple's thick veil, an earthquake, opening of tombs and the raising up of saints who enter the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 27:51ff.). The confrontation between Jesus and the Devil in the temptation narrative is exponentially magnified at the time of the crucifixion, involving a cosmic struggle between Jesus and the powers of evil and death.

### Implications

The sayings, narratives, and parables do not provide a comprehensive Satanology; however, the various texts demonstrate Jesus' understanding and the early community's sense of the important issues and their relevance for the Church engaged in an ongoing conflict with the person and forces of evil. The various passages portray that the power of evil is deeply personal and works towards the destruction of people in all dimensions of life; no sphere of life remains untouched. Specifically, Satan's objective is the war against Jesus who lives life the way it was meant to be lived and offers the gift of new life to those who put their trust in Him. Through Jesus' path of obedience (no to the Tempter and yes to God), unto his redemptive death, Satan attempts to disrupt and dislodge the redemptive plan. This plan is realized in Jesus and thereby granted to others as he brings "salvation," that is, wholeness of life in all dimensions.

Jesus' exorcisms are not isolated or incidental invasions into the kingdom of Satan; rather, they express the present and powerful reality of the Kingdom's presence. They also mark the beginning of the end, the annihilation of Satan, a sobering realization which the demons acknowledge.<sup>81</sup> As Jeremias notes, "Every occasion on which Jesus drives out an evil spirit is an anticipation of the hour in which Satan will be visibly robbed of his power. The victories over his instruments are a foretaste of the *Eschaton*."<sup>82</sup> Thus, in Matthew 8, as the Gadarene demoniacs confront Jesus, they cry out in terror: And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us *before the time*?" (Matt. 8:29). They sense clearly that Jesus is the instrument of their final destruction.

As the anointed Messiah, exorcism becomes a manifestation of his messianic activity. In Mark 1:27, when Jesus casts out demons in the Capernaum synagogue, the people are amazed at his exceptional authority over demons. The context suggests that he possesses such power by virtue of his identity, "the Holy One of God" (1:24).

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<sup>81</sup> Mk. 1:24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

<sup>82</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 95.

The authority vested in Jesus comes from the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28). Matthew's text links together Jesus' messianic person, exorcism and the instrumental role of the Spirit, which in concert, signify the presence of the Kingdom of God. Luke's text says that He exorcises demons by the "finger of God."<sup>83</sup>

We need to sense the tension inherent in the idea of Satan being bound and yet strong. Jesus won a victory in the temptation but this does not mean that Satan's power is finished. Luke's account states that the Devil left him until "a more opportune moment" (Lk. 4:13). Likewise in the Parable of the Strong Man and the Stronger One (Matt. 12:29), Jesus clearly infers that there is an essential unity of Satan's evil kingdom and Satan's power remains strong ("already but not yet"). Even after the cross, resurrection, and ascension—when the victory is complete, the grip of Satan, even though broken, is still powerful. Therefore, a tension appears similar to that which appears when the claim, "the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28), is set in contrast to the prayer, "Let your Kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). These tensions will not be resolved till the Parousia. To be sure, victory over the Evil One occurred during the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. In the messianic ministry of Jesus and the disciples sent out in mission, a death-blow has been dealt, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Lk. 10:18). His words affirm that victory is happening and the end of Satan's power is now in sight. The judgment on Satan is decreed and his temptations and power against Jesus cannot prevail. Judgment in full, however, has not yet been carried out. Only with the Parousia will there be an end to Satan and the accompanying evil.

Jesus' conflict with Satan and his role as an exorcist belong to the bedrock of the Gospel tradition.<sup>84</sup> Exorcism is not simply introductory to the Kingdom of God, but is a powerful sign of the presence of the Kingdom, bringing wholeness of life to those who are possessed by the power of Satan.

People of God need to be alert to the reality of Satan's destructive power and sensitive to the way in which we can cooperate with the Spirit of God to bring new life to those individuals who are possessed. On the cosmological level, there is a life and death struggle that has been waged and continues to be fought, since the people of God live in two ages, "the already but not yet." On the personal level, the Church needs to be alert to persons, who are in need of deliverance, freedom and relief. The fact that Jesus entrusted his disciples with a mission similar to His (Mk. 3:15) and that the early Church continued with a ministry of exorcism (Acts 5:16), confirms the role of the Church in delivering people from the power of the Strong One.

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<sup>83</sup> Allusion to Ex. 8:19, "This is the finger of God," in reference to the plague of gnats, which the Egyptian magicians were unable to produce.

<sup>84</sup> A warning to Herod is found which notes Jesus' exorcisms in an incidental manner: Lk. 13:32 And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'

We also find the record of the strange exorcist who uses Jesus' name but is not one of the twelve:

Lk. 9:49 John answered, "Master, we saw a man *casting out demons in your name*, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us."

In a similar way, Paul uses the name of Jesus Christ to perform exorcism:

Acts 16:18 And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in *the name of Jesus Christ* to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### Inter-Religious Concerns and Theological Method: Exploring The New Comparative Theology\*

Samuel J. Youngs\*\*

Commenting on inter-religious dialogue these days can be a tricky enterprise. In our contemporary polymorphous theological climate, proponents of dialogical encounters between disparate religions aim at ethical norms and global justice concerns, hoping that the faiths in question can find common ground. Opponents of such dialogue can sometimes—regardless of their own altruistic character—run the risk of being painted as regressive antagonizers, bent on stirring up religious opprobrium. Reacting to the power of such (mis)characterizations, traditionally-minded theologians often ignore the innovative work being done on the fringe, at that foremost edge of constructive theology, where once assured theological propositions are undergoing renovation and encountering startling novelty. Regardless of which camp one falls into—more constructive or more traditional—two facts are being cast in ever sharper relief as we hurtle deeper into the twenty-first century.

The first fact is that Christian theology, henceforth, if it is to be relevant, needs to be attuned to interreligious issues and other religions generally. It cannot ignore our increasingly shrunken globe nor the clashing and blending of religious ideologies this entails. David Tracy made this clear many years ago,<sup>1</sup> but scholars well within the fold of evangelicalism, such as Timothy Tennent, have more recently been beating a similar tempo.<sup>2</sup> All theological work is, to some extent, inter-theological work. It is worth noting that this has always been the case on one level or another; Christian systematicians and philosophers have always dialogued with other branches within Christianity in the course of articulating their own positions: “This means that, despite its linguistic ease of use, “the Christian tradition” does not refer to a singular lineage, nor do Christians speak with one voice... [Christian theology] is irreducible to any one voice or lineage that may claim exhaustively to represent Christian faith, thought, and practice.”<sup>3</sup> The shift that has occurred in our present context is that this naturally interactive field has expanded to include not just Christian voices, but the voices of a great many other variegated, storied religious traditions.

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\* Special thanks to Axel Marc Takacs, editor of *The Journal of Comparative Theology* (comparativetheology.org), for granting permission to reproduce material from a previous review for expansion into this review article.

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<sup>1</sup> David Tracy, “Comparative Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 14.446.

<sup>2</sup> Of special relevance, see Tennent’s salient and accessible *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007). This can be seen as a more constructive expansion of several themes which he explores in his *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York, Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

The second fact of which we must be aware is that there is already remarkable work being done in the demilitarized zone of sorts that exists “between” institutionalized religious traditions. We could call this work, this emergent field, *interreligious theology* or, as it has come to be known by many, *comparative theology*. Within comparative theology, as with all fields of academic inquiry, there is a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum—we could call it the “missiological end”—we find scholars like Tim Tennent. Tennent, while valuing the study of other religions and considering it to be of paramount importance, sees it as a means of, ultimately, spreading the truth of Christianity. The other end of the comparative theological spectrum, however, takes issue with this approach. Scholars like James Fredericks have made it clear that they feel religious solidarity should be the goal of all comparative theologizing, and that any framework which somehow promotes the notion that Christianity is a higher or a more valuable faith than any other tradition ought to be avoided. Fredericks has famously leveled a good deal of criticism at Hickian pluralistic perspectives, since, on Fredericks’ view, these perspectives tend to mollify and domesticate the real differences between religious expressions.<sup>4</sup> However, exclusivism is also intolerable, for it places conversion and evangelism at the top of the spiritual hierarchy of Christianity, inevitably leading to oppression and interreligious violence. It is this end of the spectrum that has, in the past several years, come to be identified most concretely with the label “comparative theology.” Alongside Fredericks, Francis Xavier Clooney, S.J., formerly of Boston College and now the Parkman Professor of Divinity at Harvard, has served to define the field. Both men have eschewed theology-of-religions perspectives for the sake of simply comparing the texts and theologies of disparate religious traditions. Such an approach is novel in many ways, and represents an important trajectory in Christian engagement with other faiths. Any scholar hoping to participate in interreligious concerns from a Christian standpoint must be abreast of comparative theology and related movements, ready to learn from them and ready to offer critical appraisal.

It is the purpose of this review article, then, to provide an in-depth examination of a volume of essays that Clooney recently edited, aptly entitled *The New Comparative Theology*.<sup>5</sup> This volume represents the comparative theorizing of a number of up-and-coming scholars, who all focus, in various ways, on issues of hermeneutics, postmodern philosophy, postcolonialism, and interreligious dialogue. This present article will seek to deal with each essayist in their own right with an eye toward the following critical questions: How is comparative theology being done currently? What topics and issues is it addressing? How successfully is it being done? Can the work stand up to critical scrutiny? And, is the Christian tradition itself at all endangered, hampered, or diminished in the course of such work?

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. his *Faith Among Faiths: Christianity and the Other Religions* (Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> In the interest of avoiding confusion, I will point out that the terms “comparative theology” and “the new comparative theology” have recently begun to be used interchangeably by practitioners of the discipline. The second term is allegedly more precise, for it distinguishes the comparative theology of the last 15-20 years from the “older” comparative theology, marked by the likes of scholars such as J.A. MacCulloch (*Comparative Theology*, 1902) and James F. Clarke (*Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology*, 1871), see Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, pp. 30-35.



### **Introduction by James Fredericks'**

Fredericks' essay commences the volume with some orienting matter on the variegated history of the discipline before detailing some of his own pioneering thought. Fredericks offers a fourfold definition of comparative theology as (1) necessarily dialectical, (2) distinctly theological (in terms of having an impact on both specific religious communities and their systematic reflections), (3) non-soteriologically focused, and (4) rooted in specific instances (or "experiments") in comparison, rather than general theorizing.<sup>6</sup> He also offers his now (in)famous critique of theology of religions and stages his approach to comparative theology as an "alternative" to this allegedly defunct discipline.

While this introduction is certainly adequate, it is ultimately only an introduction to Fredericks' own program, rather than to comparative theological reflection as a whole. A brief critical note: In his fourfold definition of comparative theology, Fredericks desperately wants to retreat from questions of soteriology. Alongside this stipulation comes Fredericks' desire that comparative theology become a kind of *modus operandi* for theologizing as a whole.<sup>7</sup> The issue, of course, is that all theological systems entail some notion of salvation (justification, liberation, enlightenment, etc.), and thus if comparative theology becomes normative for theology in some regard, then it seemingly must offer a way toward some soteriological position. Fredericks cannot have it both ways.

### **Comparative Theology: Between Identity and Alterity by A. Bagus Laksana**

Laksana's essential thesis is that the most productive model for comparative theologizing is that of a "pilgrimage" (taking as his inspiration the life of al-Harawi, a medieval Muslim who retained his strong religious identity while still engaging in "rather intimate encounters" with religious others throughout his travels).<sup>8</sup> He emphasizes comparative theology as a process rather than a method of theoretical and abstract construction; for him, it represents the opportunity for constructing a "hermeneutic bridge" between oneself and the other.<sup>9</sup> Laksana's strategy for building this bridge proceeds along three strands of dialogue with postmodern philosophy. First, Laksana speaks on the topic of the re-creation of identity through encounter; one's identity as a comparative theologian is portrayed as a constant and humble search after a God that is the great Other, discovered in all manner of contexts and alterity.<sup>10</sup> Second, a consideration of the imagination as a vital tool for comparative theology is presented; working within a broadly construed reading of the Roman Catholic notion of the "eye of faith."<sup>11</sup> Third, comparative theology is framed in terms of its openness to the other in conversation with the "unreserved hospitality" of Jacques Derrida.<sup>12</sup>

While a well-presented and interesting confabulation of comparative theology and postmodern philosophy, the article does founder a bit on the very tensions it relishes. A

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<sup>6</sup> James Fredericks, "Introduction," *The New Comparative Theology*, Francis X. Clooney (ed.), (T&T Clark, 2010), xii-xv.

<sup>7</sup> Against a soteriologically-driven practice of comparative theology, see p. xii. For Frederick's desire that all theology become indwelt with a comparative ethos, see p. xiv.

<sup>8</sup> A. Bagus Laksana, "Comparative Theology: Between Identity and Alterity," in Clooney, pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Laksana, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

prominent example would be Laksana's insistence that comparative theology seeks out its border crossings for the sake of real understanding, not for mere novelty. However, due to his maintenance of an ethic of openness and the necessity of a "pilgrim" (unsettled, exploratory) mindset, Laksana leaves himself with no theoretical ground to stand on in order to answer the question of why *understanding is desirable* in the first place. To provide any theoretical grounding that justifies the moral principles of openness and understanding, Laksana would have to claim a governing system, a move which is conspicuously absent.

***Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology* by Kristin Beise Kiblinger**

This essay by Kristin Kiblinger challenges the "anti theology of religions" perspective of scholars like Clooney and Fredericks, boldly claiming that all comparative theologians should "disclose...the working theology of religions guiding their comparative engagement."<sup>13</sup> She maintains that this self-disclosure actually makes comparative theologizing more respectful of the other, for it places all of the presuppositional cards which govern the interreligious dialogue on the table. She also notes that many critiques of theology of religions have been leveled at older, "discredited" forms of inclusivism and pluralism.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Kiblinger enters into some comparative work of her own, demonstrating that even Buddhist stances on other religions can succumb to the difficulties presented by the older theology of religions positions.<sup>15</sup>

Kiblinger's essay is full of appreciable critical fervor, and it unhesitatingly challenges more than a few assumptions that have held sway in the field. But in the midst of her several excellent points, a criticism can be raised concerning the "newer" forms of theology of religions that she so vigorously champions. She notes that these newer positions are "open" to learning from the other, choosing to respectfully "hear others as they are and leave their distinctiveness intact."<sup>16</sup> But then how is this "new theology of religions" doing anything that is substantially different from what comparative theology is trying to do itself, in particular as it is exemplified in the work of F.X. Clooney? In short, these new theologies of religions seem superfluous, at least as presented here.<sup>17</sup>

***The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism* by Hugh Nicholson**

Nicholson has distinguished himself as one of the chief voices in methodology among the younger comparativists, and this essay displays his trademark penchant for hairline

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<sup>13</sup> Kristin Beise Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," in Clooney, p. 25, 29.

<sup>14</sup> As is typically (and disturbingly) the case in contemporary discussions of theology of religions, the exclusivist position is ignored. Kiblinger's new forms of inclusivism include the contributions of S. Mark Heim; the new forms of pluralism come from David Ray Griffin, among others.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-41. In an interesting turn here, Kiblinger is essentially engaging in "comparative theology of religions."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Said another way, Kiblinger wants comparative theology be "up-front" and utilize theology of religions, but her updated theology of religions does not appear to be, in the end, *actual* theology of religions. Rather, it seems to be either (a) a somewhat blurry model for benign interreligious dialogue or (b) comparative theology itself.

distinctions and tightly orchestrated argumentation. His essay opens with a short excursus on older forms of theology of religions, and thus complements Kiblinger's piece. However, Nicholson then veers off in a much different direction by claiming that the new comparative theology is just the latest in a long line of correctives to the hegemonic discourse that has plagued (Christian) interactions with other religions since the Enlightenment.<sup>18</sup> He frames the new comparative theology as the most productive step yet taken along this path, claiming that it has the potential to "de-politicize" *us-them* oppositional categorization in a very successful way by (a) working prominently toward dialogical encounter (Fredericks is his primary example);<sup>19</sup> (b) focusing on small comparisons rather than overarching reductionist theories (as in F.X. Clooney's inter-textual comparative method);<sup>20</sup> and (c) being honest about its faith commitments.<sup>21</sup>

Nicholson makes characteristically well-formulated points, but, as seems to be the case with several other comparative theologians who are moving to eschew theology of religions, he cannot escape Kristin Kiblinger's critique. Nicholson has sawn off the branch he wishes to sit on if he praises comparative theology's honesty and self-disclosing propensity but wants to dodge Kiblinger's point that an admittance of a governing theology of religions perspective is an indispensable part of this methodological honesty.<sup>22</sup>

***On Hegemonies Within: Franciscan Missions and Buddhist Kings in Comparative Theological Contexts* by David Clairmont**

Clairmont is far-and-away one of the more prominent bridge builders between comparative theological discourse and comparative religious ethics. His essay in this volume marks an exercise that seeks to extract the moral underpinnings of comparative theology through an examination of a particular historical encounter between the Buddhist king of western Sri Lanka and Portuguese Franciscan monks in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These historical events annunciate variegated religious tensions, including the meaning and ethic of conversion and the often tangled web of political overlays on religious ideals.<sup>23</sup> Insights gleaned from this historical encounter are then fed into a nexus of comparative theological considerations, generating three helpful insights: (1) religious ideas are notoriously unsettled and under-communicated in missional and dialogical contexts,<sup>24</sup> (2) the particularities of one interreligious exchange may not produce universally applicable insights,<sup>25</sup> and (3) we must always be aware of our own struggle to live up to our highest (and proclaimed) religious ideals and how this struggle affects the potential for productive dialogue.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism", in Clooney, pp. 50-54.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 55, 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> For further developments of Nicholson's attunement to the political nature of comparison, past and present, see his *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> See Clairmont, "On Hegemonies Within: Franciscan Mission and Buddhist Kings in Comparative Theological Contexts," in Clooney, pp. 78-81, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

The ethical ramifications of comparative theology are critically highlighted throughout this article. Despite its obvious utility, however, Clairmont's piece comes dangerously close to reducing the field to a theologically sensitive moral barometer, with little regard for its status as an academic discipline or as "theology" proper. While this is forgivable given the article's focus, Clairmont goes perhaps a step too far when he posits a specific "devotional" outlook for comparative theology: "[C]omparative theology may exhibit a distinctive spirituality or tone of reflection that is both intellectually reserved and historically gradual... characterized by a kind of sorrow and solidarity[...]"<sup>27</sup> While these things may be personally and relationally desirable, the academic pedigree of comparative theology runs the risk of being impugned if the work itself becomes equated with a *particular* ethical and spiritual outlook.

***Comparative Theology and the Status of Judaism: Hegemony and Reversals* by Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski**

Joslyn-Siemiatkoski makes no mystery of his thesis in this provocative and constructive piece: he sincerely holds that a latent supersessionist attitude toward Judaism mars the scope of most contemporary forays into comparative theology. This holdover from Christian anti-Semitism is mediated into the field inadvertently by Christian thinkers and has rendered any comparative analysis of Judaism (if it occurs) partial and reflexive. After a helpful excursus on supersessionism and (Catholic) attempts to rectify this tendency at Vatican II, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski notes that among the most prominent comparative theologians—Clooney, Fredericks, Neville, and Ward—only Ward has taken on Judaism in the course of his interreligious theologizing.<sup>28</sup> The essay is concluded by an example of serious interreligious comparison between rabbinic Judaism and Christian New Testament readings in the Augustinian-Lutheran vein.<sup>29</sup>

Excelling perhaps all other entries in this collection, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's piece presents one of the most accessible (and valid) critiques of the current status of the discipline, uses this critique as a lens to scrutinize its most significant theoretical voices, and demonstrates an actual way forward with an example of fascinating interreligious reading. His reverse-interrogation of christology, in light of the rabbinic theology of Torah, leads to a series of constructive comparative moments that highlight the ever-unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism: "Was...the Son and Logos the active agent of revelation at Sinai? If so, was Jesus Christ obedient to the Torah that he himself revealed?"<sup>30</sup> Joslyn-Siemiatkoski also makes one of the most concrete and readily perceptible methodological critiques of the discipline: the neglect of the inter-Abrahamic theological comparisons among the American forerunners of the field.<sup>31</sup> All comparative theologians should be moved to stop and consider whether the preponderance of material comparing Christianity to primarily Chinese and Indian traditions has only enlivened certain aspects of our methodology by dampening others.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Comparative Theology and the Status of Judaism: Hegemony and Reversals," in Clooney, pp. 96-100.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-107.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Here meaning Clooney, Fredericks, and Robert Cummings Neville, *ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

***Gendering Comparative Theology* by Michelle Voss Roberts**

Michelle Voss Roberts approaches the issue of hegemony from a predictable, yet appreciable, standpoint: that of gender and feminist studies. After noting the problematic nature of essentialist definitions of religion, she delves into some examples of the “feminine” as an object in comparative theological study.<sup>32</sup> She then suggests ways in which this interaction could be expanded in comparative reflection, predominantly through the application of Patricia Hill Collins’ concept of the “outsider within.”<sup>33</sup> A comparative exercise follows, wherein the mystical and marginalized voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg and Lalleswari of Kashmir are brought to bear on issues of “theological genre, androcentric hagiography, and liberative vision.”<sup>34</sup>

Roberts’ essay is generally engaging; she makes salient points concerning the intersection of feminist theological sensibilities and comparative theology. She perceptibly notes that feminist programs can find confluence with comparative theology by their “shared interest in the particular;”<sup>35</sup> (though, this suggestion does seem to limit the dialogue partners to the likes of Clooney and Fredericks, excluding more theoretical comparativists, such as Robert Neville). However, insofar as the content of comparative work is concerned, it is not abundantly clear what Roberts is after. In her conclusion, she argues against “the unnecessary narrowing of subjects for comparison to authoritative male theologians.”<sup>36</sup> However, even a cursory survey of the authors and works cited in the pages of this volume reveals that the field already focuses rather markedly on traditionally marginalized voices. Ergo, her “argument” for a hearing of the marginalized seems redundant.

***Comparative Theology as a Theology of Liberation* by Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier**

Tiemeier stridently proposes that comparative theology should take a cue from various Asian liberation theologies and become “responsive to the cultural, multireligious, and social contexts within [sic] which religions inhabit and responsible to the religious communities that the theologian studies.”<sup>37</sup> She moves forward by looking at some exemplary interreligious liberationists—Aloysius Pieris, Peter Phan, and Sathianathan Clarke.<sup>38</sup> Methodological considerations then come to the fore as Tiemeier uses liberation frameworks to warn against the “new imperialism” that is perceptibly latent in certain approaches to comparative theology, where other religions are “plundered” solely for the acquisition of their theological “goods.”<sup>39</sup> She proffers three points that are insulated by the triple concern of liberation theology (religion, culture, and justice): (1) Christianity is historically “entangled” with other faiths, (2) “theology always occurs in a cultural context,” and (3) “theology is never value-free.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Michelle Voss Roberts, “Gendering Comparative Theology,” in Clooney, pp. 112-114. Her examples come from Aloysius Pieris, Bede Griffiths, and F.X. Clooney.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 115-116

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, “Comparative Theology as a Theology of Liberation,” in Clooney, p. 129.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-137.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 139-142.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

While this essay certainly marks the most substantial renovation of comparative theological method that is proposed in these pages, Tiemeier seems to struggle throughout the piece to clearly articulate her ideas. Her examples from Pieris, Phan, and Clarke are interesting solo excursions, but their contribution to her thesis is murky at best. The three points she raises against the “new imperialism,” while certainly true, are by now so axiomatic that to iterate them here is almost patronizing. Finally, her conclusion that “not every comparative theology needs to be an explicit theology of liberation” seems to neither strengthen her hope that her program will “ground comparative theology’s identity” nor “broaden its appeal.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, while her project is industrious and grounded in many needful areas of devotional and theological reflection, her scattershot presentation renders it somewhat impotent.

***(Tentatively) Putting the Pieces Together: Comparative Theology in the Tradition of Sri Ramakrishna* by Jeffrey Long**

Comparative theology has, thus far, tended in two directions: topical comparison for the sake of broadening dialogue, and more abstract comparison for the sake of developing hybrid systems. Long’s fascinating article is an excellent example of the latter trend. Merging Neo-Vedanta, Jain philosophy, and Whiteheadian process thought, Long pictures a pluralistic theological framework wherein “theology of religions and comparative theology are not, in practice, separable.”<sup>42</sup> Whitehead’s system, while admittedly complex and beset by certain assumptive impediments, provides Long’s theorizing with something that many other comparativists lack: a cohesive philosophical and epistemological framework (which Long claims is readily suited to comparative theologizing because it is “an open system”<sup>43</sup>). While process thought provides the intellectual bedrock on which Long builds his theology, the Jain “doctrine of perspectives” (*nayavada*) allows for the fusion of truth claims into a large, interlocking jigsaw of religious pluralism.<sup>44</sup>

Long’s piece is as interesting (and intellectually tenable) an example of comparative theology that this reviewer has seen. His union of different but complementary systems lends credence to his definition of comparative theology as “the sharing and attempted coordination of our various pieces of the puzzle...in order to expand and deepen our own understanding.”<sup>45</sup> A further boon of this article is that it contains a concrete instance of the autobiographical nature<sup>46</sup> of the discipline, as Long reveals how an expansion in his

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>42</sup> Jefferey D. Long, “(Tentatively) Putting the Pieces Together: Comparative Theology in the Tradition of Sri Ramakrishna,” in Clooney, p. 152.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-159, 166-167. Long is here drawing on a variety of sources and makes several in-depth points that cannot be explicated at any real length in this review. Of note is his employment of Vrajaprana’s ‘puzzle’ metaphor and John Cobb’s ‘metaphysical pluralism’ to give his framework conceptual efficacy.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>46</sup> I am here borrowing some language from F.X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology* (Oxford, 2010), Chapter 1.

understanding of *karma* allowed him to more deeply appropriate certain Christian understandings of the atonement.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Solidarity through Polyphony* by John N. Sheveland**

Sheveland inhabits a parallel conceptual space with Laksana's "pilgrimage" analogy for comparative theology,<sup>48</sup> though he opts instead for a thoroughly developed musical metaphor: *polyphony*, the bringing together of different tonal melodies into an aural stew that finds its definition through amalgamated contrasts. Sheveland articulates three alleged benefits of this model: theological polyphony (1) allows religious distinctions to form a unity, rather than fragmentation;<sup>49</sup> (2) amplifies the aesthetic dimension of multiple-religious "hearing;"<sup>50</sup> and (3) provides a new metaphor to constructively consider the global theological community.<sup>51</sup> In demonstrating the utility of these ruminations, Sheveland engages in a comparative "symphony" of sorts, utilizing "melodies" from Saint Paul, Vedanta Desika, and Santideva.<sup>52</sup>

While new models and methodological metaphors are always welcome on the lightly trodden pathways of an emergent discipline, the pitfalls of overly analogical thinking should not be missed. Though Sheveland's "polyphony" framework is commendable on some fronts, there are times when its application to interreligious learning seems to simply be reflective of a false analogy.<sup>53</sup> A prominent example emerges when Sheveland says that when comparativists polyphonically forego the vindication of truth claims, they can then be "edified by the tonality of the dialogue."<sup>54</sup> The analogy proves weak at this juncture, since, in carrying over the musical metaphor, Sheveland has allowed conceptual wires to be crossed between the notion of musical "dissonance" (which is merely unpleasant) and theological/philosophical "contradiction" (which can lead to unjustified claims, suppression of "heterodox" voices, and religious action based on fallacy). Comparative theologians do love the imagistic impulse of their discipline, and often rightly so, but we should be aware of its limitations in dealing with questions of religious truth and methodology.

### ***Response* by Francis X. Clooney, S.J.**

Clooney does not accompany Tracy Tiemeier in her sharply pointed concern over whether or not comparative theology fosters a "new imperialism" that plunders the religious insights of other faiths. He is seemingly content with the self-critical disposition of the field

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<sup>47</sup> See Long, p. 162 n25.

<sup>48</sup> See A. Bagus Laksana, "Comparative Theology: Between Identity and Alterity," in Clooney.

<sup>49</sup> John Sheveland, "Solidarity through Polyphony," in Clooney, pp. 172-174.

<sup>50</sup> This is my term, though Sheveland could hardly disagree with it, given his overarching metaphorical preference. Also, he uses this point of his polyphonic approach as leverage to defer questions of religious "truth," at least until "the distant future." One is reminded here of Clooney's similar truth-deferential moment in his *Theology After Vedanta* (SUNY, 1993), pp. 191-193. (The issue of the deferment of claims to truth is one of the major methodological and epistemic questions that has yet to be significantly debated among philosophically-trained comparativists.)

<sup>51</sup> Sheveland, in Clooney, pp. 176-177.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 178-186.

<sup>53</sup> Also 'weak' analogy. See Patrick J. Hurley, *A Brief Introduction to Logic* (Thomson, 2008 [10<sup>th</sup> ed.]), p. 140.

<sup>54</sup> Sheveland, p. 175.

and instead forges onward to what he refers to as “the deeper question:” why is comparative theology desirable in the first place?<sup>55</sup> Clooney offers two reasons: (1) he claims that comparative theology helps us to “keep learning” across various theological contexts (a task that could just as easily be undertaken by comparative religion, or by interreligious dialogue alone), and (2) he highlights the humbling function of comparative theology.<sup>56</sup> While this second point is certainly desirable, it leads him to somewhat ungraciously imply that “conversion” and “evangelism” are “simplistic ambitions” to be “dampened” by comparative study.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, Clooney later laments the deficit of conservative Protestant scholarship among comparative theologians;<sup>58</sup> but if his own comments on evangelistically minded scholarship is reflective of the general *ethos* in the field, it is not difficult to see why there would be a prominent dearth of conservative Christian comparativists. The exclusion of more conservative perspectives is one of the problems which the discipline has yet to sufficiently address.

After some needful and well-worded remarks on the theology of religions debate,<sup>59</sup> Clooney then engages two points: the status of “theology” in the field and the future of the field itself, and it is on these two subjects that I would like to commentate in closing. Although Clooney’s excursus on “improving ‘theology’ in comparative theology” certainly touches on helpful topics like feminism, post-colonialism, and the correction of scope afforded by them, he does *not* touch on prominent theological *loci* such as philosophy, systematics, or hermeneutics, nor on conceptions of deity.<sup>60</sup> Clooney then notes that the future of the field will not be shaped until much more work on particular theological comparisons is done.<sup>61</sup> According to Clooney, the work itself, rather than theories that justify it, will determine comparative theology’s place in the academy and in religious communities.

Though the effects of comparative theology, both on Christian thought and elsewhere, remain to be seen, as a movement it represents the blurred realities of our current postmodern and pluralistic situation. Many voices vie for airtime both in the academy’s ivory towers and the public’s culture of soundbites. Theology that does not acknowledge this and engage actively with other faiths will quickly tend toward irrelevancy.

But the best way for encountering religious others may still be ahead of us, waiting for us to prayerfully search and perhaps stumble upon it. Be that as it may, the work being done by comparatively theologians, especially the likes of Jeffrey Long and Hugh Nicholson, is sharp, provoking, and certainly necessary reading as theology learns how to walk alongside an ever-increasing menagerie of dialogue partners and faith claims.

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<sup>55</sup> Clooney, “Response,” in Clooney, pp. 193-194.

<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that many philosophers of religion, as well as scholarship focused on religious epistemology, would find Clooney’s two “reasons” here to be significantly less than stirring. Neither seems to point in any kind of philosophical beneficial (or novel) direction in order to justify the abdication of formerly utilized inter-religious practices.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196. The three paragraphs on this page may be among the most even-handed on this topic that are available in the current literature.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>61</sup> Clooney, p. 200.



## BOOK REVIEWS

***The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus.* By W. Ross Blackburn. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 238 pps., \$24.00.**

In *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, W. Ross Blackburn uses a canonical approach to address interpretive issues and rhetorical concerns in the book of Exodus while arguing for a “missionary” focus for the book. Having taught classes in this field and written on some of these key concepts myself, I can state with confidence that Blackburn has tackled the most difficult aspects of the book of Exodus.

Blackburn’s first chapter lays out his purpose for writing the book and his basic methodological approach. In his first three lines he sets forth his major thesis: “*The God Who Makes Himself Known* will argue that the Lord’s missionary commitment to make himself known to the nations is the central theological concern of Exodus” (15). In chapters 2–7 Blackburn systematically works through the major blocks of the book of Exodus: Ch. 2—“The Name of the Redeemer” (1:1–15:21); Ch. 3—“Training in the Wilderness” (15:22–18:27); Ch. 4—“The Law and the Mission of God” (19–24); Ch. 5—“The Tabernacle Instructions” (25–31); Ch. 6—“The Golden Calf” (32–34); and Ch. 7—“The Tabernacle Construction” (35–40). In each chapter Blackburn structures his argument around the key theological and interpretive issues within a given block while interacting, in many cases, with the pertinent scholars on each given topic. From this vantage point Blackburn explicates how his exegesis and exposition furthers his thesis that the biblical author’s main purpose in writing the book of Exodus was for the rhetorical purpose of showing Yahweh’s “missionary” desire that the nations come to know him through his acts for his chosen nation, Israel.

In chapter 2 Blackburn begins his argument by focusing on the revelation of the divine name in 3:14–15 (34–39) and 6:3. Drawing on the work of Walther Zimmerli (*I am Yahweh*) among others, Blackburn argues that central to the plague narratives and the “Egyptian deliverance” was the fact that Yahweh sought to reveal his divine name to both Israel and Egypt (65). This was for the sole purpose that all nations might come to know that Yahweh was God and, in this “missionary” act, God might draw both Israel and the nations to himself. Indeed, one of Blackburn’s strongest points comes when he notes that Yahweh’s acts had caused a great “mixed multitude” to leave Egypt with the Israelites (50)—a fact strongly supportive of Blackburn’s thesis.

In chapter 3 Blackburn continues his discussion by building upon Martin Noth’s twofold breakdown of the foundational traditions of the Pentateuch (i.e., “guidance from Egypt” and “guidance into the land” [64]). Subsequently Blackburn attempts to show that even though there is a “general lack of appreciation for how the wilderness functions in the theological movement of Exodus” (64), the text clearly points to Yahweh’s missionary purposes through his people Israel so that the nations may know him (65). He highlights how Israel’s struggles in the wilderness were to show that the “Lord tests primarily to instruct” (68), viz., instruction on whom the Lord truly is. Blackburn bolsters his thesis by suggesting that Jethro’s confession in 18:11 “serves as a specific fulfillment of the Lord’s primary goal in 1:1–15:21, that other nations would come to know his [the Lord’s] supremacy” (77). Thus the Lord’s testing of his people’s obedience in the wilderness was for the purpose of reflecting “his image faithfully in and throughout the world” (80).

Focusing on the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai (chs. 19–24) in chapter 4, Blackburn delves into a discussion of law and gospel using the works of Gerhard von Rad (*The Problem of the Hexateuch*) and James Barr (“An Aspect of Salvation in the Old Testament”) to launch his discourse (84–86). Blackburn asserts that “The gospel refers to what God has done for his people; the law refers to what God calls his people to do” (86)—hence in the case of Israel, her deliverance from Egypt (i.e., the “gospel”) preceded the “law” delivered at Mt Sinai (114). It is in this chapter that Blackburn zeroes in on Exodus 19:4–6 as “Israel’s ‘mission statement’, defining Israel’s purpose as the people of God and the role of the law in that purpose” (87). Blackburn correctly notes that “Israel was set apart as a nation for the purpose of rendering priestly service in order to reflect the character of God to the nations. [ . . . ] through Israel, God would make himself known to the world” (95). Thus, “Israel’s status as a treasured possession is not an end in itself, but also a means to a further end that has in view all peoples of the earth” (89). For Blackburn the giving of the law and the making of the covenant at Sinai served one purpose: to fashion Israel into a missionary nation to the world spreading the “gospel” of who Yahweh is—a good, kind, and holy God worthy of obedience and worship. In essence, Israel’s obedience to the law was supposed to reveal to the surrounding nations her reverence for her God (112).

In chapter 5 Blackburn tackles the theological problem that the pedantic description of the tabernacle poses for scholars. While he acknowledges the long-held and entrenched assumption posited by Wellhausen (*Prolegomena*) that this portion of Exodus was a later addition by “P” (125), he nonetheless insists that this section has “theological significance” as it appears canonically (126). Blackburn bases much of his discussion here on Menahem Haran’s 1978 work, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*. Through a detailed analysis of the materials used for the tabernacle construction and the exquisite workmanship of the earthy abode of the Lord (128–31), Blackburn concludes that the tabernacle served as a microcosm of the universe which housed the “Cosmic King” (135)—much of the language being rooted in the Genesis creation account (135–51). Here Blackburn continues his proposed thesis by averring that “the tabernacle is a means by which the Lord rules over Israel as her divine king, serving the missionary purpose of 19:4–6 as the place where he continues to give his law (25:22)” (135).

In chapter 6 Blackburn addresses the canonical problem of the placement of the Golden Calf pericope (chs. 32–34). Within these chapters, Blackburn focuses on 34:6–7 as the exemplar for understanding the “tension between mercy and judgment” and as a means to show the “Lord’s missionary commitment to be known among the nations” (155). Blackburn marshals the work of a series of scholars to elucidate the role of Exodus 34:6–7 within the whole of the pericope (155–62). For Blackburn the instruction in this troubling passage is clear. Even though the Lord is a jealous God (165–66), he still is the redeemer who shows mercy in the midst of his judgment (164)—something the nations needed to know. Blackburn goes on to do an extended exposition on the central role of Moses as intercessor after the tragic event (168–89). Here Blackburn returns to his thesis and concludes that the Lord’s response to Moses’ prayers prove that the primary reason why Yahweh chose to forgive Israel and renew the covenant was to preserve the name and character of the Lord in the sight of the nations—a purely missionary motive.

Chapter 7 is really a continuation of the discussion concerning the canonical function of chapters 32–34. Blackburn begins, “This chapter will seek to demonstrate how the position

of the golden-calf narrative in the midst of the tabernacle material is crucial in understanding the theological importance of both sections [i.e., chapters 25–31 and 35–40]” (199). In essence, Blackburn, following the lead of many scholars, concludes that the repetition of the phrase that the Israelites “did as the Lord commanded Moses” (203), proves that the nation had learned to follow the commands of their God. This allowed the proper atmosphere for the glory of the Lord to descend upon the completed tabernacle (40:34) as a witness to the nations that Yahweh was indeed God (204–7).

Blackburn’s canonical approach is a refreshing advancement from the strict—and often speculative—source-critical conclusions of the past (18). His integration of NT passages and themes in the concluding remarks of each chapter also helps to place his observations within an overall biblical theology (e.g., 116–19). Moreover, Blackburn is successful, to a degree, in convincing this reader that his thesis has merit. In particular Blackburn has offered sound and viable solutions for the canonical arrangement of chapters 25–40.

Nevertheless, there are a few issues with Blackburn’s overall thesis that need to be considered. First, it is somewhat perplexing that at no point in his work does Blackburn address the covenantal nature of the phrase “I am the Lord.” This is a point that many scholars of the past have noted (e.g., Herbert Huffmon “The Treaty Background of the Hebrew *Yada*,” *BAJOR* 181 [1966]: 31–37), especially as found in Zimmerli’s work *I am Yahweh*, which Blackburn uses elsewhere. Second, Blackburn never notes the use of this same phrase in the book of Ezekiel where it appears no less than 63 times—the most of any OT book. Much of the usage there is in the context of covenantal judgment on Israel and the *nations*, something that may create problems for Blackburn’s thesis (see chapter 4 of my recent work *Ezekiel in Context*). Third, Blackburn notes the “kindness” that Israel was called to exhibit (110) and the role they were to play in being a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3); yet at no point does he address the ethical and theological dilemma of how the conquest was a “missionary” endeavour to the Canaanites who were on the receiving end of the Israelites’ swords. Fourth, in his discussion on the tabernacle and cosmos in chapter 5, the important works of John Walton are glaringly absent.

These concerns being noted, I feel that Blackburn is indeed correct in teasing out the priestly role the nation of Israel was to play to the *surrounding* nations (Canaanites excluded). Indeed as noted above, his comments on Exodus 12:38 (50) and his sixth chapter on the Golden Calf (esp. 168–69) are especially compelling and supportive of his thesis. Any teacher dealing with the book of Exodus needs to consider Blackburn’s thesis. I know, for one, that this reviewer will be requiring it the next time I teach the Pentateuch.

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***iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment.* By D. Brent Laytham. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012, 209 pp.**

Growing up as a child in the 1980s, my household was besieged by technology. From televisions to video game systems, every new gadget seemed to herald the natural progression in an evolutionary chain of human ingenuity by bringing our species one step closer to eliminating the age-old problem of boredom. Yet, as humans constantly threatened by boredom, we do not simply experience the symptoms of our failure to pass the time

purposefully but are victims to a deep existential crisis. Time, which lends acuity to our boredom, is both master and servant, and so we desperately look for ways to both control and contain the tedium of experiencing ourselves alone with ourselves.

In this work, D. Brent Laytham proposes that our love affair with entertainment is representative of a deeper disconnect despite the volume of interconnected activities that make up our lives. Entertainment has revolutionized the ways in which we relate to time, place, and one another. “For the past ninety years or so, entertainment has been aggressively colonizing our habitats, homes, vehicles, tools, bodies, schedules, and, most crucially, our habits and imaginations. Entertainment is normalized and habituated” (26).

In this readable and important work, Laytham has filled the pages with observations at the intersection of theology and entertainment. So too, many of his observations create opportunities for discourse beyond his own analyses. Laytham notes how these might be used to grow talking points in group discussions, and the book itself aids such organization by arranging the chapters with questions to introduce each discussion.

Chapter 1 introduces the challenges and discusses the pervasive extent of entertainment in contemporary culture. Chapter 2 represents Laytham’s own unique theological deconstruction that lies behind the posturing of entertainment as a power in the culture, and it is from this that a theological language crystallizes the dialectical structure of entertainment. Chapters 3 through 10 offer perspectives on types of entertainment. Chapters 11 and 12 examine the cult of celebrity and the people behind the power, while the final chapter is dedicated to the moral make-up of the silver screen. I will not attempt to address everything Laytham lays out, but instead highlight the most salient features of his presentation.

Early in his book, Laytham poses a question: Do you naturally imagine God and the gospel as belonging to one sphere of life and entertainment to another? In helping us to think in terms of relational dialectics, Laytham asserts that “we’ve settled for a world divided between loving God and enjoying ourselves—an easy, unacknowledged truce that divides our lives into zones of sacred pursuits and secular pastimes, discipleship and fandom” (3). Laytham is sensitive on this score; he insists that individuals encounter entertainment not as something whose nature is inherently bent on our destruction but as something subject to distortion by an ontology of sin that permeates our reality.

The nature of entertainment is not one openly opposed to our being, though in most encounters, it imitates the promises of spiritual fidelity, which Laytham describes by a language of theological mimicry. This mimicry disguises the disorderliness of its authority. An example of this comes in the form of devices like the iPod. Laytham claims there is an advertised transcendence, a sense of a world-denying, God-avoiding reality precisely because the transcendence one engages is “sensed within” rather than externally (37). Laytham summons Albert Borgmann’s phrase “regardless power” to explain this reality as something that produces for us desired results despite the encroachment of everyday hindrances that would otherwise prevent such access: “Technology promises this kind of regardless power, offering us an endless procession of ‘magic wands’ that provide an infinite stream of the commodities, products, experiences, and outcomes that we desire. And we become so habituated to the exercise of regardless power that we expect to exercise it everywhere and all the time” (40).

Furthermore, entertainment takes on a form of omnipresence that is a historical rejection of the transcendent reality of the omnipresent God. Taking up the work of Quentin Schultze, Laytham describes the being of entertainment as principality and power. These agencies, whether personal or impersonal, caricature, deceive, and seduce (27). But they are also far more than the activities they superintend: “A power’s agency is always more than the amalgamation of its individual human factors. A power’s fallenness, its capacity for and achievement of evil, is greater than the sum total of the human sinners involved. A power’s resistance to grace continually exceeds the resistance of its individual participants” (27).

This deeper problem speaks not to the ways in which entertainment affects our lives but its ability to overcome us. As a power, we look not to redeem it, but reorient it in its proper place. Laytham expressly rejects a position that inserts itself between the two extremes of media idolatry and technophobia. Laytham proposes instead a dialectical relationship: “One is to name entertainment as a principality, to refuse its quest for primacy in our lives, and to resist its seductive power. The other is to name entertainment as a triviality, and therefore intentionally to enjoy its freeing possibilities” (28). Humanity must resonate this dialectical movement in its mode of engagement, to “make discerning theological judgments whose purpose is neither to condemn nor celebrate entertainment per se, but to help ourselves imagine more fully the shape of fidelity to Christ...” (11).

The notion of entertainment as a triviality does not exempt entertainment as an event unworthy of God’s creative power. Laytham agrees with Stanley Hauerwas on this point, but steers away from his assertion that within entertainment one finds self-worth and purpose—for Laytham “there is no sense of ‘making a contribution’ in the passive form of many contemporary entertainments” (30). Laytham is certainly correct in a general sense, although one might point to video games, which, with their increasing sophistication, have spawned entire communities where players can vie for top scores, win praise, contribute to a digital world, and be noticed by those outside their true-life communities.

Entertainment culture also evolves and develops under the historic influence of capitalism. On the topic of play, for example, Laytham explores the concept with regard to its contemporary exploitation as a commodity for profit. Corporations are guilty of destroying the creativity and freedom essential to an authentic expression of play and instead have replaced it with scripted forms. Laytham reaches a far less optimistic conclusion than Walter Benjamin did last century on the place of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, saying that the controlling force of capitalism strips us entirely of our creativity so that “somewhere along that profit-seeking continuum lies the demise of play’s essential creativity” (13). Benjamin spoke similarly of the loss of authenticity, but he also questioned whether we ought to ignore what he considered (in the example of photography) a paradigm shift and whether the entire nature of art had been changed primarily due to the increasing volume of participation. It is clear that both Laytham and Benjamin agree that once the commoditization is complete, it is ripe for political exploitation.

The concept of *community* exists as a major theme both in its inauthentic expression driven by entertainment media and the call to community that resonates in the body of Christ. A negative trend reveals itself as the concept of community continues to transition from physical presence to virtual presence; it runs against the possibility of cruciform living. In its best incarnation, the secular model of the audience as community can only imitate the communion found in the body of Christ—for while audience claims oneness, its

authorization remains controlled by vested interests: “So in the midst of this massive cultural transformation the Christian church, called to gather around the One who is worthy of all adoration and praise, struggles to form a people willing and able to assemble bodily as Christ’s body” (18).

These indictments against virtual community however should be advanced in full consciousness of the ever-changing expansion of social interaction. I would venture Laytham agrees that bodily presence alone is no guarantee of true community, even in the Church. And when presence was not possible, the history of Christianity recalls followers in Christ who pronounced their unending, intimate loyalty with those from whom they were separated. Laytham does not ignore this. Returning to his example of the Methodist layperson, he notes that this person could have very well sung in isolation, but even so would have been “joining with the communion of saints, even if none was visible or audibly present” (45). This notion that songs to God in private binding us to the larger community of the church leads to what I would acknowledge can be a very typical experience of many evangelicals outside non-mainline communities, the same who have become the biggest consumers of pop Christian culture. The availability of contemporary Christian music to one’s iPod allows us to manipulate content, control a range of moods, and choose to download the sermons we want to hear, which may very well aid in our praise and devotion. Laytham is on to something when he notes how the hymnal is a genetic marker of the shared fellowship of community and the iPod is not. Yet even the marketing of external speakers for the iPod has the potential of returning us to a more traditional communal experience, an option that was not pressed into service but is inherent to the technology’s realm of possible uses.

Laytham’s last chapter, in which he highlights four responses to Hollywood cinema, is a sturdy deconstruction of the seduction of easy moralizing, and offers a sharp and incisive analysis of the way we have accepted simplistic story lines and moral resolutions that more often than not stand in opposition to an appropriate theological encounter with the world.

While Laytham avoids a complete rejection of entertainment, his book continually challenges the reader to consider how he spends his waking moments in its grip. Laytham does a good job of asserting the dialectical balance of antithetical encounters with entertainment that is accomplished in the inherent tension of the model. Yet one senses it is the persuasive language of sin and fallenness insightfully applied and rooted in a recognizable biblical theology, rather than any affirmative feature (for example, in that of play, which Laytham readily admits, does not resonate in scripture) that captures one’s attention. This lack of a comparable grounding for the trivial in the biblical narrative and theological tradition requires Laytham to widen his theological lens to adopt a broader approach to cultural anthropology. In identifying play as a core task of becoming human, the question of the dialectic remaining a theologically constrained analysis opens the question of whether we are dealing with a natural theology, in which my insights are independent of a particular kind of revelation, or whether we can maintain these insights as a form of Christian revelation, as has been true with the identification of sin. Play invites our observation everywhere. Sin requires a theological mind. Concepts like thanksgiving, blessing, and the goodness of creation seem appropriate, though they are hardly intrinsic to the concept.

Entertainment still remains a moving target. There is need to allow for expansion, especially when entertainment functions in a way that violates our expectations and

continues to evolve rapidly. Is entertainment, theology? If we mean by this “the study of the divine” in the proper sense, it is hard to see how even the church qualifies without becoming subject and self-referential. If entertainment is a trivial good as a part of God’s creation set in its subordinate place, then we ought to promote studies like this that seek to venture a theological understanding of our ever-changing world. No doubt Laytham’s book is an able attempt to diagnosis an entertainment culture that has been largely demonized or ignored by our theological communities.

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***Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology.* By Robert Letham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011, 164 pp., \$17.99.**

The doctrine of union with Christ has in recent years taken center stage in the discussion of biblical soteriology. There have been a number of publications on the topic from various angles—exegetical studies, systematic studies, and historical studies. The problem for beginning students has been knowing where to start in studying this complex subject. Robert Letham’s *Union with Christ* provides an accessible introduction to the doctrine that touches on each of these angles. Letham’s unique contribution is that he is able to cover a wide range of material in a relatively short book. Throughout the book, he interacts with writers and theologians past and present, helpfully drawing the reader’s attention to central, as well as lesser-known, resources.

Letham is convinced that “union with Christ is right at the center of the Christian doctrine of salvation” (1). Thus, he writes the book to aid readers in understanding the biblical, theological, and practical meaning of being united to Christ. In so doing, he writes six chapters, three showing the importance of union with Christ in narrative of Scripture and three devoted to theological exposition.

In the first three chapters, Letham provides studies on creation, incarnation, and Pentecost, focusing on the way in which these major biblical events relate to the doctrine of union with Christ. He begins at the beginning, as it were, showing that union with Christ is only possible because of humanity’s creation in the image of God. While not all readers will agree with his conclusions on Genesis 1, his primary point is clear—humanity was created in union and communion with God. Adam’s sin broke this union and it is being restored in Christ.

This leads Letham to his discussion of the incarnation in chapter two. His point here is that Christ’s incarnation is a union with humanity so that believers may be united to him. This chapter includes an excursus on the development of Christology in the early church which demonstrates that a well-formed Christology is essential to the doctrine of union with Christ. With regard to the biblical material, Letham helpfully explains the place of union with Christ in the history of redemption. He writes, “the Christian faith can be summed up as, *inter alia*, a series of unions. There is the union of the three persons in the Trinity, the union of the Son of God with our human nature, the union of Christ with his church, the union established by the Holy Spirit with us as he indwells us” (37).

Chapter three completes the biblically focused chapters with a discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in uniting the believer to Christ. Here Letham shows that just as the Spirit is the agent of union between the Father and the Son, so the Spirit unites the believer with the whole Trinity. This chapter highlights the Trinitarian nature of union with Christ.

At this point, a minor point of critique is in order. Though the first three chapters of the book serve as a helpful introduction to the “big picture” of the biblical doctrine of union with Christ, the exegetical work is mostly assumed rather than explained. That is, Letham quotes and makes references to biblical passages in support of his conclusions, but he includes little exegetical groundwork to demonstrate the soundness of his conclusions. While the book is not intended to be a work of exegetical theology, readers would have benefited from the exegetical wisdom of a seasoned scholar like Letham.

In chapters four through six, Letham moves to a discussion of the theological relationship between union with Christ and other aspects of soteriology. In chapter four, he deals with the relationship between union with Christ and representation. Here the focus is on the legal aspect of union with Christ, showing that the benefits of Christ’s death are communicated to the believer through union with Christ. Letham holds to a traditional Reformed view of the atonement, but emphasizes the central role of union with Christ in salvation. The chapter also includes a discussion of the doctrines of election and justification, again emphasizing union with Christ as the key to the biblical teaching.

A second omission should be mentioned. At the conclusion of chapter four, Letham acknowledges the importance of union with Christ in contemporary debates regarding justification but chooses not to include interaction with current scholarship on the subject, citing limitations of space (82). While a writer is free to choose his dialogue partners, given the importance of union with Christ in the recent debate revolving around the New Perspective on Paul, it would have been fitting for Letham to at least include a brief discussion of the matter.

Chapter five is the longest chapter of the book and deals with union with Christ in relation to transformation. Letham shows that union with Christ is more sweeping than simply conferring a legal status upon the believer. Union with Christ results in the transformation of the believer from within. Letham briefly references the biblical support for this assertion and then moves to a historical discussion of the topic. The bulk of the chapter deals with the concept of *theosis* followed by a discussion of the Reformed understanding of transformation in union with Christ. Letham believes that, rightly understood, the concept of *theosis* can contribute greatly to Protestant understandings of union with Christ. The chapter closes with Letham offering ten theses on union with Christ and transformation. These are very helpful summary points and should lead to more fruitful discussion.

The book concludes with a short chapter on union with Christ in death and resurrection. Letham shows that the believer’s participation in the death and resurrection of Christ is the source for future hope. Believers need not fear death since it results in a more intimate union with Christ.

Letham’s *Union with Christ* fills a need in contemporary scholarship by providing a readable, brief, yet thorough introduction to an important doctrine. Though the introductory nature of the book carries some limitations, there is nothing currently available that



compares to it in terms of its ability to serve as an entryway into the discussion. The likely long-term contribution of the book will be its ability to raise questions and push readers to further research.

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***Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty.* By Susan A. Ross. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012, 166 pp., \$19.95.**

“In practice,” writes Karl Barth, “the Doctrine of Creation means anthropology—the doctrine of man” (CD III/2, 3). By this statement, Barth is referring to humanity’s place in the world vis-à-vis God and the rest of creation. In essence, anthropology, from the point of view of the Christian tradition, truly means *theological* anthropology. It is constitutive of humanity’s reflections as it endeavors to understand itself as a complex being in a world that is characterized by mystery. The status of creature is significant for humanity’s way of being in the world. Firstly, it ascribes a contingent character to human being; it points outside of human nature for humanity’s *raison d’être*. Secondly, that humanity is a creature among others highlights its shared origin and continual engagement with everything else that exists. Thus, simply stated, to be human means to be in relationship with God and with nature.

Yet the rest of creation does not exhibit such a concern with its own existence. Is it true that humanity has become a question for itself? If humanity is made in the image of God, as the tradition asserts, then why is being human so problematic? What exactly constitutes this *imago Dei* beyond the tradition’s essentialist attempts at definition, which historically have excluded persons whose stark alterity stands in the face of dominant historical and cultural norms? Theological anthropology is the attempt to provide adequate answers to the perennial question, “What does it mean to be human in this time in light of God’s self-revelation throughout time?”

Susan A. Ross’ *Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty* is a fascinating investigation of these salient issues. It is a concise yet rich exploration of anthropology from the viewpoint of the Christian tradition with particular concern for the Catholic perspective. As a text of anthropology, it is concerned with humanity’s being in the world. As a text of Christian theology, it consists in a deep engagement with the Christian tradition’s self-understanding as a means of divine grace to the rest of creation.

Ross critically surveys the depth of the tradition as a way of mining the wisdom necessary for a proper understanding of the human in the twenty-first century. As the subtitle of the text suggests, Ross interprets human life as a complex reality that is driven by desire: a desire for God, truth, beauty, justice, peace, knowledge, etc. God too is moved by desire, a desire to be with humanity. “A Christian theological anthropology has Christ as its center—a Christ who desires to be with his friends, a God who desires that there be a world in which God’s glory can be revealed” (xii), asserts Ross. Here she proposes a powerful approach to the understanding of desire. She proposes “that the desires of all human beings, especially those who have been denied their basic humanity, must stand as a criterion for the adequacy of anything written here” (xii).

Several subsequent (and poignant) questions reveal her concern for the memories of history's victims: "What were the desires of young black men who were lynched for merely looking at a white woman? What are the desires of women who risk their lives for an education? What were the desires of our ancestors...?" As those questions indicate, the power of Ross' thesis lies in her deep concern for the human; and her concerns transcend the limits of her own particularity as they welcome every human being to a conversation that concerns all people.

The outline of the text is quite strategic. Chapters 1-3 offer a historical survey of theological anthropology from the book of Genesis to late Modernity. From the biblical tradition's championing of Jesus Christ as the exemplar for anthropology to Sigmund Freud's dismissal of religion as an illusion at the height of modernity, Ross painstakingly delves into the literature to lift up the most important ideas from antiquity.

Chapter four brings the conversation into contemporary (postmodern) times and highlights the challenges of postmodern thought for notions of selfhood, for, as she puts it, "If the challenges of postmodernity have had any particular focus, it is in the ideas of the self" (69). In this chapter, Ross takes up some of the major themes of postmodernity such as fragmentation, plurality, otherness, etc., and shows with keen insight the ways in which postmodern concerns may help deepen the Christian doctrine of the human. Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner are important conversation partners for Ross in this chapter.

Chapter five tackles the issue of embodiment as Ross makes a case for serious consideration of biology and the "social experiences of all people" (107). In chapter six, entitled "The Human Capacity for Evil and the Hope for Salvation," Ross brings the conversation closer to the theme that seems to undergird the entire text: *salvation*. Ross masterfully couches the themes of evil and violence in the language of hope and redemption. "If there is hope for human redemption," she writes, "then we must face what requires redemption" (110).

In chapter seven, Ross acknowledges the implications of the advancements of science and technology for theological anthropology. She challenges Christians to take seriously scientific advancements as they deal with questions that are foundational to the Christian self-understanding.

Couched in christological language, Ross' vision of the human is vibrant and full of promise. Her work speaks powerfully to a Christian culture that is prone to polarization on matters central to the faith. As Ross makes very clear, the questions concerning what it means to be human are not new. However, the notions of selfhood have changed and will continue to change. In a manner that is consistent with James and Evelyn Whitehead's method in *Method in Ministry*, Ross takes seriously the religious tradition, the contemporary culture, and the experiences of the people. In addition, her choice of conversation partners from Augustine to Leclercq to David Tracy makes her work a great resource for research in the field.

*Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty* is an excellent contribution to theological anthropology. It is well written, concise, and rich in insight. Ross admirably draws from a diversity of scholarly sources. Though written from a Catholic perspective, the work's breadth is quite ecumenical. Its brief yet deep engagement with the literature lends it will to

an introductory course in theological anthropology. The book itself is a good exercise in being human as in it the author exhibits her desire for deeper insights into the human and into “the Mystery who calls all of us” (162).

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***Monks and Muslims: Monastic and Shi’a Spirituality in Dialogue.* Edited by Mohammad Ali Shomali & Fr. William Skudlarek. Liturgical Press, 2012. 164 pages.**

Without a doubt, both Dr. Shomali and Fr. Skudlarek have “Reserved” placards firmly affixed to a pair of seats at the table of inter-religious dialogue. Each man has contributed much to scholarly discourse on not only their own religious tradition (Shi’a Islam and Benedictine monasticism, respectively) but on the opportunity for encountering the spirituality of other faiths. Dr. Shomali’s previous edited volumes (*Catholics and Shi’a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality*, *A Catholic-Shi’a Dialogue: Ethics in Today’s Society*), as well as his extensive education in western philosophical traditions, situate him at a unique cross-roads where his desire to educate and critical mindset edify all who interact with his work. Fr. Skudlarek shares this rarefied air, having consistently demonstrated a keen and sober voice for handling novel spiritual issues, spurred in no small part by his interest in and respect for Swami Abhishiktananda, a seminal figure in the perpetuation of inter-religious interests within Catholicism. (Abhishiktananda was a 20<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine monk turned Hindu *sannyasi* and student of *advaita* philosophy; see *God’s Harp String: The Life and Legacy of the Benedictine Monk, Swami Abhishiktananda*, also edited by Skudlarek). With the sharp minds and gentle hands of both Shomali and Skudlarek guiding this anthology of essays, *Monks and Muslims* is both tightly focused and imminently practical in its meditations on contemporary, reflective spirituality, whether found in a monastery or a *masjid*.

The anthology is divided into a series of excursions on each of the following topics: Revelation, *Lectio Divina*, Prayer, Witness, and Dialogue. These topics are elucidated by concise-yet-eloquent essays from representatives of both Benedictine monasticism and Shi’a Islam. On “Revelation,” Benoit Standaert sets the tone for the inter-religious openness which characterizes the volume, saying, “The holy books of the Bible, it is true, do offer us a privileged access to divine revelation, but the God who is revealed there is a God who calls us to open our eyes to the divine light, wherever and whenever it shines” (7). Dr. Shomali himself serves as the author of the parallel Shi’a essay, laying out a fascinating description of the Islamic notion of *wahy*. *Wahy* (“communication” or “giving of a message”) participates in a vast theological spectrum, including not only the direct revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad, but other divine communications to previous *rusul* (“prophets”) and even beyond this: “[S]ince divine guidance is all-inclusive, [God’s] *wahy* reaches out to all forms of creation” (11). This chapter by Shomali, which is both devotionally concerned and technically acute, accessibly lays out many dimensions of the Islamic conception of Allah’s communication with the world, and would be highly useful in educational contexts.

The next section is focused on the monastic practice of *Lectio Divina* (“divine reading”) and thus takes a more contemplative turn. The Benedictine essay states that, rather than serving as a means of gaining intellectual knowledge about the propositional contents of scripture, *lectio divina* is meant to be a transformative process, bringing about “a personal

relation with God, and transformation of one's own life according to the image of Jesus Christ" (27). The author, Guido Dotti, lucidly delineates the four stages of this process: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio* (reading, meditating, praying, contemplating), describing each as a step "on a spiritual ladder" whereupon the practice of scriptural reflection and prayer become seamlessly intertwined (32-33). The corresponding Shi'a essay interestingly revels in the more mystical side of Islam, an aspect of the faith with which many Westerners are unfamiliar. Through an evocative discussion of *muraqabah* ("self-scrutiny"), among other concepts, Farrokh Sekaleshfar describes a similar-yet-distinct spiritual ladder, at the conclusion of which "one must eliminate all traces of the ego; one must kill the 'I....At this stage, one has become annihilated in Allah" (42-43).

The dual-discussion of prayer is less engaging than the previous entries, though there are still points of interest. Lucy Brydon offers her Benedictine take on prayer, couching her discussion in the midst of her own life experiences; her essay is the most biographical of the anthology. Aside from this discussion of prayer, there is also a Benedictine perspective offered on "Public Prayer." Here, the monastic emphasis on prayer-in-community, and communal life in general, is effectively distilled, and thus this essay serves as a needed orientation away from the individual thoughts of the various Benedictine authors and toward the communal *praxis* that distinguishes the monkish orders from other Christian expressions: "Christian prayer is primarily church prayer. Saint Benedict permits his monks to pray privately, but after the community prayer. And this private prayer, he says, should not last too long. Public, communal prayer comes first" (89).

Paralleling these two essays are two Shi'a entries on prayer, addressing *du'a* (individual, personal supplication) and *salat* (the daily, ritualized prayers). Though there are many notable elements of Islamic "prayer-theology" contained in these essays, one of the more significant is perhaps the notion of "increasing the likelihood" that God will hear a Muslim prayer. Both authors (Fatemah Nazari and Mohammad Taghi Ansari-pour) name several things that can serve as "obstacles" to prayer (sin, supplication without action, praying with the intent to "show off", etc. 70-71, 79) and things which can serve to *expedite* prayers or increase the likelihood of their acceptance (Nazari mentions that prayer that takes place at night or in certain holy places is better and possibly more effectual than prayers at other times and places, 71-73). Most distinctive is the third Islamic essay on prayer, wherein the author emphasizes quite clearly that "God is more likely to answer" the prayer of a heart-broken person and that "God sends more mercy when there are more people praying to Him" (98-99). This dynamic, fluctuating scale concerning the prospect of divine response seems to be notable difference from Christian understandings of prayer, though no analysis or interchange of dialogue on the point is sustained.

On the issue of engaging with secular society (in the section on "Witness") some interesting points emerge. Finbarr Dowling writes from the Benedictine point-of-view, "The monks of today have a treasure of contemplative experience that they are now challenged to open to secular spirits. They [monks] need to find new symbols to serve as icons through which Tweeters and Facebook devotees will get a sense of awe...." (127). This model of cultural encounter, based on retaining and promoting classic monastic virtues and using them to supplant contemporary infatuations with social media, is interesting, if vague. But whereas monastic "encounter" may seem a bit far-fetched, seeing as how monasticism as a movement generally retracts or retreats from the world/culture, the Shi'a essay on this point

implicitly stresses Islam's greater likelihood of cultural engagement, since all Muslims, not solely monks, are called to "follow [Islam's] doctrines in all aspects of life, social and personal" (137). Mohsen Javadi, though he acknowledges the need to witness in secular society, is unflinching in his affirmations that "the principle and lasting opponent of the religious life is the worship of one's desires instead of the worship of Allah.... Witness as such is a combat with the devil and his forces in the world" (140-141).

There have always been critiques of inter-religious forays—a good deal of them focused on the potential for unbounded syncretism or the blunting of important theological differences. While critiques of this nature may be uneven, the final Benedictine essay does effectively (and possibly inadvertently) highlight a few perennial criticisms. Essayist Thomas Wright states that we should "imagine that the followers of the Rule of St. Benedict and the followers of the Holy Prophet [Muhammad] are like two sets of climbers who are ascending the same mountain, the Mountain of God, but from different sides!" (144). This statement, among others in Wright's essay, rings with the assumptive inclusivism (or even pluralism)—stemming from the lineage of Jacques Dupuis and Raimon Panikkar but only slightly-less resonant with the work of John Hick—that can attend many inter-religious endeavors on the part of Christian theologians. On an epistemological and soteriological level, pluralism is an oft-challenged idea. But it is an assumption the volume makes, and one is free to accept or reject it.

However, a second critical issue raised by Wright's essay persists, even if pluralism is gladly adopted. This second issue is, ironically, the lack of *actual dialogue*. Throughout the volume, a Catholic-Benedictine view on a topic is presented, followed by a Shi'a-Islamic presentation. This cycle repeats throughout with not one example of the traditions truly talking *to* each other. There is no critical interaction to behold here; no interrogation of assumptions; no constructive inter-religious theology; no abstraction or even true philosophizing. Two views are presented side-by-side; that is all. Though this can be helpful in certain ways, and though several of the essays are quite excellent, it is not dialogue. It is not an exchange of mutually contributory insights or respectful disagreements built on inherent challenges, nor is it really an advancement of understanding in any kind of unique space, since much of what is learned in the volume could be gleaned almost as easily by a Christian reading a book on Shi'a Islam, or a Shi'ite reading a reference work on Benedictine spirituality.

Regardless of these difficulties, the volume's strengths are manifold. A good number of the essays, especially those from the Shi'a authors, are highly worthwhile as standalone dispatches on various aspects of theology and devotion. The text, if its methodological issues are addressed constructively, could be a productive supplementary text in a graduate or seminary course on Christian-Muslim dialogue, or spirituality and devotional practice in general.

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***Paul: In Fresh Perspective.* By N. T. Wright. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009. 195 pp. Softcover, \$18.00.**

N. T. Wright's *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* exhibits the fruit of his decades of work in New Testament theology. Many valuable insights may be gleaned from this compact volume, but Wright's method and presuppositions, not to mention his conclusions, deserve critical assessment as well as appreciation.

This work is split into two major parts: "themes" of Paul's world and "structures" of his theology. Wright begins by explaining the well-known three worlds of Paul (Second Temple Judaism, Hellenism, Roman Empire) and adds a fourth: the Church (6). He notes that for Paul to be in Christ, he had to live in a Hellenistic world while retaining his, albeit reshaped, Judaism, preaching against the Roman Empire, and living with and leading the people of God (6). According to Wright, the legacy of Paul's ministry has been to "keep the church on its toes" (20), i.e., interpreting Paul's writings have challenged the church through the years, and Wright believes his own fresh perspective will shed new light on Pauline studies.

In the following three chapters, Wright expounds the Second Temple Jewish environment in which Paul lived (and was trained) and in light of which he must therefore be interpreted. He describes briefly the major theme of creation and covenant which runs through the OT and remains alive in the Second Temple period, along the way referring readers to his other works for most argumentation due to space constraints (this book, being based on a series of lectures, does not provide extensive documentation or argumentation). The apocalyptic nature of Second Temple Judaism remained alive in Paul, although for him it was the revelation of God's plan which was being worked out from the beginning (54). Wright also believes that Paul's gospel was intentionally polemical in nature, bravely hailing Jesus as Lord in a world where Caesar was to be hailed as such; Philippians 3 especially exemplifies a call to anti-imperialism (72).

Having laid the foundation for how Paul is to be interpreted, Wright then demonstrates how Paul did not shed his Jewish beliefs altogether after his Damascus experience, but rather contoured them to the revelation of Jesus as Messiah (84). This involved his reshaping of monotheism, e.g., his inclusion of Jesus the Messiah in the Shema formula in 1 Corinthians 8:6 (94). Paul's parallel reshaping of election involved the inclusion of Gentiles into God's plan of redemption. This is the context in which Paul expounded the doctrine of justification by faith, seeking to unify the people of God (particularly in Galatians 2 [111, 113]). This discussion inevitably leads Wright to propound his "New Perspective on Paul" view of justification by faith (119-122). His chapter entitled "Reimagining God's Future" explains Paul's eschatology, pointing forward the day when Jesus the Messiah will return to earth to set everything right, not the day in which Jesus will come and mysteriously transport believers to heaven (141f.).

The last chapter is Wright's attempt to apply the foregoing conversation to the Church today. He explains how we, like Paul, are a part of the "fifth act" in God's history (meaning the era after the resurrection) and how we should live in this stage of history. Wright calls for a reshaping of not only our individual worldviews, but also the task of moving beyond the flawed (though somewhat helpful) era of post-modernism into a new era, where the Church takes the lead in shaping the worldview of our societies to focus them on God's coming kingdom and the Messiah's rule and reign until his return to "set the world to rights."

Positively, Wright succeeds in breaking out of the mold of “Pauline scholarship” as it has been known for the past century. Perhaps Wright’s most singular contribution to biblical scholarship is his characteristic emphasis on the “metanarrative” (170) of Scripture and one’s place within the scheme of God’s salvation history. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, most of the argumentation bears the distinction of both salient and accessible. Yet the work is still demanding of the reader in that it challenges paradigms that have been erected regarding Paul’s world and theology. Perhaps the most helpful chapter is “Messiah and Apocalyptic,” where he rejects the apocalyptic paradigms for Paul created by one of his mentors, Ernst Käsemann (41), and demonstrates how Paul actually reshaped what were probably his apocalyptic expectations prior to the Damascus experience—expectations that were in accord with standard Second Temple Jewish beliefs.

Although this book is helpful, it does suffer in various ways. The greatest fault is that Wright refers the reader to his argumentation elsewhere and simply assumes his conclusions for this work and builds upon them. Thus, in order to judge certain conclusions in this work, one must read his argumentation elsewhere, especially as concerns Second Temple Judaism. Nevertheless, he does provide a small amount of argumentation for weighty points, such as his view that Paul’s appropriation of the doctrine of justification by faith was only to unify Jews and Gentiles as the one new elect people of God.

Wright’s explanation of the doctrine of justification by faith according to Paul exposes what seems to be a presupposition of Wright’s: that Paul was so entrenched in Second Temple Judaism that he could not have acted or thought in a way that breaks out of that historical mold. This means Wright’s reconstruction of Second Temple Judaism becomes the overbearing lens through which Paul’s writings are interpreted, rather than letting them speak for themselves. For example, Wright interprets Romans 1-4 (and particularly the story of Abraham in chapter 4) as an apology for God’s faithfulness to his covenant. “Paul is recalling Abraham . . . as the one with whom God made the covenant in the first place . . .” (30). Wright believes that whatever Paul writes must fit into the Second Temple Jewish framework of beliefs, which is why he finds Romans 1-4 defending the twin themes of Second Temple Judaism: creation and covenant. Some may find reason to disagree with Wright’s imposition of this determining historical reconstruction onto the text.

Though Wright rightly emphasizes the Jewish background of Paul’s thought, the current trend in scholarship to make Paul such a Second Temple Jew that all discontinuity disappears can be seen as imbalanced (and to consider Paul’s “reshaping” as discontinuity may not go far enough). Wright himself affirms continuity between Paul and Jesus and believes that the former knew the teachings of his Lord. If this is true, then it should be acknowledged that Jesus exhibited both continuity and discontinuity with his Second Temple Jewish kindred, and therefore Paul would have done so as well.

Finally, Wright’s application to the church could have been more practical. He advocates shaping the worldview of the coming generation and moving beyond post-modernism (172), but what is the Church to do aside from intellectual activity? How does Wright’s “fresh perspective” on Paul change the way the Church spends their existence—their time, energy, and money?

Wright accomplishes his goal by looking at Paul in a fresh way. Although the book suffers a bit from its external referencing and, possibly, an imbalanced interpretive context

for Paul, the work as a whole is stimulating. Those who read this work will be challenged in their own presuppositions and methods and in how they interpret Paul in his historical context.

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## ECUMENICAL CREEDS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

### 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.