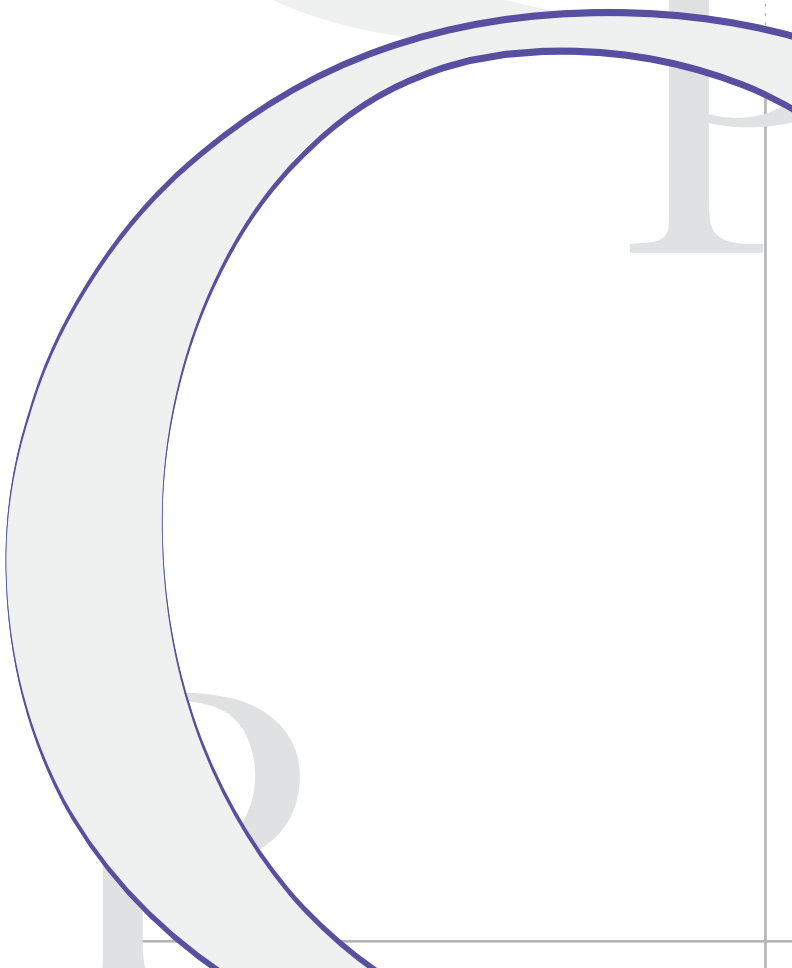
Volume 2, no. 3 | December 2014

RADICAL ORTHODOXY

Theology, Philosophy, Politics



Radical Orthodoxy:
Theology, Philosophy, Politics

Radical Orthodoxy: A Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Politics (ISSN: 2050-392X) is an internationally peer reviewed journal dedicated to the exploration of academic and policy debates that interface between theology, philosophy and the social sciences.

The editorial policy of the journal is radically non-partisan and the journal welcomes submissions from scholars and intellectuals with interesting and relevant things to say about both the nature and trajectory of the times in which we live. The journal intends to publish papers on all branches of philosophy, theology aesthetics (including literary, art and music criticism) as well as pieces on ethical, political, social, economic and cultural theory.

The journal will be published four times a year; each volume comprising of standard, special, review and current affairs issues. The journal will pursue an innovative editorial policy by publishing pieces both longer and shorter than those typically published in mainstream academic journals (alongside those of standard length).

Style Guidelines: Submissions must be made through the online system at http://journal.radicalorthodoxy.org. Please submit a Word or RTF document in Times New Romans, 12pt font, 1" margin on all sides, with 1.5 line spacing. *RO:TPP* uses Chicago/Turabian styleguide. References will be in footnotes (*not* endnotes). For examples see: http://journal.radicalorthodoxy.org/index.php/ROTPP/about/submissions#authorGuidelines

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics
Vol. 2, Number 3. December 2014

Articles

Reviews

Fiction and Poetry

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 323-34.
ISSN 2050-392X

Radical Orthodoxy:
Theology, Philosophy, Politics

Kierkegaard's Virtue Epistemology

Michael D. Stark

Introduction

Epistemological emphasis often focuses on what is true or right. It is obvious that the possession of knowledge and truth is valuable, but perhaps epistemic rightness ought not be the sole, primary concern. Indeed, perhaps the epistemic process, i.e., the pursuit of knowledge and truth, and the characteristics of the learning agent thereof, ought to be equally prioritized. This paper argues for the prioritization of the epistemic process using the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaardian epistemology has often been relegated to various forms of fideism, but perhaps with much haste. In light of Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual, further epistemological examination is warranted. This article will argue that aspects of Kierkegaard's epistemology can be categorized under virtue epistemology. Understanding Kierkegaard through virtue epistemology can help us: (1) understand the role that self-formation plays in relation to belief-formation, (2) apprehend the role subjectivity plays in Kierkegaard's thought, and (3) respond to the frequent objection that he was a fideist.

Virtues & Kierkegaard

Much of Kierkegaard's epistemological discussion surrounds selfhood and the activities and decisions which bring forth selfhood–virtues by which a person fulfills human potential.[1] This is, I believe, an appropriate connection with contemporary virtue epistemology. Adapting a definition from Robert C. Roberts, virtue epistemology is described as traits or values that a knowing agent possesses that constitute the agent's understanding and knowledge in relation to the self and its development.[2] Elsewhere, Roberts, working with W. Jay Wood, defines virtue as "acquired bases of excellent intellectual functioning."[3] That is to say, a virtue is not merely a properly functioning cognitive ability; rather, a virtue is an acquired and cultivated activity that facilitates human flourishing and self-development.

A Kierkegaardian virtue epistemology must be connected to individual life. That is, the virtues are directly related to the fulfilment of the existential components of humanity. Classical virtues fit the model, such as discernment, intellectual honesty, objectivity (unbiased), and truthfulness.[4] While the building of these virtues may correspond to human faculties, such traits are not *of* the faculties *per se*.[5] Properly functioning faculties do not alone comprise virtues. For example, one may possess healthy mental faculties only to use them for endeavors that bring forth harm instead of benefits. Consider, for example,

[1] "Self" is a central component of Kierkegaard's philosophy. The self is essentially a relation to, and a consciousness of, itself. Each individual lives in a manner that continuously discovers the self and becomes more conscious of its own importance. The relation of self extends beyond self; it is a relation to God. In order to properly relate to God, one must authentically develop the self.

[2] Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard's Virtue Epistemology: A Modest Initiative," in *Why Kierkegaard Matters: A Festschrift in Honor of Robert L. Perkins* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 220.

[3] Robert C. Roberts & W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 60.

[4] This abbreviated list of epistemic virtues are similar to, yet categorically distinct from, the classical moral virtues (such as those endorsed by Aristotle and Aquinas). While the moral and epistemic categories are both necessary for aiding selfhood, they are, in fact, distinct. However, this paper will later address how the two are correlated when considering Genesis 22 with regard to Kierkegaard's religious stage of life.

[5] Roberts, "Kierkegaard's Virtue Epistemology," 220.

Kierkegaard's response to Pastor Adolph Adler in *The Book on Adler*. In 1843 Adler wrote *Several Sermons*, which testified to a personal revelation Adler supposedly had from God. In short, Adler was chastised for the book and later suspended from the pastorate. What Kierkegaard saw as troubling was that Adler later recanted the revelation and subsequently considered his book the work of genius. *The Book on Adler* is Kierkegaard's response, not so much a critique of Adler's content as it was of Adler as an author himself. When Kierkegaard writes of a discourse shared with Adler, Adler is prompted to give explanations for his original claim and its redaction. Kierkegaard writes that Adler's response was not truthful. In fact, Kierkegaard says that Adler's "best answer can be regarded as an evasion."[6] Kierkegaard went to great measures not to condemn the former pastor; he tried instead to ascertain the situation Adler found himself in. Debate is had over the mental awareness of Adler during this period, but assuming his intellectual faculties were functioning adequately, his resistance to direct answers and truth escapes the role of the virtuous knower and learner that Adler was claiming to be. Someone with profound insight ought instead to speak directly and authoritatively about one's own authorship and the criticism it may elicit.

With this brief examination, then, it can be said that virtuous traits must lead to human flourishing and excellence, and the cultivation of selfhood. With this understanding, Kierkegaardian categories will also be added to the list normal epistemic virtues (such as intellectual honesty, humility, discernment, truthfulness, etc.), with special attention being paid to subjectivity, faith, and recognized epistemic uncertainty. For Kierkegaard, focusing on the subjective is connected to fulfilling one's life. As Climacus writes,

> To become subjective should be the highest task assigned to every human being, just as the highest reward, an eternal happiness, exists only for the subjective person or, more correctly, comes into existence for the one who becomes subjective.[7]

[6] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,1998), 56.

[7] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 163.

The Value of Subjectvity

Kierkegaard's concern is with the individual, namely the individual's understanding of human condition and the transcending of this condition in relation to God.[8] This transcending is a double movement away from depravity and toward development with God. Yet, this may come in a variety of manners, depending on the person.

While it is true that Kierkegaard thinks subjectivity brings forth religious truth, it would not follow that Kierkegaard is some radical subjectivist or denied the ability to ascertain objective truth. It would be more appropriate to say that Kierkegaard's view is that that objective inquiry cannot alone lead to Christian truth. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus focuses attention on an objectivity void of subjective interests.[9] Objectivity is said to be unemotional, disinterested evaluation. To possess knowledge of this kind is to merely know, to know without appropriating this knowledge and truth through practical implementation or recognize one's existential passions, which Climacus (and Kierkegaard) thinks is necessary to Christianity. Objectivity also has the tendency to abstract one's individual traits (emotions, desires, etc.) in favor of some knowledge that would otherwise be distorted without abstraction. Climacus writes that "the question about what Christianity is must not be confused with the objective question about the truth

[8] Robert Delfino has raised an objection surrounding the inclusion of God. Delfino "doubts [Kierkegaardian virtue epistemology] will hold much attraction for agnostics and non-theists." I do, however, respectfully disagree on two fronts. First, I do not believe that Kierkegaard must be a Christian to adopt a virtue epistemology, though I believe that his religious convictions strengthen the claim. That is, one need not be a theist to accept the premises and conclusion of this paper. One may object to theism while still accepting this interpretation of Kierkegaard. Second, I believe that any belief structure can fit Kierkegaard's understanding of virtue epistemology. For example, if Kierkegaard were an atheist or adherent to another religion, this strand of virtue epistemology would only need be modified to account for proper selfhood under those alternative convictions. Quotes taken from a written and verbal commentary by Robert A. Delfino, "Commentary on Michael Stark's Virtuous Self: A Kierkegaardian Virtue Epistemology" as presented at the Long Island Philosophical Society Conference, May 4, 2013.

[9] Adapted from C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 107. In this paper I will refer to Kierkegaard's pseudonyms and take the pseudonynms seriously. However, it is my goal to show elements of virtue throughout the Kierkegaardian corpus and thus I will make references to various pseudonyms, and Kierkegaard himself, for support.

of Christianity."[10] At this critical juncture, Climacus postulates that what something is may be distinct from its lived-out-truthfulness. The ascertaining of truth and the ascent to belief in the cognitive sense is merely one step of a twofold process of possessing truth. The second step, the subjective one, is putting cognitive truth into action. This is especially true for Christianity. Christian truth cannot be known merely through objective understanding that is distinct from subjective living. One can know the truth-claims Christianity makes regardless of whether one believes it to be true or not; furthermore, one can believe Christianity to be true but stop short of living Christianly. For truthfulness to be expressed, it must cohere to subjectivity. That is to say, truth must be appropriated into each subjective individual life.[11] Kierkegaard states that belief is actually better understood as an existence–one that involves a relation between an individual and God, thereby breaking down the notion that Christianity is just something that must be believed without appropriated living.

Kierkegaard writes that "the only fundamental basis for understanding is that one himself becomes what he understands and one understands only in proportion to becoming himself that which he understands."[12] The pursuit of understanding is the activity by which one makes decisions. Kierkegaard directly asserts that subjectivity is both personal and active, saying that "the essential thing about subjectivity is that in resolution and decision of choice one takes a risk."[13] M. G. Piety articulates further, saying "Kierkegaard maintains that we have an essential interest … in choosing the proper interpretation of existence. Our eternal blessedness … is ultimately dependent on this choice."[14] Choices are

[10] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 371.

[11] Note that objective knowledge is not denied. Rather, its importance is diminished without an individual assenting and relating to knowledge in a subjective manner. For example, take the proposition "murder is wrong" as objective moral knowledge. What purpose would such a proposition contain apart from individuals who comply or deviate from its nature? The objectivity here is not disputed, but its *telos* lacks minus subjective interaction.

[12] Søren Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, vol. II, 2299. Ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Subsequent footnotes from Kierkegaard's journals and papers will take the shortened citation version.

[13] *JP* IV 4537.

[14] Marilyn Gaye Piety, "Kierkegaard on Rationality," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 65.

contingent on a variety of factors, and objective reasoning has a pivotal role. However, it would be hasty to assert that objective reasoning is the only factor with regard to choices and belief. As Kierkegaard makes so evident, choice is "interested" and related to the passions. Passions, as they are here connected with choice and belief, are connected to the epistemic virtues. Inasmuch as passions are pruned and refined through life, the epistemic virtues likewise undergo continuous refinement in order foster a higher quality of intellectual living and personal development to inform beliefs and choices.

Whereas the epistemic virtues are objective by nature, different persons will experience and direct the will towards the objective in their own individual, subjective manners. Objective truth remains valued, but the mere possession of truth lacks significance if it does not affect the subjective individual in some manner. A subjective interest in a truth-claim, especially religious truth, plays a pivotal role in choice and decision-making. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard objects that Christianity is merely a set of doctrines that must be believed in–Christianity is to be existed in. Doctrine can only take human reason so far. Where it leaves off, the issue becomes an object of faith.

Louis Pojman correctly notes that Kierkegaard claims that propositions such as "God exists" are "objects of belief which affect one's inner being."[15] Subjectivity, in Kierkegaard's sense, is always intentional–a willed movement toward an object.[16] Pojman limits his discussion to the subjective pursuit of understanding. However, Kierkegaard's embrace of subjectivity is not only for this pursuit. Through understanding, one develops better intellectual functions and develops capacities not previously held. For what purpose would there be in knowing *of* love without then *experiencing love*? A knowledge of love without an experience of love would separate love from passion, a separation of love from its essence.[17] Yet through an understanding of what love is in the objective sense

[15] Louis P. Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 56.

[16] This does not exclude mental activity.

[17] This is perhaps most evident in the Kierkegaardian corpus in *Repetition*. In that text, the pseudonym Constantin Constantius dialogs with an anonymous young man regarding the young man's engagement. They discuss love–Constantius from an objective perspective that yields unfavorable results for the young man. The concluding discourse is written with passion, as the young man rediscovers his passions, his subjective features, which made him a

one builds a subjective interaction with the object. A subjective interpretation of the objective is then transmuted into action. An act of knowing ought to propel the individual into reflection about, and action in, one's life. As Climacus writes, "Essential knowing is related to the knower, who is essentially an existing person, and all essential knowing is therefore essentially related to existence and to existing."[18] Knowing is subjective, and its function in subjectivity grows one in relation to oneself.

Parsing this further, take the proposition "God is love." To understand this utterance, one must come to an understanding of three conditions: (1) an understanding (but not belief) of what (or who) God is, (2) an understanding of the characteristics of love shared between two subjects (forgiveness, kindness, etc.), and (3), the embodiment of love by God. In the learning of these, a volitional appropriation is undertaken. Two people might attempt to properly understand these objective propositions only to subjectively appropriate them differently. Each person experiences something unique. As Sylvia Walsh writes, knowing God "is 'a voyage of discovery' in which one comes to know God through an 'inland journey' into oneself."[19] Thus, each individual undertakes a subjective interpretation and volitionally puts it into action in a similar, yet non-identical, manner. Each journey is individual-specific insofar as each life comprises a unique set of experiences, emotions, and passions which relate to God.

The preceding exposition might read as epistemological subjectivism, the skeptical view of objective knowledge and its possession. It would be a mistake to read Kierkegaard this way. There is a stark, fundamental distinction between epistemic subjectivism and the *value* of subjectivity. Whereas subjectivism may deny, or attempt to eradicate, any value of objective knowledge, the virtue and value of subjectivity affixes personal desires, characteristics, and traits to objective knowledge.

---

captivating individual. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling & Repetition*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); *Repetition* is pp. 125-330.

[18] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 197-98.

[19] Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51.

The Virtuous Self

Climacus examines the question regarding the possibility of completing the becoming self. He writes,

> …when time itself is the task, it becomes a defect to finish ahead of time. Suppose a person is given the task of entertaining himself for one day and by noon is already finished with the entertainment–then his speed would indeed be of no merit. So it is also when life is the task. To be finished with life before life is finished with one is not to finish the task at all.[20]

The developing self is a fundamental and primary value of life. There is no allotment of time in which the self's task of developing is finished prior to death, which is the finality of the self's development. The value in this epistemic good rests in Kierkegaard's plea that one be active, even until the point of death. There is for the self no temporal completeness, and thus the goal of the self never changes: it must become.

On Beliefs, Faith, & Uncertainty

Many operate under the assumption that Kierkegaard was an irresponsible fideist.[21] This claim will be addressed later, but Kierkegaard's "leap" into religious faith is connected with his analysis of belief formation. Of pertinent concern is whether or not beliefs are volitional. Climacus calls into question not only the certainty of personal beliefs, but also the objectivity by which some beliefs are founded. In Christianity, the basis of faith has several components, one of which is its set of historical claims. Yet, historical claims are not objective in the sense many theologians assert. History is an "approximation" and therefore not conclusively sufficient to base one's beliefs on.[22] By approximation,

[20] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 164.

[21] Here I am following Alvin Plantinga's definition of fideism as "exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone." See Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga & Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 89.

[22] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 23.

Kierkegaard means that no record of history is without some error, and thus cannot be indubitably trusted, especially in matters related to "eternal truth," issues of lasting importance. There are bound to be errors in historical reports. When related to passionate interest, no error is small enough to avoid being worrisome, as even a small error could be a barrier between the individual and eternal truth.[23]

With this understanding of historical claims, the individual begins the speculative journey in search of truth. In this search the individual discards any approximations previously acquired. Truth is not approximated as in objectivity, but rather appropriated in subjectivity. The individual must leap into belief with passionate action. The highest capacity for approximated historical truths (and all speculative doctrine) is also the limit of human reason. Human reason is limited, and thus cannot possess any perfect knowledge, despite how close doctrine may get us to the objective understanding. At this juncture, an object of belief ceases to be a category of reason, but rather a category of faith.

Climacus frustrates his reader by stating that the speculative leads to an answer of "mystification."[24] Speculation will not allow one to arrive at a certainty through which one can claim to have discovered the eternal truth. Yet speculation is what motivates the individual toward faith. The focus is on the hopeful conclusion: reaching eternal truth. Climacus wants the individual to *choose* to believe–thus indicating a direct connection between one's volition and personal belief. As Alastair Hannay comments,

> The uncertainty confronting faith, and which faith must overcome, is whether the theological interpretation is *ever* the right one. Its being the right one is precisely what, in the absence of any evidence *at all* that historical phenomena, or nature itself, are manifestations of divinity, he must choose to believe. This, then, is the uncertainty of which Kierkegaard speaks and of which he goes on to say that, in faith, it is embraced.[25]

[23] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Kierkegaard's Arguments Against Objective Reasoning in Religion," in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Louis P. Pojman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 425.

[24] Ibid., 55.

[25] Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 125.

Belief in eternal truth is based on the arrival of uncertainty. While this will likely leave some in angst, it may be Kierkegaard's hope. Anxiety is a psychological state in which one realizes the gravity of beliefs (and actions). It is at this juncture that one "leaps" into one belief over another. The leap rests not on mere non-rationality, but on the truths and beliefs one has available. Here, the individual gains a higher level of certainty by the appropriation of truth in faith.. The foundation of faith is objective uncertainty. Its result is a more certain subjectivity.[26] Truth is in the subjective; it is the action of belief.[27]

Historical approximations lack the certainty that one may desire, yet they serve as evidence by which one can, to a certain degree, make a rational leap into belief. Anxiety itself is an epistemic virtue (as it places the individual at a point of decision-making), but it leads to a correlative one: the love of knowledge. The lover of knowledge "wants his beliefs to be true, and to be adequately supported, in whatever way of supporting is appropriate to his particular belief in its particular circumstance."[28] If this analysis is accepted, two conclusions can be drawn: (1) the quest of knowledge and belief, although resulting in some degree of uncertainty, is virtuous, as it requires the individual to examine one's epistemic conditioning, and (2) Kierkegaard cannot be rightly classified as an irresponsible fideist. Faith is not a mere irrational curvet into belief. Rather, the foundation of faith is entrance into uncertainty while simultaneously based upon the reasoning and evidence of the approximated historical claims. If the leap operates in this function, the movement is an epistemic virtue that directs one to the subjective building of the self. The leap of faith is one that places faith not *against* reason, but *beyond* reason. Nowhere in Kierkegaard's writings, pseudonymous or otherwise, is there evidence for a repudiation of reason. Agreeing with the likes of St. Thomas Aquinas,

[26] In his admiration of Socrates, Kierkegaard employs the historical figure in an account of uncertainty with regard to subjectivity and objectivity. The Socratic discussion surrounds *if* there is immortality after death. Kierkegaard determines that Socrates' uncertainty helped Socrates' personal development and acceptance of his death sentence. Kierkegaard writes, "on this *if* [Socrates] risks his entire life." This risk is subjective, as the "proofs" for an immortal soul (read: objectivity) are "dead to spirit and enthusiasm" and prove some abstract notion that lacks passion. See *CUP*, 201.

[27] As Climacus writes, "If I am able to apprehend God objectively, I do not have faith; but because I cannot do this, I must have faith." See *CUP*, 204.

[28] Roberts & Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 156.

Kierkegaard asserts that there are objects of faith rather than objects of reason. Take, for example, Kierkegaard's interaction with the incarnation of Christ. One can gain a certain level of understanding regarding the incarnation, but where human reason becomes limited the incarnation becomes an object of faith.

The preceding can be clearly seen in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard questions whether there is a teleological suspension of the ethical committed by Abraham in Genesis 22. Here he makes the provocative claim that Abraham committed an act of the "absurd"–placing himself, a single individual, higher than the ethical universal. He seeks a "higher expression for the ethical that can ethically *explain* his behavior, ethically *justify* him in suspending the ethical duty."[29] Note the epistemic terminology here. How can the seemingly absurd be explained in an epistemically justifiable manner? And how can an individual who places oneself above the ethical exist? The answer: by *believing*.

> That is the paradox by which he remains at the apex and which he cannot make clear to anyone else, for the paradox is that he as the single individual places himself in an absolute relation to the absolute. Is he justified? His justification is again the paradox, for if he is justified, it is not by virtue of being something universal, but by virtue of being the particular.[30]

The Christian and Jewish traditions place much value on Abraham's example. Ethical judgment of norms was necessarily suspended to allow Abraham to act in faith. He committed the absurd–a willful intention to kill his son and place himself beyond the ethical. This leap had the most uncertain end and required great faith to commit. Yet, this is no mere fideistic lunge into the unknown. Entering into the unknown required a faith that was not on its own sufficient for Abraham's decision. It is conceivable that the decision to follow through on God's command was based on his prior experiences with God. In pushing past the uncertainty in faith, Abraham formed a belief that he was justified in his action, as it correlated with the eternal truth. This example further

[29] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh, trans. Sylvia Walsh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 49. Emphasis mine.

[30] Ibid., 54.

demonstrates that, for Kierkegaard, Christianity is something that should be *existed in*, not merely believed in.

It has been shown that speculation, uncertainty, and faith fit the mold of epistemic virtues, as they place the individual on the path of knowledge which can formulate belief. Though certainty may be lacking, Kierkegaard is more concerned that the individual develops the faculties of humanity and fulfills each of his or her capacities in a manner which subjectively forms personal beliefs. When Kierkegaard's philosophy is understood as an endeavor to develop the self, his epistemology, by nature, must exclude pure fideism. Rather, he develops virtues which force one to recognize the power of knowledge that is appropriated into action. Beliefs based solely upon objectivity diminish the existential role that truth possesses. A life voice of subjective appropriation of knowledge will likely lack meaning and a deeper understanding of one's self. The acquisition of knowledge must be personal and subjective in order to properly arrive at truth. In essence, each person is his or her own "Abraham." Each person must appropriate what is objectively known and act accordingly. This is the movement of the developing self.

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 335-78.
ISSN 2050-392X

Joseph Ratzinger's Understanding of Freedom

Peter John McGregor

The desire for freedom has been constant throughout human history. From the cries to God of the Hebrews in Egypt to the cries against the Gaddafis, Mubaraks, and Assads in the "Arab Spring," this desire has never waned in human hearts. The fact that it has never waned, that it has always been a great, yet never permanently or completely attained, goal prompts one to ask whether or not it is a chimera, a mirage which constantly taunts us with its apparent reality, yet proves in the end to be nothing but sand, dust, and ashes. With this question in mind, it should come as no surprise that the nature of freedom has been a recurrent question in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, a theologian whose *modus operandi* has been to focus on the particular questions which face us in a post-rational world, which is just the kind of world to propose that freedom is nothing more than a will-o'-the-wisp. Yet it does come as something of a surprise, since the terms "Ratzinger" and "freedom" would be held by some to be mutually exclusive. As it turns out, "freedom" proves to be one of the "cardinal points" of Ratzinger's theology, a concept he uses to orientate his thinking.

In this essay we shall try to delineate the overall shape of Ratzinger's understanding of freedom. Beginning with what he considers to be some false understandings of freedom and the contemporary "loss of faith" in freedom, we

shall examine his critique of how the idea of freedom is presented in *Gaudium et Spes*. Following this, we shall attempt to demonstrate that Ratzinger has developed a theology of the freedom of God, as well as an anthropology of human freedom, that find their consummation in a Christology of the freedom of Jesus. We are called to participate in this freedom, and this participation constitutes our divinisation. The climax of our participation in this freedom comes about through our communion with Christ in the Eucharist.

Some False Ideas of Freedom according to Ratzinger

In his commentary on the section of *Gaudium et Spes*, which addresses the nature of human freedom, Ratzinger maintains that the intention of the text was to affirm the value of freedom on the basis of faith. The particular aspect of freedom that it addressed is psychological, rather than social or political. It sought to find a firm basis for human freedom that is subject neither to external coercion nor to the compulsion of instinct. It also sought to oppose the idea that freedom is simply the absence of commitment. Ratzinger saw the negation of freedom through coercion and instinct, or the identification of freedom with license, as a potential means for the social manipulation of the human person through control of the intellectual and economic markets. Finally, he thought that the text wished to uphold the reality of human moral responsibility in opposition to any kind of determinism. Regarding this last point, Ratzinger saw a contemporary paradox–on the one hand, the demand for freedom without responsibility, and on the other, a materialistic belief that human behaviour is biologically determined. In opposition to this, Ratzinger saw the text as professing human moral freedom, over and against determinism, be it biological or theological. As he states:

> However much the New Testament … may speak of the decadence and impotence of man, it nevertheless always expressly affirms the moral responsibility of *all* men; despite the important aspects calling for consideration which it

> expresses, Luther's "servum arbitrium" cannot be maintained on New Testament grounds.[1]

In Ratzinger's analysis we can discern the false "freedom" of licence, which can so often become chimeric through propaganda, and which leads to the enslavement of the will in sin, as well as both the materialist and theological denials of freedom. In *Feast of Faith* he identifies another denial of freedom that springs from a rationalistic, but not materialistic, worldview shaped by the science and technology. He states that:

> [A] rationally constructed world is determined by rationally perceived causality. The notion of personal intervention [by God] is both mythical and repugnant. But if this approach is adopted, it must be followed consistently, for what applies to God applies equally to man. If there is only *one* kind of causality, man too as a person is excluded and reduced to an element in mechanical causality, in the realm of necessity; freedom too, in this case, is a mythical idea. In this sense it can be said that the personalities of God and of man cannot be separated. If personality is not a possibility, i.e., not present, with the "ground" of reality, it is not possible at all. Either freedom is a possibility inherent in the ground of reality, or it does not exist.[2]

In *A New Song for the Lord*, Ratzinger identifies a false notion of freedom which can be found in liberation theology. While recognising the contemporary appeal of Christ the liberator for our times, he thinks that liberation theology tends to read salvation history the wrong way. Instead of moving from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to the kingdom of God, it goes in the opposite direction: through the application of political criteria to Christ. This leads to a political interpretation of the Exodus rather than a Christological one. What Ratzinger

[1] Joseph Ratzinger, "The Church and Man's Calling–Introductory Article and Chapter One–The Dignity of the Human Person–Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," in Herbert Vorgrimler (ed), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, trans. J. W. O'Hara (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), V, 115-163, at 139-140.

[2] Joseph Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 20.

wishes to do is "make comprehensible the new dimension of the concepts of exodus, freedom, and liberation that came into the world through Christ."[3]

The Contemporary Dilemma of Human Freedom

Ratzinger's most comprehensive analyses of false notions of freedom are to be found in an essay entitled "Freiheit und Wahrheit," and, as Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*.[4] In the first he maintains that the fundamental difficulty with the contemporary concept of freedom is that it has been separated from that of truth. The general notion of freedom is that expressed by Karl Marx, when he says that in the future Communist society one will be able "to do one thing today and another tomorrow; to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, breed cattle in the evening and criticize after dinner, just as I please … "[5] This concept of freedom as the ability to do or to have anything which we desire, to have one's own will as the sole norm of our action, presupposes that one's will is truly free. Yet, Ratzinger asks, if the will is irrational, can it be truly free? Can it be truly good? He proposes the need for a definition of freedom which says that it is "the capacity to will and to do what we will in the context of reason."[6] Such an interplay between reason and will shall enable us to find that common reason shared by all people, and thus ground the compatibilities of personal liberties.

Ratzinger points out that both Marxism and Liberalism have failed to deliver the freedom that they have promised. Although Marxism claimed to have discovered a scientifically guaranteed way to freedom, it instituted a gigantic system of slavery. Despite the promises of the liberal system of politics and economics, many people in democratic societies are excluded from freedom by

---

[3] Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, trans. Martha M. Matesich (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 6.

[4] Published in English as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," trans. Adrian Walker, *Communio* 23 (1996): 16-35. See also, Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 16-23.

[5] Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Werke*, 389 vols. (Berlin, 1961-71), 3:33. Cited in Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 17. It is ironic that Marx's concept of freedom is so bourgeois.

[6] Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 17.

unemployment and material poverty, and are also "haunted by the spectre of meaninglessness."[7] Ratzinger cites the Polish philosopher Andrej Sziztpiorski's reaction to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the apparent triumph of Western liberal democracy, which is that this triumph has raised the possibility that there is no way to human liberation. If neither East nor West can give an answer to the human desire for freedom, perhaps there is no answer.[8] So, for Ratzinger, there are actually two questions which need to be answered, not just "what is truth?" but also "what is freedom?"

Ratzinger sees the idea of freedom as the defining theme of post-mediaeval European society. The issue which Luther raised was that of the most intimate of all human freedoms: the freedom of conscience, vis-à-vis the authority of the Church. The concept of freedom came to be individualised. Rather than something found in the Church, it meant "liberation from the yoke of a supra-individual order."[9] Yet this liberation was confined to the "religious" sphere. In the political sphere the contrary happened–liberation was curtailed by a growing secular authority that, more and more, attempted to subjugate the Church.

In *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI gives a complementary account of this individualisation of freedom through showing its connection with the individualisation of salvation. According to him, this reduction of redemption to the "salvation of the soul" arose from the development of the "scientific method." The new correlation of experiment and method introduced the possibility of what Francis Bacon called "the triumph of art over nature."[10] The potential to achieve dominion over creation, occasioned by the new correlation between science and praxis, leads to an attempt to rebuild the Tower of Babel, returning to Paradise via science rather than faith. This displaced faith onto another level, that of the private and other-worldly, which proves to be irrelevant to the world. Publically, faith in Christ is replaced by "faith in progress." The kingdom of God

[7] Ibid., 18.

[8] Ibid., 19. Ratzinger cites Szizypiorski from a manuscript provided during the Salzburg University Weeks of 1995.

[9] Ibid., 20.

[10] Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* I, 117. Cited in Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 16.

now becomes the "kingdom of man." According to Benedict XVI, the two categories which become increasingly central to this idea of progress are reason and freedom. It is reason which drives progress towards the perfect realisation of freedom. Since this realisation of perfect freedom comes about through the establishment of a "kingdom of man," which could also be called a "kingdom of reason," both of these concepts of reason and freedom are politicised. These concepts were interpreted as being in conflict with both the faith and the Church and the reigning political structures.[11]

Initially, this faith in reason is naïf. The French Revolution seemed to promise the establishment of the rule of reason and freedom as a political reality. Only later did some begin to doubt this new-found faith. Benedict XVI illustrates this point through appealing to two essays in which Kant reflects upon the Revolution. In his 1792 *Der Sieg des guten Prinzips über das böse und die Gründung eines Reiches Gottes auf Erden* ("The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth"), Kant claims that: "The gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith to the exclusive sovereignty of pure religious faith is the coming of the Kingdom of God."[12] Yet three years later, in *Das Ende aller Dinge* ("The End of All Things"), he is wondering if the transition from an "ecclesiastical faith" could also lead to an "irrational" faith. As Benedict XVI puts it: "Now Kant considers the possibility that as well as the natural end of all things there may be another that is unnatural, a perverse end."[13]

The Enlightenment challenged not just religious but also political authority by proposing the emancipation of the human will through reason, a reason to which even political authority must bow. Only that which is reasonable is valid. Paradoxically, this led to two antithetical social philosophies with their attendant political programs. The first, "Anglo-Saxon" current emphasised natural rights and constitutional democracy as the only realistic way to freedom. For this way

[11] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 18.

[12] Immanuel Kant, *Werke* IV, ed. W. Weischedel (1956), 777. Cited in *Spe Salvi*, n. 19.

[13] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 19. See Immanuel Kant, *Das Ende aller Dinge*, in *Werke* VI, Weischeldel (1964), 190.

of thinking, "Freedom is not bestowed on man from without. He is a bearer of rights because he is created free."[14] Thus we can see that this idea has a Christian origin. It is a principle which can be found in Romans 2:14. It is based on a theology of creation. And yet, in the Enlightenment recasting of this idea the individual is set in opposition to the community. Human rights must be protected from the community–"the institution seems to be the polar opposite of freedom, whereas the individual appears as the bearer of freedom, whose goal is seen as his full emancipation."[15]

The second current, exemplified by Rousseau, also begins with the idea of nature. Yet this "nature" is anti-rational. For Rousseau, "everything which owes its origin to reason and will is contrary to nature, and corrupts and contradicts us."[16] His concept of nature is anti-metaphysical. "Nature" is a state of total, unregimented freedom. This anarchic concept of freedom eventually comes to dominate the French Revolution, and resurfaces in Nietzsche and National Socialism. Although it is inimical to the Enlightenment appeal to reason, it is nonetheless the Enlightenment cry for freedom in its most radically intensified form.

Ratzinger sees Marxism as a continuation of this radical line, in that it gives precedence to the community rather than the individual. For Marxism, freedom is indivisible. Unless there is equality, freedom for all, there is freedom for none. Individual liberties must therefore give way to solidarity with those struggling for freedom. Yet, the endpoint of this struggle is the unbounded freedom of the individual. The precedence of the community only stands until the freedom of equality is achieved.[17]

As Ratzinger sees it, the problem for Marxism is simply that it cannot work–it is contradictory in essence. It claims to be the rational means of bringing about a

[14] Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 21.

[15] Ibid., 22.

[16] Ibid. Although Ratzinger does not explicitly make a link, perhaps we could see Rousseau's position as a fulfilment of Kant's fear of an anti-rational "faith."

[17] Ibid., 23. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 20.

change in the very structure of society, yet those who are to bring about the change are unable to attain the altruism necessary for such a change. Consequently, Marxists took refuge in a "mythology"–the new structure would bring forth a new, altruistic man. Yet this "new man" is the necessary prerequisite for the achievement of the new structure. This "lie" at the heart of Marxism reveals that there can be no freedom without truth. The "lie" neutralises even those elements of truth that do exist in Marxism.[18]

Turning to that element of truth, Ratzinger confronts the "democratic" concept of freedom. The Marxist critique of democracy has some validity. How "free" are elections when they can be manipulated by propaganda in the guise of advertising, underwritten by "capital"? How much does an "enlightened" oligarchy rule through control of the media? How representative is representative democracy, with its rule by what is often a narrow majority? How much power do "interest groups" exercise compared to the "unorganised" individual? How often do the wills of individuals prevail over the freedom of the whole? The freedom of total autonomy, of doing what one pleases, is impossible for all. Ultimately, it means an imposition of the will of the strong upon the weak. The inability of democratically ordered freedom to give freedom to all increases the anarchic calls for freedom.

As Benedict XVI, he also reflects upon the twentieth century's critique of the nineteenth century's faith in progress. Referring specifically to Theodor Adorno's observation that "progress" means progress from the sling to the atom bomb, he states what should be obvious to any thoughtful person: because of the human potential for either good or evil, we can only speak of true progress in the sense of technical progress. Without a corresponding moral progress this technical progress is in fact a regression, and potentially annihilation.[19]

---

[18] Ibid., 23-24. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 21, where he points out that Marx's deepest error was that he forgot the reality of human nature. Since Marx was a materialist, he assumed that human evil was a product of economic conditions. "He forgot that freedom always remains also freedom for evil."

[19] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 22.

Ratzinger maintains that grand promises of modernity to establish freedom for all flow from a failure to penetrate to the foundations of what man is and how he can live rightly, both individually and collectively. Modernity separated the philosophical, and hence political, concept of freedom from the religious concept. This has ultimately led to the most radical philosophy of freedom, that of Sartre. Ratzinger's account of this nadir of freedom deserves to be quoted at length.

> Sartre regards man as condemned to freedom. In contrast to the animal, man has no "nature." The animal lives out its existence according to laws it is simply born with; it does not need to deliberate what to do with its life. But man's essence is undetermined. It is an open question. I must decide myself what I understand by "humanity," what I want to do with it, and how I want to fashion it. Man has no nature, but is sheer freedom. His life must take some direction or other, but in the end comes to nothing. This absurd freedom is man's hell. What is unsettling about this approach is that it is a way through the separation of freedom and truth to its most radical conclusion: there is no truth at all. Freedom has not direction and no measure. But this complete absence of truth, this complete absence of any moral and metaphysical bond, this absolutely anarchic freedom–which is understood as an essential quality of man–reveals itself to one who tries to live it not as the supreme enhancement of existence, but as the frustration of life, the absolute void, the definition of damnation. The isolation of a radical concept of freedom, which for Sartre was a lived experience, shows with all desirable clarity that liberation from the truth does not produce pure freedom, but abolishes it. Anarchic freedom, taken radically, does not redeem, but makes man a miscarried creature, a pointless being.[20]

[20] Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 25-26.

The Inadequate Answer of *Gaudium et Spes*

In his commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, Ratzinger criticised the section which dealt with freedom.[21] An analysis of his criticisms can help us to grasp his understanding of human freedom. His first criticism is that its exposition of the nature of human spirituality in terms of intellect (the human capacity for truth), conscience (the human capacity for good), and freedom excluded the inter-subjectivity of the human person, our essential ordination to love. The concept of "person" does not ground the document's presentation of freedom.[22] His second criticism is that the document excluded the New Testament doctrine of freedom. It linked the idea of freedom with the doctrine of man as being in the image and likeness of God, but without any reference to Christ. In Ratzinger's estimation the document should have set out the New Testament teaching on the gift of freedom that is conferred in Christ. Instead, even in its use of biblical texts, it grounded the meaning of freedom in natural theology rather than faith. It developed something which Ratzinger calls "a *theologia naturalis*, or, even more, an *ethica naturalis*."[23] Rather than simply follow the ethical optimism of late Jewish wisdom theology, it should have grounded the meaning of freedom in the light of the critical wisdom theology of Ecclesiastes and, especially, Job. It should have attended to the Jewish ethical doctrine of the two ways that is grounded on the theology of the Covenant. When one looks at the actual

[21] Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 136-140. The biblical texts referred to are Eccles 15:14 and 2 Cor 5:10). However, we should note that at the 1985 Synod Ratzinger affirmed the importance of article 22 of *Gaudium et Spes* as the hermeneutical lens for the rest of the document. This being the case, the point of the document is to affirm the contemporary longing for human freedom and self-fulfilment that can only be realised through union with Christ. See Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32-33 and 38.

[22] Ibid., 130-131. On this point, Rowland comments that: "Regrettably for Ratzinger … the young Karol Wojtyła's personalism did not carry through to articles 15-17 of *Gaudium et spes*. … Neither the concept of person nor the idea of love was mentioned here. The philosophy of interpersonal love, the whole set of I-Thou questions, are practically absent for the treatment of spirituality within this section of the document, and Ratzinger was quite appalled that anyone could attempt to speak of spirituality without thinking that Christian love might have something to do with it." See *Ratzinger's Faith*, 41.

[23] Ibid., 137.

history of the Covenant, one encounters the inability of Israel to fulfil it. Ultimately, the way of life came not from a freedom that could fulfil the Law but Christ's fulfilment of the law through his death on the Cross.[24]

Essentially, Ratzinger's dissatisfaction with the account of freedom given in *Gaudium et Spes* is that it is inadequate on both theological and philosophical levels. Its theological understanding of freedom is historically faithful neither to the biblical witness nor to actual human history. It neglects to address the "slavery" to sin so dramatically described in Romans 7:13-25. Ratzinger goes so far as to say:

> It even falls into downright Pelagian terminology when it speaks of man "sese ab omni passionum captivitate liberans finem suum persequitur et apta subsidia… procurat." That is not balanced by the following sentence, which logically is scarcely linked with it and which speaks of a wound inflicted by sin but regards grace only as a help to make the will once more "plene actuosam." The extent of the human dilemma, which is not constituted by the modest difference between "plene actuosus" and "actuosus," but calls man in question to his very depths and makes him unfree, is not taken even roughly into account here. Fundamentally, the formula "plene actuosus" means that an at all events semi-Pelagian representational pattern has been retained.[25]

On the philosophical level Ratzinger asserts that the document presents what he calls "a colourless philosophical doctrine of freedom" that takes no account of the contemporary awareness that human freedom is constrained by numerous psychological and sociological factors. According to Ratzinger, it could even have been improved by taking into account the Marxist perception of "the extent of human alienation and decadence."[26]

As Ratzinger sees it, *Gaudium et Spes* did not really deal with the problems of human freedom. It only dealt with "freedom of choice." As he states:

---

[24] Ibid., 137-138.

[25] Ibid., 138.

[26] Ibid.

> The actual ontological content of the idea of freedom, the capacity to accept one's own nature and to become identified with it, is just as little realized as the dialogue character of human freedom, which is only brought to the full possibilities of its realization by that appeal of love which can never be forced upon it. But only on this basis would it have been possible to show that God's summons, under which man stands, is not in opposition to his freedom but makes it truly possible; that human freedom does not consist in abstract selection between different possibilities of behaviour, but by its very nature love in the presence of God and can only be really understood in relation to this vis-à-vis. Only on this basis would it also be possible to explain the perfect fulfilment of Christian freedom in the "freedom of the children of God."[27]

The Theology of Freedom

The purpose of Ratzinger's focus upon the prayer of Jesus in the Garden is to establish the outcome of that prayer for Jesus and for us. He maintains that: "Wherever the I gives itself to the Thou, there is freedom because this involves the reception of the 'form of God'," and that "the Son transforms the anguish of a man into filial obedience, the speech of the servant into the Word which is the Son."[28] Consequently:

> [We] come to grasp the manner of our liberation, our participation in the Son's freedom. As a result of the unity of wills … the greatest possible change has taken place in man, the only change which meets his desire: he has become divine. We can therefore describe the prayer which enters into the praying of Jesus and becomes the prayer of Jesus in the Body of Christ as freedom's laboratory.[29]

---

[27] Ibid., 138-139.

[28] Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 41.

[29] Ibid., 42.

If we are to understand what Ratzinger means by our participation in the Son's freedom, we must discover two things: what he means by "freedom" and how he understands it to be exercised by the Son.

In Ratzinger's earlier Christology, we come across a paradoxical reference to "freedom": "God's disguise as man in history 'must' be–with the necessity of freedom."[30] However, if we are to understand this paradox we must go back to its foundation in Ratzinger's understanding of God. We begin with what he calls the "primacy of the *logos*." This *logos* he identifies as "the idea," "freedom," and "love." It is "the originating and encompassing power of all being."[31] All being is derived from thought; indeed, the innermost structure of being is thought. All being is "being-thought." What we find present in all things is "objective mind," which is the product of "subjective mind." All of our thinking about being is actually a "rethinking" of what has already been thought. This "being-thought-ness" of things is discoverable by philosophers, that is to say, they can discover the God of the philosophers. Ratzinger sums up thus: "The world is objective mind; it meets us in an intellectual structure, that is, it offers itself to our mind as something that can be reflected upon and understood."[32] From this follows the conviction in the existence of "God," since "being-thought" is not possible without thinking.

In arriving at this conclusion, Ratzinger rejects the materialist solution to the question of being and accepts the idealist solution: "All being is ultimately being-thought and can be traced back to mind as the original reality."[33] Ratzinger defines "matter" as "being that does not itself comprehend being," and "mind" as "being that understands itself, as being that is present to itself," and consequently: "The idealist solution to the problem of being accordingly signifies the idea that all being is the being-thought by one single consciousness. The unity of being

[30] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster, with a New Preface trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 269.

[31] Ibid., 152.

[32] Ibid., 155.

[33] Ibid., 156.

consists in the identity of the one consciousness, whose impulses constitute the many things that are."[34]

From the God of the philosophers, Ratzinger moves to the God of Jesus Christ. This God is not completely identical with the idealist's God as outlined above. The Christian God is "being" which is "being-thought," but does not remain thought alone, only giving rise to the 'appearance' of an independent existence in things. Rather:

> Christian belief in God means that things are the being-thought of a creative consciousness, of a creative freedom, and that the creative consciousness that bears up all things has released what has been thought into the freedom of its own, independent existence. In this it goes beyond any mere idealism. While the latter … explains everything real as the content of a single consciousness, in the Christian view what supports it all is a creative freedom that sets what had been thought in the freedom of its own being, so that, on the one hand, it is the being-thought of a consciousness and yet, on the other hand, is true being itself.[35]

Thus, for Ratzinger, God is being, not just as consciousness, but as "creative freedom" that creates further freedoms. Hence:

> To this extent one could very well describe Christianity as a philosophy of freedom. For Christianity, the explanation of reality as a whole is not an all-embracing consciousness or one single materiality; on the contrary, at the summit stands a freedom that thinks and, by thinking, creates freedoms, thus making freedom the structural form of all being.[36]

We should note that, thus far, Ratzinger has been speaking in terms of being as such, not personal being. All being, both uncreated and created, participates in freedom. "To be" is "to be free."

According to Ratzinger, the Christian belief in the primacy of the *logos* leads to a belief in the personal nature of original being. Such being, as original

[34] Ibid., 157.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 158.

thought, expressed as "being-thought" in the world, means that this original being "is not an anonymous, neutral consciousness but rather freedom, creative love, a person."[37] For Ratzinger, the acceptance of the *logos* as personal and creative means the acceptance of the primacy of the particular over the universal. The difference between the "personal" and the "individual" is that the latter is understood as arising out of, and secondary to, the universal, whereas the personal means it is the particular being which is the primary reality.[38] To accept the primacy of the person means to accept the primacy of freedom, rather than that of cosmic necessity. It is this primacy of freedom which marks the division between idealism and Christian belief.[39]

At this point Ratzinger moves from an economic view of freedom as expressed in creation back to an immanent view of freedom in God, and how that freedom issues forth in establishing economic freedom. Since the creative thinking that is the precondition and ground of all being is conscious thinking, it must know not only itself, but also its whole thought. Consequently:

> It means further that this thinking not only knows but loves; that is it is creative because it is love; and that, because it can love as well as think, it has given its thought the freedom of its own existence, objectivized it, released it into distinct being, loves it and, loving, upholds it.[40]

Ratzinger identifies the *logos* of all being as "consciousness," "freedom," and "love." The world is not grounded on cosmic necessity, but on freedom. Freedom is the "necessary structure" of the world. Yet this very fact renders the world "incomprehensible." If the world is upheld by a freedom which wills, knows, and loves the world *as freedom*, then incalculability becomes an essential part of the world. This freedom creates the possibility of the rejection of freedom. The world is willed and created on the "risk" of freedom and love. "As the arena of love it is also the playground of freedom and also incurs the risk of

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 160.

[39] Ibid., 158-159.

[40] Ibid., 159.

evil. It accepts the mystery of darkness for the sake of the greater light constituted by freedom and love."[41]

Ratzinger made his paradoxical statement about the necessity of freedom in the context of a section of *Introduction to Christianity* called: "The primacy of acceptance and Christian positivity."[42] There he writes of "the primacy of acceptance over action, over one's own achievement, when it is a question of

[41] Ibid., 160. In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger is critical of Rahner's concept of freedom because, he argues, it leaves no room for the "incomprehensible" and "incalculable." According to Ratzinger, in his attempt to reconcile history and ontology, Rahner has attempted to do too much. The "particular" is reduced to the "universal." Initially, this looks like liberation. The Christian "is freed from the burden of Christian particularity, led into the freedom of universal philosophy and its rationalism" (167). But Christianity becomes a "burden." All that is needed is "self-acceptance," just being human. But for Ratzinger, this is "damnation" rather than "salvation." We do not want to merely accept our own humanity, but transcend it. What is needed is a spirituality of "conversion," of "self-transcendence," which is one of Rahner's basic concepts, but one that, according to Ratzinger, is lost sight of in his synthesis. Ratzinger thinks that Rahner went astray in attempting to provide "a philosophical and theological world formula on the basis of which the whole of reality can be deduced cohesively from necessary causes" (169). Such a solution is contrary to the "mystery" of freedom. Hegel's conviction that there is a "spiritual world formula" is wrong. According to Ratzinger, Rahner adopted the concept of freedom that is proper to idealistic philosophy–a concept which can only be applied to God. Rahner defines freedom as "the ultimate self-responsibility of the person … as self-action" (*Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* [Freiburg: Herder, 1976], 47). Freedom is the ability to be oneself [*Grundkurs*, 49]. According to Ratzinger, for Rahner, human freedom seems to have been absorbed into divine freedom, having an efficacy which belongs to God alone. Moreover, in calling human freedom an "always already accomplished freedom" (*Grundkurs*, 138), "freedom seems to be assimilated by predestination. Ultimately, Ratzinger sees Rahner as the advocate of a different kind of identification of freedom with necessity. Thus, "the attempt to depict cohesively with a logical necessity the unity and totality of the real leads unquestionably to an identification of freedom and necessity. … Ultimately, then, a synthesis that combines being and history in a single compelling logic of the understanding becomes, by the universality of its claim, a philosophy of necessity, even though this necessity is then explained as a process of freedom" (170). For Ratzinger's complete analysis of Rahner's position on the nature of freedom in the context of the relationship between ontology and history, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S. N. D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 153-190, especially 161-171.

[42] Ibid., 266-269.

man's final end."[43] Essentially, the human person only becomes wholly human through the free reception of the gift of love. This love "represents simultaneously both man's highest possibility and his deepest need," and "this most necessary thing is at the same time the freest and most unenforceable means … for his 'salvation'."[44] Attempting 'self-salvation,' self-liberation, destroys one's humanity. This is the attempt to be like God which misunderstands the true nature of God, thinks of him as an independent, autonomous, self-sufficient being. This is "loneliness," but God is "fellowship." Freedom is not "independence," but a freely willed exchange, the freedom of self-giving communion.[45]

The Anthropology of Freedom

In "Freiheit und Wahrheit," Ratzinger develops the anthropological understanding of freedom at further length. Taking the example of a woman who aborts her child in response to a false notion of freedom which sees it as the right to autonomy, to self-determination, which in turn annuls the right of another to freedom, Ratzinger points to the interdependent nature of being human. The mother-child relationship is a particularly vivid example of the true nature of human freedom. As Ratzinger explains:

> The being of another person is so closely interwoven with the being of this person, the mother, that for the present if can survive only by physically being with the other, in a physical unity with her. Such unity, however, does not eliminate the otherness of this being or authorize us to dispute its distinct selfhood. However, to be oneself in this

[43] Ibid., 266.

[44] Ibid., 267. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Loi de l'Eglise et liberté du chrétien, Service culturel de l'Ambassade de France près la Saint-Siège," 24.11.83., where he states: "In the Church, the debate (about freedom) concerns liberty in its deepest sense, as openness to the divine Being in order to become a sharer in its life". This is from an unpublished paper, and is cited by Aidan Nichols in "Walter Kasper and his theological programme," *New Blackfriars* 67 (787) (1986): 16-24, at 22.

[45] Ibid., 267-268.

> way is to be radically from and through another. Conversely, this being-with compels the being of the other–that is, the mother–to become a being-for, which contradicts her own desire to be an independent self and is thus experienced as the antithesis of her own freedom.[46]

For Ratzinger, this "being-from," "being-with," and "being-for" is the essence of "being-human." We must all accept the limitation of our freedom, meaning that we must live out our freedom in communion rather than competition. The temptation which faces us is to accept the being-for of others in relation to ourselves, but reject the reality of "being-from" and the responsibility of "being-for" others. According to Ratzinger, the radical demand for freedom which springs from the Enlightenment regards what is actually the fundamental reality of human existence as an attack on freedom. Thus, "[the] radical cry for freedom demands man's liberation for his very essence as man, so that he may become the 'new man.'"[47]

Ratzinger sees this attempt to achieve a freedom of radical autonomy as a kind of false attempt at *theosis*–"the implicit goal of all of modernity's struggles for freedom is to be at last like a god who depends on nothing and no one, and whose own freedom is not restricted by that of another."[48] This is a false attempt at divinisation, because behind it lies a false image of God, an idol, a conception of divinity as pure egoism. It is a demonic antithesis of the real God, who is "by his very nature entirely being-for (Father), being-from (Son), and being-with (Holy Spirit). Man, for his part, is God's image precisely insofar as the 'from,' 'with,' and 'for' constitute the fundamental anthropological pattern."[49] Any attempt to free ourselves from this pattern leads not to divinisation, but dehumanisation. We destroy our being through a destruction of the truth about our being. The Enlightenment ideal of freedom leads, in the end, to Sartre's "hell of other people" from which there is "no exit."

---

[46] Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 26.

[47] Ibid., 28.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

What is Ratzinger's antidote for this freedom which poisons itself?

> [Human freedom] can consist only in the ordered coexistence of liberties, this means that order–right–is not the conceptual antithesis of freedom, but rather its condition, indeed, a constitutive element of freedom itself. Right is not an obstacle to freedom, but constitutes it. The absence of right is the absence of freedom.[50]

This raises the question of how one identifies the "right" that accords with freedom. Right must be in accord with truth, and thus with freedom. The truth of our being includes its moral truth. Ratzinger seeks to answer this question inductively, rather than deductively, by beginning with how a small community discovers "which order best serves the shared life of all the members, so that a common form of freedom emerges from their joint existence."[51] He then observes that no small community is self-contained. The same is true of nation states. Yet, the common good of a particular community, even if it be a nation state, cannot be true, genuinely human freedom. The whole of humanity, both today's and tomorrow's, must be kept in mind. Citing Augustine, Ratzinger says that "a state which measures itself only by its common interests and not by justice itself, by true justice, is not structurally different from a well-organized robber band."[52]

The true right that accords with freedom Ratzinger calls the good of the whole, the good itself. For him, the central concept in ethics is "responsibility." Ratzinger defines responsibility as "the anchoring of freedom in the truth of the good, of man and of the world."[53] Rather than consisting in an ever-growing expansion of individual rights in isolation from the whole, freedom can only increase if there is an increase in a responsibility, which includes the claims of a

[50] Ibid., 29. The translator of this essay points out that here the term "right" renders the German "Recht." This term can mean "right" in the sense of "human rights," but may also mean "law," with the more or less explicit connotation of "just order," "order embodying what is right." It is in this latter sense that Ratzinger uses "Recht" here and in what follows.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 30.

[53] Ibid., 31.

shared human existence and of true human nature. Such a responsibility must include a religious understanding, for philosophy by itself is unable to obtain a comprehensive view of the common good, including the good of the future.[54] The two alternatives to this are a consequentialism which overreaches itself, since we are unable to see all the future consequences of our actions, or an elitist "consensus" of those who deem themselves capable of rational argument, who will engage in "advocacy" on behalf of lesser mortals.

For Ratzinger, one cannot understand freedom as long as one only sees the human person in his or her individuality, without reference to the other person and to the whole of mankind. There is a single humanity, present in every human person, that we call human "nature." From faith in creation comes the conviction that "there is one divine idea, "man," to which it is our task to answer. In this idea, freedom and community, order and concern for the future, are a single whole." Therefore, "[responsibility] would thus mean to live our being as an answer–as a response to what we are in truth."[55] We can find this truth in the Decalogue, which is the self-presentation and self-exhibition of both God and man. It is the mirror of God's essence. In living the Decalogue we bring our being into correspondence with the truth and thus do good. The definition of freedom is to live our divinity, which comes through the union of our being with that of God.

Ratzinger's concern for history breaks through in his analysis of freedom because, for him, there is a history of freedom. There is a history of liberation, an "ongoing purification for the sake of the truth. The true history of freedom consists in the purification of individuals and of institutions through this truth [of responsibility]."[56] Returning to his notion that there is always an excess in the

[54] Ibid. On this point, Ratzinger refers the reader to Josef Pieper, *Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff* III, B. Wald (ed), (Hamburg, 1995), 300-323, as well as 15-70, esp. 59ff. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 28: "Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others. Love of God requires an interior freedom from all possessions and all material goods: the love of God is revealed in responsibility for others."

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 30. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 24-25.

meaning of human words of which the speaker is unconscious, but that comes to the surface over time, Ratzinger states that this must, *a fortiori*, be true of the Word which comes out of the depths of God. Hence, the Decalogue, though it has received its definitive and authoritative exegesis in the words, life, passion, and resurrection of Christ, continues to reveal unexpected depths. Consequently, "man's listening to the message of faith is not the passive registering of otherwise unknown information, but the resuscitation of our choked memory and the opening of the powers of understanding which await the light of the truth in us."[57] Therefore, our reason is on a quest for responsibility. There is a real "history of freedom."

The Biblical Meaning of Freedom

Ratzinger has also sought to establish the meaning of "freedom" on a secure biblical basis. In a 1981 essay entitled "Freedom and Constraint in the Church," he identified two biblical terms which express the concept of freedom– ἐλευθερία (freedom) and παρρησία (frankness, candor).[58] The first term does not refer to freedom of choice, but the fullness of membership and possession of rights in a family or society. The free person is the one who "belongs," who fully participates. In the allegory of Sarah and Hagar on the nature of Christian freedom, to be free one must truly belong to the household (cf. Gal 4:21-31). It does not consist in having different privileges from the slave, but in having a different status: that of an heir and an owner (cf. Gal 4:1). In short, to be free means to be a son (cf. Gal 4:5). For the Christian, an ontological difference leads to a difference in behaviour. Because one has put on Christ (cf. Gal 3:27), one participates in his way of acting. Hence, one does not use one's freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but, like Christ, through love becomes a servant of the

[57] Ibid., 33.

[58] Joseph Ratzinger, "Freedom and Constraint in the Church," in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 175-192, at 186.

other (cf. Gal 5:13). One fulfils the law of Christ (cf. Gal 6:2). As Ratzinger explains:

> This is a consequence of their ontological status, that is, of the fact that through the Spirit of Christ they participate in the ontological status of Jesus Christ himself. They are "spiritual" (6:1). To live the law of Christ means, therefore, to live according to the ontological status of the spiritual man, in the way of the Spirit. This includes crucifying the flesh "with its passions and desires" (5:24).[59]

From a biblical perspective, freedom is not indeterminacy, nor is it participation in a given social structure; it is participation in being itself. From this perspective, God is freedom in person, since he is in possession of being in its totality. To be free means to participate in the gift of love and the reception of love that takes place in God. To be free is to be divinised, to participate in the life of the Trinitarian God. To be free means to be like Christ crucified.[60]

The "frankness" or "candor" of this freedom is based on a term that, in its original context of Greek political vocabulary, meant the right to say everything publically. It springs from the responsibility of the free individual as an heir and owner. The right of freedom flows from the responsibility of freedom. According to Ratzinger, in the First Letter to the Thessalonians St. Paul develops a Christian rhetoric of freedom that "interprets a characteristic basic right of freedom in a Christian and ecclesial way."[61] Ratzinger's reading of St. Paul attributes to him an understanding of the rhetoric of antiquity as characterised by flattery, covetousness, and glory-seeking. It sought self-promotion, material gain, and the good opinion of others. The last feature in particular is contrary to truth. "Seeming suppresses being. The appearance becomes the universal standard. Man lives for appearance, and so his life becomes a semblance of life. In this the Bible rightly sees the essence of slavery, of the lack of freedom."[62]

[59] Ibid., 188.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 189.

[62] Ibid., 190.

Thus, there can be no freedom where there is no truth. Because St. Paul speaks the truth to a world ruled by appearances, he faces "great opposition" (1 Thess 2:2). This expression of freedom presupposes a freedom from oneself, a detachment from oneself. Here again, Ratzinger locates freedom in being, which then takes concrete forms "in active freedoms, in rights to do things."[63] If to be free means to be like Christ crucified, then by implication Christ exercises his true freedom in saying "yes" to the Father's will that he drink of the cup of death.

The Freedom of Jesus in his Passion and Death

How does Jesus' exercise of human freedom in his Passion save us and lead to our deification? When we compare Ratzinger's treatment of the Passion and death of Jesus in *Introduction to Christianity* and *The God of Jesus Christ* with that found in *Jesus of Nazareth* we can see that although there are some elements in common, there are also some differences in emphasis. Some things that are given great prominence in the earlier works receive much less attention in the later, wherein one finds new emphases as well as some development of earlier points.

In his earlier works Ratzinger finds the key to the Passion in what he calls the 'brokenness' of Jesus, a brokenness that is worship. In this worship there is a twofold movement from God to man and from man to God. Christian sacrifice is a receiving, a "becoming totally receptive and letting ourselves be completely taking over by him."[64] It is also the gift of the Son to the Father. The Cross is the sacrifice that Jesus offers the Father in obedience. It is "man's unqualified Yes to God" that alone is "true worship."[65] We have been "lent the freedom to say Yes or No, the freedom to love or to reject; love's free Yes is the only thing for which God must wait–the only worship of 'sacrifice' that can have any meaning."[66] Though Ratzinger does not state it here, his understanding of freedom implies

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 283.

[65] Ibid., 285.

[66] Ibid., 285-286.

that sin has destroyed true human freedom. Only the man who is truly free can offer this sacrifice. Jesus is the one true priest, and the worship he offers is "the one and only liturgy of the world, a cosmic liturgy."[67] What Jesus sacrifices is his own "I," his own self. It is love "to the end" (Jn 13:1).

What is the nature of this love? It is God's own love become human love. Again, this implies that the freedom of God, the one who is freedom itself, becomes the freedom of the human love of Jesus. According to Ratzinger it is a new form of representation. Jesus stands in our place not in a legal sense, but in an ontological one. In order to participate in this sacrifice we must let ourselves be taken over by him, allow ourselves to be united with this gift of love from Jesus to the Father, "and thus become worshippers with him and in him."[68] For Ratzinger, Jesus' worship of the Father in the Cross "has smelted the body of humanity into the Yes of worship. It is completely "anthropocentric," entirely related to man, because it was radical theocentricity, delivery of the "I" and therefore the creature man to God."[69]

At this point, Ratzinger comes to the heart of his understanding of sacrifice. It is "the form that love takes in a world characterized by death and self-seeking."[70] The love of Jesus for the Father becomes "the ec-stacy of man outside himself, in which he is stretched out infinitely beyond himself, torn apart, as it were, far beyond his apparent capacity for being stretched."[71] In a sinful world worship must be sacrificial, it must be the Cross, it must be the pain of being torn apart. This pain of the Cross is necessary, not because the Father wills it, but because love can take no other form in the face of sin and death. Although the fundamental principle of sacrifice is love, in the face of evil, love is crucified.[72]

[67] Ibid., 286.

[68] Ibid., 288.

[69] Ibid., 289.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

However, this love is active, not passive. Jesus freely drinks from the cup. So Ratzinger can say that this love "breaks down, opens up, crucifies, tears."[73]

It is in looking at the article of the Creed that says that Jesus "descended into Hell" that Ratzinger attempts to lay bare the meaning of Jesus being torn asunder. Quoting Jean Daniélou, he portrays the death agony of Christ as a sharing in: "[Our] feeling of being torn asunder, which is a cross to us, this inability of our heart to carry within itself simultaneously the love of the most holy Trinity and love of the world alienated from the Trinity."[74] Ratzinger presents us with the paradox of the crucified Christ, in the words "My God, why have you forsaken me?" being "simultaneously immersed in God and in the depths of the God-forsaken creature."[75] This is the "crucifixion" of Jesus, the realisation of love.

In *The God of Jesus Christ*, Ratzinger reflects further on this paradox. He states that, for Jesus, "the destruction of the bodily instrument of communication interrupts his dialogue with the Father. When the bodily instrument is crushed, the intellectual act that is based on this instrument disappears for a time."[76] Since the whole existence of Jesus "is in the shared dimension of his dialogue with the Father, the absolute solitude wrought by death is incomprehensible."[77] In true Marcelian fashion, Ratzinger does not attempt to "solve" this apparent problem, only to "clarify" the mystery.[78] The "silence" of God, as well as the "speech," is a part of Christian revelation–"God is not only the comprehensible word that comes to us; he is also the silent, inaccessible, uncomprehended, and incomprehensible ground that eludes us."[79]

---

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., 290; quoting Jean Daniélou, *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire*, no page number given.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 83.

[77] Ibid.

[78] See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* (London: Harvill, 1950), 211-212.

[79] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 296.

For Ratzinger, Jesus' descent into Hell begins on the Mount of Olives. Here the innermost heart of his Passion is revealed not as "physical pain but radical loneliness, complete abandonment."[80] Ratzinger believes that this loneliness is nothing other than the human condition. We dwell in an "abyss of loneliness"– we are "alone in [our] innermost being."[81] Created by God for communion, we are unable to exist alone. Paradoxically, though, we are alone. We experience the fear of loneliness, which is not a rational fear of some identifiable threat, but a fear of a state that is a contradiction of our very nature. For Ratzinger, this is a "hellish" state.

> If there were such a thing as a loneliness which could no longer be penetrated by the word of another; if a state of abandonment were to arise that was so deep that no "You" could reach into it any more, then we should have real, total loneliness and dreadfulness, what theology calls "hell."[82]

By Ratzinger's account, the fact that the Old Testament has one word for hell and death, *sheol*, reveals a profound insight. Death is hell. It is absolute loneliness, the place that no love can reach–or rather, it was such a place, for now Jesus has descended into this hell. It is no longer the place that no love can reach. Life has gone down into hell. Love now dwells there.[83]

---

[80] Ibid., 298.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 300.

[83] One can see both similarities and differences between Ratzinger's and von Balthasar's portrayal of the descent into hell. Although Ratzinger shares von Balthasar's focus on the loneliness of Jesus and his solidarity with us, unlike von Balthasar he has not been accused of universalism. Moreover, he identifies the descent into hell with the whole of the Passion, not just Holy Saturday. We could even say that, for him, the descent into hell begins with Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. Ratzinger speaks of the descent into the waters of baptism as an anticipation of the descent of Holy Saturday, saying that in the ultimate descent Jesus does not descend in the role of a spectator, as is presented in Dante's Inferno. Thus he agrees with von Balthasar that the descent is not a triumphal one, but rather a suffering-with-others one. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 19-20. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 148-188. Von Balthasar's thesis is contemporary with that of Ratzinger, since it was first mooted in *Theologie der Drei Tage*, published in 1970.

When we come to the crucifixion and death of Jesus in *Jesus of Nazareth*, we find, as we have said, some elements in common with Ratzinger's earlier Christology, as well as some different emphases. Overall, the later work does not reach the intellectual depths of the earlier writing, although it covers a broader expanse and is more biblically based. So, although Ratzinger covers much the same ground in looking at the Cross as an act of worship, he does so with a much more explicitly biblical flavour.[84] His approach might be termed more 'pastoral' in intent. It is concerned not just with the actions of Jesus but also the reactions to him from the onlookers.

One aspect which is more developed is the ecclesial significance of Psalm 22. Attention is focused not just on one verse in the Psalm, but upon the whole Psalm.[85] When Ratzinger does look at Jesus' cry of abandonment from the Cross, he moves beyond the attention that he gave earlier to exclusively concentrating upon "the mystery of his person in his final agony."[86] While not denying the validity of this approach, he characterises it as too narrowly individualistic. Now he emphasises the intercessory aspect of this cry, and the reality of "corporate personality."[87] There is also a greater emphasis upon the priesthood and kingship of Jesus.[88]

There are also new elements. In the cry "I thirst" (Jn 19:28), the lament of God over the failure of his people to requite his love is made present in Jesus.[89] Ratzinger also points out that one aspect of "corporate personality" is that we can be purified by participating in the suffering of Jesus, by gazing upon the

[84] Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 229-239.

[85] Ibid., 204-205.

[86] Ibid., 214-215.

[87] Ibid., 213-216.

[88] Ibid., 209-212, 216-217, and 223.

[89] Ibid., 217-219.

pierced one (Jn 19:37; Zech 12:10), while another is that the Church and its sacraments are born from this same pierced side.[90]

The Consummation of Jesus' Freedom in his Resurrection

Like goodness, truth, and beauty, for Ratzinger love and freedom are convertible. They are conterminous–love is freedom, freedom is love. In our fallen world, in the face of sin, this love/freedom must take the form of obedient sacrificial worship. This worship transforms the un-freedom/loneliness of sin, and its consummation, death, into true freedom, the freedom/love of God.

This new consummation takes place first in Jesus, in his resurrection from the dead and his ascension to the Father's right hand. In order to grasp Ratzinger's understanding of this consummation, we must again address his understanding of that love which is freedom. The love which Ratzinger focuses upon is that spoken of in the *Song of Songs*. It is the love that is as strong as death (cf. Song 8:6). This love is not *agape*, but *eros*. This love Ratzinger typifies as making boundless demands that give expression to the basic problem of human existence, the demand of human love for infinity and indestructibility, a demand that must remain unsatisfied in a world of sin and death, a world of loneliness and destruction.

Why does Ratzinger focus upon *eros* rather than *agape*? He himself admits that the term *eros* is used only twice in the Septuagint and not at all in the New Testament.[91] To begin with, he sees *eros* as having been subjected to a false divinisation in the ancient world. Rather than being a true ascent in "ecstasy" to the divine, it was warped and degraded. It needs to be disciplined and purified so that it can give "a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns."[92] Ratzinger focuses upon *eros* rather

[90] Ibid., 219-222, and 225-226.

[91] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 3.

[92] Ibid., no. 4.

than *agape* because the human person is not pure spirit, but body and soul. It is this "unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves."[93] *Eros* is meant to ascend to the divine. We are meant to rise in ecstasy above ourselves, in a love which is meant to realise both a human and divine promise.[94]

In the *Song of Songs* love moves from an insecure, indeterminate, and searching love to a love which really discovers the other and seeks the good of the beloved.[95] *Eros* is transformed in a twofold sense–it becomes exclusive and eternal. It becomes ecstasy, not in terms of intoxication, "but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God."[96] This path is travelled first by Jesus, through the Cross and Resurrection. Thus Ratzinger states: "Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfilment therein, he … portrays … the essence of love and indeed of human life itself."[97]

In looking at *agape* and *eros*, which are often contrasted as "descending" love and "ascending" love, Ratzinger rejects a distinction that would classify the first as Christian and the second as non-Christian. Rather, the two can never be completely separated. When the two are united, the true nature of love is revealed. *Agape* enters into *eros*, which consequently seeks the good of the other more and more. Human love cannot be pure *agape*, since, as a creature, the human person must receive love as well as give it. One must receive the descending *agape* of God in order to pass on an *agaped eros* to both God and other human beings.[98] For Ratzinger, the love of God for man is simultaneously

[93] Ibid., no. 5.

[94] Ibid., no. 6.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., nos. 7-8. It would be interesting to compare Ratzinger's understanding of the relationship between *eros* and *agape* with that portrayed by C. S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* (Glasgow: Collins, 1977).

eros and *agape*. He not only "gives," "creates"–he also "desires," "elects," "chooses." God's *eros* is *agape* because it is gratuitous and it forgives.[99]

We have said that for Ratzinger the path by which *eros* is transformed into *agape* is firstly the Cross and Resurrection. In the Resurrection this love is shown to be greater than the power of death. Indeed, the Resurrection "*is* the greater strength of love in the face of death."[100] Now the human paradox is that man is not by nature immortal.[101] Heaven is a grace added over and above our human nature.[102] The striving for autonomy that has fallen to our lot, owing to original sin, must end in death, since autonomy is impossible for us.[103]

How can love be stronger than death? According to Ratzinger, it is only when someone is ready to put life second to love. In the Resurrection of Jesus, the power of love has risen to be superior to the power of mere biological life. In him, *bios* has been encompassed by, and incorporated in, the power of love. This love of Jesus for us has become the love that actually keeps us alive. In this "evolutionary leap," *bios* has become *zoe*, definitive life. This "leap" is achieved "by the spirit, by freedom, by love. It would no longer be evolution but decision and gift in one."[104]

From the human perspective, immortality is only possible through living in another, and it is only the "other" who, through taking us up into its own being, can make immortality possible for us. Ratzinger sees these two perspectives mirrored in the two New Testament descriptions of the Resurrection of Jesus– that he has risen, and that the Father has raised him up. Thus he writes that:

---

[99] Ibid., nos. 9-10.

[100] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 302.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., 313.

[103] Ibid., 302. The positions that we are by nature mortal and have lost immortality through original sin are not contradictory. The rebellion of our first parents precluded our reception of eternal life. We should remember that there were two special trees in Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. Had we not eaten from the first we would have been free of the fruit of the second (cf. Gen 3:22).

[104] Ibid., 305.

> The two formulas meet in the fact that Jesus' total love for men, which leads him to the Cross, is perfected in totally passing beyond to the Father and therein becomes stronger than death, because it is at the same time total "being held" by him.[105]

From this, Ratzinger draws the point that love and immortality are intrinsically linked. Indeed, the specific character of love is to establish immortality. The reverse of this principle is that immortality always proceeds from love. It cannot proceed from an autarchy that is sufficient to itself. This principle even applies to God. Because God is the relation of three Persons to each other in the "one for another" of love, because he lives only "in relation to," he is absolute permanence. The absolute is "absolute relatedness."[106]

Returning to the Resurrection, Ratzinger argues that it is on the basis of love as the foundation of immortality that the Resurrection of Jesus *is* our life.[107] For him, this is the reasoning that lies behind St. Paul's argument that if the dead are not raised neither is Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15: 12-19). Only if Christ has risen can love be stronger than death. In Jesus, it is love *for us* that is stronger than death.[108]

What conclusion can we draw from all of this concerning the freedom of Jesus? We have seen how Ratzinger regards love and freedom in God as identical. We can now add to this that he sees the life of God as identical with his love and freedom. In the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, *bios* has been transformed into *zoe* through the transformation of human *eros* into divine *agape*, human freedom into the freedom of God. This new state of affairs Ratzinger attributes also to "the spirit."

---

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., 305-306.

[107] Ratzinger refers to "the biblical statement that *his* Resurrection is *our* life" in *Introduction to Christianity*, 306. He seems to be referring to the statement of Jesus in *John* 11:25–"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

[108] Ibid.

Freedom and the *Eschaton*

In *Introduction to Christianity* there is a deliberate contrast made between the descent of Jesus into Hell and his ascension into Heaven. According to Ratzinger, these two states form the two poles of the total range of possible human existence. These two poles are existential rather than cosmic. It is possible for any human person to move to the "hellish" pole through the definite rejection of "being for" the other.[109] At the opposite pole the Ascension opens up the possibility for communion with human others through communion with divine love. As Hell can only be self-inflicted, Heaven by nature can only be received as a gift. This heaven only comes into existence through the "ascension" of Christ. To say that he "ascended into heaven" is simply to say that he brought about the communion "of the being 'man' with the being 'God.'"[110] Since Jesus is the "last Adam," his "creation" of heaven is for the corporate human race, not simply private individuals.

---

[109] Ibid., 311-312. At this point, Ratzinger makes the following remark: "We know today better than ever before that everyone's existence touches these depths; and since in the last analysis mankind is '*one* man,' these depths affect not only the individual but also the one body of the whole human race, which must therefore bear the burden of them as a corporate whole. From this angle it can be understood once again how Christ, the 'new Adam,' undertook to bear the burden of these depths with us and did not wish to remain sublimely unaffected by them; conversely, of course, total rejection in all its unfathomability has only now become possible" (312). Unfortunately, Ratzinger does not expound upon this "analysis" or the corporate personality of the human race, although, in his commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22, he does write, "[in this section the] idea of the 'assumptio hominis' is touched upon in its full ontological depth. The human nature of all men is one; Christ's taking to himself the one human nature of man is an event which affects every human being; consequently human nature in every human being is henceforth Christologically characterised. This idea is then extended to the real plane of actual concrete human existence. Human action, thought, willing and loving have become the instrument of the Logos; what is first present on the plane of being also gives new significance to the plane of action, to the actual accomplishment of human personal life." See Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 160. We should note how Ratzinger grounds the "creation" of hell for human persons on Christ's taking upon himself the burden of the "corporate man." Hell becomes possible for us only after Christ has "descended into hell." One immediately recalls the account of Christ going to preach "to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey" (1 Pet 3:19-20).

[110] Ibid., 313.

Since the communion of God and man in the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ has broken down the frontier of *bios* and transformed it into *zoe*, the "end of the world" has already begun. The *eschaton* has already begun. Ratzinger identifies the Resurrection as *the* eschatological event.[111] In Christ the temporal has been taken up into the eternal. The barrier between "being" and "becoming" has been breached. Time has been drawn into God. For Ratzinger our prayers are effective because we are in Christ.

> In Jesus we temporal beings can speak to the temporal one, our contemporary; but in him, who with us is time, we simultaneously make contact with the Eternal One, because with us Jesus is time, and with God he is eternity.[112]

Jesus is "in actual fact 'the throne of grace' to which at any time we can 'with confidence draw near' (Heb 4:16)."[113]

In *Jesus of Nazareth* Ratzinger develops his understanding of the new presence of Jesus that has been brought about by his Resurrection and Ascension. The "heaven" into which Jesus has ascended is not some inaccessible place, but a sharing in God's dominion over space as well as time. Jesus' "going away" is also his "coming" (cf. Jn 14:28). Because Jesus is with the Father he can "see" us. We can only "touch" Jesus because he is now present with the Father. Through Baptism our life is now hidden with God in Christ (cf. Col 3:1-3).[114] However, it must be mentioned that at this point Ratzinger makes no mention of the new presence of Jesus being the result of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We have just seen that, for Ratzinger, the two poles of possible human existence are existential and not cosmic. This position needs to be further defined. For Ratzinger, anthropology and cosmology coincide in Christology. That is to say, in Christ, man and the cosmos have been reconciled. In the

---

[111] Ibid., 320.

[112] Ibid., 317.

[113] Ibid., 318.

[114] Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, 279-286.

assumption of *eros* into *agape*, *bios* has been taken up into *zoe*.[115] The cosmos was not created as a mere "container" for human history. Rather, "the cosmos is movement … it is not just a case of history *existing in* it … cosmos itself *is* history."[116] This history is moving towards its "omega" point, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In his earlier Christology Ratzinger made much use of Teilhard de Chardin's "complexification" thesis to explain this movement. This movement is driven from above by "mind," not from below by unconscious matter. There is a process taking place by which the material is taken up into a new kind of unity through spirit. The return of Christ will be "the final unification of reality by spirit or mind." [117] This increasing coalescence of spirit and matter, of anthropology and cosmology, implies unification in a person, since there can be no mind which does not subsist as person. For the omega of the world to be "the triumph of spirit; that is, the triumph of truth, freedom, and love," this omega must be a person, since only a person can be truthful, free and loving.[118] If reaching this omega "is based on spirit and freedom," it must include responsibility. [119] For this reason the second coming of the Lord brings judgement as well as salvation. The "final stage of the world is not the result of a natural current but the result of responsibility that is grounded in freedom."[120] At this point Ratzinger introduces what he sees as the paradox of freedom. It will be helpful to here to quote him at length.

> There is a freedom that is not cancelled out even by grace and, indeed, is brought by it face to face with itself: man's final fate is not forced upon him regardless of the decisions he had made in his life. … It is not part of our task to consider in detail how [the assertion that we will be judged according to our works] can coexist with the full weight of

[115] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 318-320.

[116] Ibid., 320.

[117] Ibid., 321.

[118] Ibid., 322. Note once more the equation of spirit, freedom, love, and now truth.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid., 323.

> the doctrine of grace. Perhaps in the last analysis it is impossible to escape a paradox whose logic is completely disclosed only to the experience of a life based on faith. Anyone who entrusts himself to faith becomes aware that both exist: the radical character of grace that frees helpless man and, not less, the abiding seriousness of the responsibility that summons man day after day. Both mean together that the Christian enjoys, on the one hand, the liberating, detached tranquillity of him who lives on that excess of divine justice known as Jesus Christ. There is a tranquillity that knows: in the last analysis, I cannot destroy what *he* has built up. For in himself man lives with the dreadful knowledge that his power to destroy is infinitely greater than his power to build up. But this same man knows that in Christ the power to build up has proved infinitely stronger. This is the source of a profound freedom, a knowledge of God's unrepentant love; he sees through all our errors and remains well disposed to us. It becomes possible to do one's own work fearlessly; it has shed its sinister aspect because it has lost its power to destroy: the issue of the world does not depend on us but is in God's hands. At the same time the Christian knows, however, that he is not free to do whatever he pleases, that his activity is not a game that God allows him and does not take seriously.[121]

The question which arises from this position is the following–can this apparent paradox be dissolved or must it remain insoluble? How can "freedom" be love and at the same time the choice to reject love? Perhaps the term "freedom" is being used in different senses. If freedom is love, then not loving is unfreedom. Rejecting God's grace is not an exercise in freedom, but a rejection of freedom. This is so even though we may say that we are "free" to reject God's grace, his offer of himself. When Ratzinger says that "there is a freedom which is not cancelled out even by grace," we can say that such a "freedom" is actually unfreedom. This "freedom" is actually a perversion of true freedom, a perversion which ultimately leads to its negation.

[121] Ibid., 324-325.

Our Participation in the Freedom of Jesus

Ratzinger holds that there is indeed a genuine theology of liberation. In *A New Song for the Lord* he explains this theology in the context of the statement of Jesus that he is "the way, the truth and the life" (cf. John 14:6). Regarding the first aspect of this liberation, when Jesus calls himself "the way," this entails a "theology of liberation." As the true Moses, Jesus does more than lead us along the way; he *is* the way. This "liberation theology" is shaped by the connection between the Old and New Testaments, which Ratzinger sees as the "two stages of the divine-human history of freedom."[122] Although a new theology of "exodus" was first developed in countries in which suffering from political and economic oppression is especially prevalent, Ratzinger claims that the desire for the promised land of freedom is just as strong in those nations that enjoy the greatest political, economic, and social freedom.

Ratzinger sees a particular manifestation of the meeting of the two stages of the divine-human history of freedom in the accounts of the Transfiguration. He notes that the one place in the Gospels wherein the word "exodus" appears is in the Lucan account of the Transfiguration. The two men who appear talking with Jesus about his coming "exodus" through his Passover in Jerusalem are Moses and Elijah. That Moses foreshadows this exodus hardly needs to be pointed out. But Ratzinger presents Elijah, too, as a type of exodus. Although in his time the people of Israel lived in the promised land, in their way of life they had returned to Egypt and, ironically, were living under a tyrannical king and experiencing a tyrannical existence even in the promised land. Having thrown off the Covenant, their self-made freedom proved to be a new tyranny. It is for this reason that Elijah must go to Sinai in order to symbolise a new exodus. A true exodus means living according to the Covenant.[123]

Ratzinger sees the mount of the Transfiguration as a new Sinai. In Matthew and Mark it occurs six days after Peter's profession of faith. Just as, six days after coming to Sinai, Moses, accompanied by the two priests Nadab and Abihu,

[122] Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 5.

[123] Ibid., 16-17.

ascends into the divine presence, where his face is transfigured (cf. Ex 14: 1 & 16), so Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, ascend the new Sinai, where his whole body is transfigured. Rather than receiving a new Decalogue, the disciples are presented with a new living Torah, the Son, the Beloved of the Father, to whom they must listen. Ratzinger goes on to further identify the Feast of Booths, the feast of thanksgiving for the gift of the land, with the three tents of the Transfiguration. For Ratzinger, the Transfiguration of Jesus signifies that: "The exodus of Israel and the exodus of Jesus touch each other: all the feasts and all the ways of Israel lead to the Passover of Jesus Christ."[124]

According to Ratzinger, Luke depicts the entire public life of Jesus as an "exodus." It is a going up to Jerusalem in order to Passover to the Father. It is "the real and definitive exodus in which Christ walks the path into the open and himself becomes the way for humanity into the open, into freedom."[125] However, this road does not end in Jerusalem, but continues into the Resurrection. Jesus opens "the new and living way for us … through the curtain (that is, through his flesh" (Heb 10:20). He leads us into the "tent not made by hands," into the presence of the living God (Heb 9:11).[126] For Ratzinger, this is the freedom that we desire, the freedom that cannot be satisfied by any earthly thing or experience. Rather: "The thirst for freedom is the voice of our being made in the image and likeness of God; it is the thirst 'to sit at the right hand of God,' to be 'like God.'"[127]

How can we participate in the freedom of God? What is the alternative to the serpent's temptation to "be like God" through a self-made freedom? One way Ratzinger explains it is that this freedom is based on a new "substance." Referring to the Letter to the Hebrews, as Benedict XVI he points out the definition of faith given there in Hebrews 11:1–"Faith is the *hypostasis* (Vg. *substantia*) of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen." Following St.

[124] Ibid., 18.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid., 19.

[127] Ibid.

Thomas, Benedict XVI points out that faith is a *habitus*, a stable disposition of the spirit, "through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see."[128] This is to say that the "substance" of the eternal life for which we hope is already present in us through faith. This presence of eternal life creates a certainty that, although it does not yet "appear" in the exterior world, it can still be perceived interiorly. *Pace* Luther, this "substance" is objectively present, not just subjectively present as an expression of an interior attitude. It is not just subjective conviction, but objective *elenchos*, proof. The fact that we have this new "possession" (*hyparxin*–Vg. *substantiam*) enables Christians, in the face of persecution, to give up their normal source of security, their "property" (*hyparchonton*–Vg. *bonorum*).[129] In linking these two kinds of "substance," Benedict XVI maintains that the *habitus* of faith, based as it is on the possession of eternal life, creates a new freedom, one which transcends the possessions which are the habitual foundation of life. This new freedom is not only revealed in martyrdom, but in all those who renounce their own wills in order to bring the Gospel to others. Touched by the hope of Christ, "hope has arisen for others who [are] living in darkness and without hope."[130]

Furthermore, in explaining the meaning of this freedom, Ratzinger identifies two sayings of Jesus which refer to being placed on the right hand of God. The first is the promise to those who gave Jesus food when he was hungry, drink when he was thirsty, welcomed him when he was a stranger, and visited him when he was sick or in prison (cf. Matt 25:31-40). The second is in response to the request of the sons of Zebedee, who are told that whomsoever may sit to the right and left of the Father, their call is to drink the cup that Jesus drinks and receive the baptism that he receives (cf. Mark 10:35-40). These two passages are paradigmatic of Ratzinger's understanding of how we become truly free. They point to more than a mere moral imitation of Christ. The imitation of Jesus is a Christological category. We are not just called to imitate the human Jesus. We are called to imitate him in his divinity. As Ratzinger quotes: "Therefore be

[128] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 7. Citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 1.

[129] Ibid., n. 8. Cf. Heb 11:34.

[130] Ibid.

imitators of God" (Eph 5:1).[131] The way that Jesus opens for us "through the curtain" is ontological. By denying oneself and taking up one's cross, through entering into the Paschal dimension of Jesus' exodus, we are reborn into a new life. This is a life of conversion, wherein the old self is put to death and the new creature enters into the freedom of God.[132]

Ratzinger briefly touches upon the second aspect of this liberation–Jesus as the truth and the life. As we have seen, for Ratzinger, truth and freedom are inseparable. We are now friends of Jesus, rather than mere servants, because we can *know* everything that Jesus has heard from his Father (cf. John 15:15). As Ratzinger explains:

> Ignorance is dependency, slavery: whoever does not know remains a servant. Only when understanding opens up, when we begin to comprehend what is essential, do we begin to be free. Freedom from which truth has been removed is a lie. Christ the truth, this means: God who makes friends out of unknowing servants be letting us become, to some degree, sharers in the knowledge of himself.[133]

The alternative to this kind of freedom is not a self-made freedom, but the negation of freedom. If God is not the author of the world, then the world does not originate in freedom, and any appearance of freedom in it is an illusion. If we cannot know the truth about God, the true God, "then we are not free people in a creation that is open to freedom, but elements in a system of necessities in which, inexplicably, the cry for freedom will not die out."[134] To Ratzinger, this is another manifestation of the refusal to accept the call to divinisation. It is the heresy of Arius, who refused to abandon the idea of God's absolute transcendence, and hence our inability to know him. This transcendent God

[131] Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 20-21.

[132] Ibid., 22.

[133] Ibid., 23.

[134] Ibid., 24.

cannot be the creator of the world, but must act through an intermediary that is less than divine. We cannot become the "friend" of such a God.[135]

Using the example of iconography, Ratzinger argues that the transcendence of God does not prevent him from being visible in Christ. He accepts as true the words of Jesus: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). "Whoever sees Christ really sees the Father; in that which is visible one sees that which is invisible, the invisible in person."[136] The human life of Jesus is the love of the Father made visible. The Crucified One is the image of the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15). Those who look upon Christ are taken up into his exodus. If one sees the Father in Christ Crucified, then one sees through the torn curtain of the Temple. The God who is thusly revealed is a Trinity. In becoming a friend of this God one is initiated into the very heart of truth. But this truth is also a way; "it is the fatal, yet precisely through losing oneself life-giving adventure of love which alone is freedom."[137]

Even more briefly, Ratzinger looks at the third aspect of this liberation, Christ as the life. Of particular interest is his focus upon John 7:37-38, Jesus' invitation to come and drink from the fountain of living waters. He points out that this reception is not merely passive. If we come and drink, out of our own hearts living waters will flow. Thus: "To drink from the living water of the rock means to consent to the salvific mystery of water and blood. … It is consenting to love; it is entering the truth. And exactly this is life."[138]

It is no coincidence that the freedom of this way, truth, and life is addressed in a book on the Liturgy because, for Ratzinger, the Sacred Liturgy is the ultimate *locus* of our participation in freedom. In *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ratzinger reiterates much of what he has said about freedom in earlier works,

[135] Ibid., 24-25.

[136] Ibid., 25.

[137] Ibid., 26.

[138] Ibid., 32.

although here it is within the context of the connection of the Liturgy to both the cosmos and history.[139]

His first point is that Christian worship is related to both the cosmos and history, to God the Creator as well as God the Saviour. Thus: "Creation moves toward the Sabbath, on the day on which man and the whole created order participates in God's rest, in his freedom."[140] For Ratzinger, the Sabbath is a "vision of freedom." This freedom is not only anthropological–that is to say, freedom from subordination to another and to work. According to Ratzinger, the Sabbath is the sign of the Covenant, and its connection with Creation reveals that Creation exists for Covenant.

> [Creation] exists to be a place for the covenant that God wants to make with man. The goal of creation is the covenant, the love story of God and man. The freedom and equality of men, which the Sabbath is meant to bring about, is not a merely anthropological or sociological vision; it can only be understood *theo*-logically. Only when man is in covenant with God does he become free. Only then are the equality and dignity of all men made manifest. If, then, everything is directed to the covenant, it is important to see that the covenant is a relationship: God's gift of himself to man, but also man's response to God. Man's response to the God who is good to him is love, and loving God means worshipping him.[141]

In Ratzinger's understanding, the completion of the Tabernacle by Moses after seven days mirrors the completion of creation. The glory of the Lord which fills the Tabernacle anticipates the fullness of God dwelling in his creation. As Ratzinger sees it:

> Creation and history, creation, history and worship are in a relationship of reciprocity. Creation looks toward the covenant, but the covenant completes creation and does not simply exist along with it. Now if worship, rightly

[139] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 24-34.

[140] Ibid., 25.

[141] Ibid., 26.

> understood, is the soul of the covenant, then it not only saves mankind but is also meant to draw the whole of reality into communion with God.[142]

In Ratzinger's estimation, the heart of worship is sacrifice. But true worship does not mean destruction. Rather, it means union through true surrender to God, the union of man and creation with God. Belonging to God does not entail destruction–that is, non-being–but is a way of being. It means moving from a state of separation, or autonomy, to one of finding oneself through losing oneself (cf. Mk 8:35 & Mt 10:39). Ratzinger calls St. Augustine as a witness to this.

> [The] true "sacrifice" is the *civitas Dei*, that is, love-transformed mankind, the divinization of creation and the surrender of all things to God: God all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). That is the purpose of the world. That is the essence of sacrifice and worship.[143]

Thus divinization is the goal of both worship and creation. For Ratzinger, a divinized world is a world of freedom and love.

In support of this position, Ratzinger calls upon both modern and ancient witnesses. The "complexification" thesis of Teilhard de Chardin is the former. This thesis gives a new meaning to Christian worship. "[The] transubstantiated Host is the anticipation of the transformation and divinization of matter in the Christological 'fullness' … the Eucharist provides the movement of the cosmos with its direction; it anticipates its goal and at the same time urges it on."[144]

The ancient witness is the pattern of *exitus* and *reditus*, found in its most impressive form in Plotinus. In Christian thought, this pattern of an *exitus* as a fall from the infinite into finitude, to be redeemed by a *reditus* which liberates from finitude, is recast. The Christian *exitus* is one in which the Creator engages in a free act of creation. Rather than being something negative, non-divine being is the positive fruit of the divine will. Thus Ratzinger states:

---

[142] Ibid., 27.

[143] Ibid., 28.

[144] Ibid., 29.

> The act of God's being, which causes created being, is an act of freedom. In this respect, the principle of freedom is present in being itself, from the ground upward. The *exitus*, or rather God's free act of creation, is indeed ordered toward the *reditus*, but that does not now mean the rescinding of created being. … [Instead, the] creature, existing in its own right, comes home to itself, and this act is an answer in freedom to God's love.[145]

The creature accepts its creation from God as an offer of love and thus enters into a dialogue of love, with the new kind of unity that is the unique creation of love. Rather than being absorbed by the other, in giving itself the creature becomes fully itself. This *reditus*, instead of abolishing creation, results in its full and final perfection.[146]

In spite of this freedom the creature has the freedom to rupture the *reditus* through the rejection of love, which is seen as dependence. This is the autonomy of the attempt at self-divinization. Since we have all in fact suffered this rupture in the Fall, "sacrifice," which "in its essence is simply returning to love and therefore divinization," now takes on a new form.[147] As Ratzinger explains:

> [Worship] now has a new aspect: the healing of wounded freedom, atonement, purification, deliverance from estrangement. The essence of worship, of sacrifice–the process of assimilation, of growth in love, and this the way into freedom–remains unchanged. But now it assumes the aspect of healing, the loving transformation of broken freedom, of painful expiation. Worship is directed to the Other in himself, to his all-sufficiency, but now it refers itself to the Other who alone can extricate me from the knot that I myself cannot untie.[148]

---

[145] Ibid., 32-33.

[146] Ibid., 33. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *The End of Time* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 20-21. Rowland contrasts Ratzinger's understanding of human participation in the freedom of God with both the extrinsicist separation of nature and grace, and Rahner's alternative of naturalising the supernatural. See *Ratzinger's Faith*, 37.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid. Cf. Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith*, 30.

The sacrifice of the Cross of Christ, "the love that in dying makes a gift of itself," is an act of new creation, "the restoration of creation to its true identity."[149] All worship is now a participation in this Passover "from divine to human, from death to life, to the unity of God and man."[150] In the sacrifice of Jesus and our participation in it through the Sacred Liturgy, the gift of freedom has become the centre not only of divine being, but of created being as well. So now we have come from the freedom of Jesus as expressed in his free "sacrificial" obedience to the Father, to our participation, personally and corporately, in that freedom though our participation in this prayer of Jesus–and this participation is in the freedom of God.

[149] Ibid., 34.

[150] Ibid.

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 379-99.
ISSN 2050-392X

The Martyr as the Vanishing Point for a New Political Philosophy

Dotan Leshem

Prologue: To Begin with Speaking of the Economy

By Necessity

Aristotle's imperative "to begin with speaking of the economy"[1] may be interpreted as directed at anyone who engages in political philosophy. This interpretation is supported by the context in which the imperative appears: "And now that it is clear what the components of the *polis* are, it is necessary to begin with speaking of the economy, for every *polis* is composed of *oikiai*." [2] Aristotle himself adhered to this imperative in his *Politics*: after accounting for the constituent parts of the *polis*, he discusses economy and its relation to politics; only then does he turn to speak of politics in and for itself.

According to another possible interpretation, what is necessary is not only to begin with speaking of the economy, but to speak of an economy that is born of

[1] "ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον περὶ οἰκονομίας εἰπεῖν," Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253b.

[2] "ἐπεὶ δὲ φανερὸν ἐξ ὧν μορίων ἡ πόλις συνέστηκεν, ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον περὶ οἰκονομίας εἰπεῖν: πᾶσα γὰρ σύγκειται πόλις ἐξ οἰκιῶν." Ibid.

necessity.[3] Such was the view in Greek-speaking antiquity, where economy meant the prudent dispensation of the bare necessities of life, which were shared by humans with the rest of creation and managed within the bounds of the *oikos*. As Aristotle saw it, the prudent management of the abundant means of survival, supplied by nature herself, could generate a surplus of leisure time to be spent outside the boundaries of the economic sphere in the nobler activities of philosophy and politics.[4]

An economy more divine than many think

> My work will begin... with the economy–which is loftier and greater than human conception... For it is necessary... for one who proposes to write a history of the *ecclesia* to begin with the very origin of Christ, an economy more divine than many think.[5]

Christian philosophers abided by Aristotle's imperative to begin by speaking of the economy. They did so "with a view to an economy suitable to the fullness of ages, that is, to recapitulate all in Christ,"[6] endowing the concept of economy with new meanings. The term was used by the Church Fathers to describe "the economy of the mystery which from eternity has been hid in God."[7] Consequently, instead of designating the boundaries of the earthly *oikos,*

[3] This view is most associated with Hannah Arendt, who described the economic sphere as born of and ruled by necessity. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 28-51.

[4] For a detailed description of the art and theory of ancient Greek economic thought, see: Dotan Leshem, "Oikonomia Redefined," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (2013): 43-61; idem, "The Ancient Art of Economics," *European Journal for the History of Economic Thought* (2014): 201-229.

[5] Eusebius, "Church History," in *NPNF2-01*, edited by Philip Schaff. *Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 1:8-9.

[6] "εις οικονομιαν του πληρωματος των καιρων ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι τα παντα εν τω χριστω." Ephesians 1:10.

[7] Ephesians 3:9.

economy was now seen as dispensed within (and defining) the boundaries of the heavenly *politeuma*.[8] It was according to the economy of God that the apostle was made a minister of the Church, in order to fulfill His Word[9] by enlightening all on the meaning of the economy of the mystery.[10] A radical transformation occurs in the nature of the thing economized. While in pre-Christian Greek antiquity the economized objects are the necessities sustaining the life process itself, things common to humans and to all other living beings, according to the Church Fathers, it is the divine within man that is economized–that is, that which man and God hold in common.

Following Paul, Christian philosophers did not abide by the second interpretation of Aristotle's imperative; they did not maintain that the economy was born of necessity. They believed, on the contrary, that His economy begins with freedom. They perceived the economy as originating in the speech-act of God the Father, whereby He freely begot his Son,[11] who, in turn, willingly incarnated.[12] Thus, while complying with Aristotle's imperative to begin with speaking of the economy, the Christian philosophers conferred on us a choice: either an economy that is born of necessity, or one that originates in an act of free will.

---

[8] Philippians 3:20.

[9] See Colossians 1:25: "ης εγενομην εγω διακονος κατα την οικονομιαν του θεου την δοθεισαν μοι εις υμας πληρωσαι τον λογον του θεου."

[10] Ephesians 3:9.

[11] For the first formulation of this view, see Tatian, "Address to the Greeks," in *ANF02* edited by Philip Schaff, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (Entire) (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 5.1-5.3. Later on, Christian Orthodoxy confined economy to the *mimesis* of the divine act of begetting as performed by the God-Bearer Mary in the incarnation. As Verna Harrison describes it: "This parallel between the Father and the Virgin officially entered the Church's dogma through its inclusion in the Chalcedonian Definition […] Her parenthood is the most exact human icon of the divine fatherhood." Verna Harrison, "The Fatherhood of God in Orthodox Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 37, nos. 2-3 (1993): 185-212.

[12] On incarnation as economy, see George Léonard Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964), 102-3.

Free to choose by necessity

Ironically, while designating the economy as the sphere in which people practice free choice, contemporary economic theory follows Aristotle by rooting the economy in existential necessity.[13] Neither *oikos* nor *ecclesia*, the economic sphere is now conceived as encompassing any psychic and social action that is governed by a specific type of "relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses […] So far as the achievement of any end is dependent on scarce means, it is germane to the preoccupations of the economist."[14] The type of relationship specified by the economic approach to human behavior configures[15] humans as prudent utility-maximizers.[16] Thrown by the "worldly philosophers" into a world of scarcity, *homo econmicus* is made to choose in a prudent manner between competing ends. Thus, paradoxically, the economic sphere is constituted as a sphere in which we are free to choose by necessity.

In each of these economies, people chose to attribute the excess they are bound to face throughout their lives to different origins. In classical Greek antiquity, excess was attributed to the circularity of nature; in the Christian economy, it is believed to originate in the Godhead. In contemporary economics, excess is believed to be located within humans themselves, in their desires that know no limits, and which are held responsible for the modern

[13] For a comparative analysis of Ancient and contemporary economics, See Dotan Leshem, "Aristotle Economizes the Market," Boundary-2 40, no. 3 (2013): 39-57.

[14] Lionel Robbins, *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (3 ed.; London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1935). This definition became commonplace and appears in most economic textbooks, according to Mark Blaug, *The Methodology of Economics: Or how Economists Explain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 87; Wade D. Hands, *Reflection Without Rules: Economic Theory and Contemporary Science Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Israel Kirzner, "Human Nature and the Character of Economic Science," *The Harvard Review Of Philosophy* 8 (2000): 14-23.

[15] See Michel Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics," in *The Laws of the Market,* edited by Michel Callon (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1998), 1-57.

[16] See Garry Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 4-14.

condition of scarcity. But while the topos of the economic sphere has changed dramatically over the years, from the ancient Oikos, via the Christian ecclesia, to the all-encompassing rise of the Social, one basic feature remained the same: Economy delineates a sphere of human existence in which excess is prudently and justly managed.[17]

Table 1: Aristotelian, Christian and Contemporary Economies

Parameter/Economy	Aristotelian	Christian	Contemporary
Origin of excess	Nature's circularity	The Godhead	Human wants
Sphere	Oikos	Ecclesia	The Social
To begin with	Necessity	Freedom	Necessity
Mode of conduct	Prudent & just	Prudent & just	Prudent & just
The thing economized	Life process	Freedom	Each need and every desire indiscriminately

An economy more human than many think

Abiding by Aristotle's imperative to begin with speaking of the economy, the rest of the paper attempts to cast Arendt as offering in her *Report on the Banality of Evil* a radical re-secularization of the Christian concept of the economy, this time rooted in existential freedom. By doing so, we may be able to address "the problem of conscience, in a purely secular context, without faith in an all-knowing and all-caring God who will pass a final judgment on life on earth." Arendt continues, contextualizing this problem as part of the more general

[17] For a more detailed account, see Dotan Leshem, "The pre-Modern Origins of the Economy," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought 34*, no. 2 (2012): 262-4.

"question whether conscience can exist in a secular society and play a role in secular politics. And it is also the question whether morality as such has an earthly reality."[18]

A. Introduction: The Vanishing Point

Hannah Arendt's late discovery, which she accounted for in her "*report on the banality of evil,*"[19] is that, contrary to what she had written in *The Origins of Totalitarianism,*[20] "The holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story."[21] This argument has received substantial scholarly attention. But something that is essentially crucial was deduced from her late insight, and the nature of that thing is implied a few lines further down in the very same paragraph, when she argues:

> For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody's grasp […] Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.[22]

Following a presentation of Arendt's "personas theory" in Part B, I demonstrate in Part C how the discovery that *the holes of oblivion do not exist and that one man will always be left alive to tell the story* re-orders the mode by which the three personas–the legal, the moral, and the political–are stripped from *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human* in the "novel form of government" introduced into our world by totalitarianism. A radical change in

[18] Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," Social Research 71, no. 3 (2004): 439.

[19] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: *A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

[20] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1994).

[21] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 232-33.

[22] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 233. See also, Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949-1975* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 147; Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 434-35.

the order of the unmasking of the personas is deduced from the non-existence of the holes of oblivion; the kernel of this shift lies in the discovery that the moral persona, to which the martyr is revealed in the gaze of the spectator, forms an icon and cannot be unmasked from the face of humans. Thus, contrary to Giorgio Agamben's claim that the thing revealed in the "particular condition of life that is the camp"[23] is "bare life," what is truly revealed is the moral persona.

Based on my analysis of what is deduced from Arendt's change of heart, I aim in Part D to situate the vanishing point for a new political philosophy in the witness, who ensures that the moral persona cannot be unmasked. The vanishing point, as conceived by renaissance artists, is a point found on the horizon in which parallel lines converge, thus co-ordinating space and placing everything into perspective by forming a point. By secularizing the persona of the martyr, I argue, we may be able to establish such a vanishing point on the *economic* horizon (misrepresented in Arendt's account of the rise of the social[24]), in which the parallel lines of *politics* and *philosophy* converge, thus ordering human communal spheres of existence. As testified by Arendt, such a reordering of space is indispensable, because

> We live today in a world in which not even common sense makes sense any longer. The breakdown of common sense in the present world signals that philosophy and politics, their old conflict notwithstanding,[25] have suffered the same fate. And that means that the problem of philosophy and politics, or the necessity for a new political philosophy from which could come a new science of politics, is once more on the agenda.[26]

[23] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (*Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 120.

[24] As argued in Dotan Leshem, "The Distinction between Economy and Politics in Aristotle's Thought and the Rise of the Social," *Constellations*, forthcoming.

[25] For a short history of the role played by the concept of economy in the old conflict between philosphy and politics prior to the rise of Christianity, see Dotan Leshem, "Oikonomia in the Age of Empires," *History of the Human Sciences* 26, no. 1(2013): 39-44.

[26] Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 453.

In Part E, I seek to illuminate precisely what is revealed in the gaze of the spectators at the tormented flesh of the martyr who, facing political rulership, chooses truth over life. As testified by two of the Church Fathers, the element revealed in the gaze of the spectator towards the vanishing point that the martyr brings forth is *the economy of human nature.*

In the concluding section, I argue that the new political philosophy that Arendt placed once more on the agenda must *begin with speaking of the economy* as a glorious and mysterious partnership in a thing that is alien to us beyond recognition, a thing in which, despite its ontological alienness, we are capable of participating. Establishing the martyr as the vanishing point from which we may be able to constitute a new political philosophy calls for a return to Diotima's discourse of love begetting philosophical tradition. Such a reconstitution will turn our gaze to the different means of self-perpetuation by *begetting on a beautiful thing by means of body and* soul,[27] as enumerated by Diotima's students.

B. The Three Human Personas

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt studies the condition of appearance of "the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human"[28] in the totalitarian camps, which, as she argued, was the greatest danger for "the survivors of the extermination camps, the inmates of concentration and internment camps, and even the comparatively happy stateless people."[29] Arendt's argument concerning the nature of the totalitarian regime can be presented as follows: totalitarianism is "a novel form of government" because it is the first form of government to cast from humanity any mode of being revealed in the personas in which humans appear in the gaze of spectator. The novelty of totalitarianism can be found in its capacity to prevent men and women from perpetuating themselves in the gaze of the spectator by arresting the possibility

[27] Plato, *Symposium,* 206b.

[28] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.

[29] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 300.

of perpetuating the singular mode of the human being who, contrary to the cosmological order of things, is conducted along a rectilinear line.[30] It seems that the violent exposure to *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human* is the reason that Arendt argued that "the camps are the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power"[31] that proved more "essential to the preservation of the regime's power than any of its other institutions."[32] As presented by Arendt, the exposure of the human mode of being in its abstract nudity is carried out by the violent unmasking of first the legal, then the moral, and finally the political personas humans put on interchangeably, in the forms of governments preceding totalitarianism.

"The first essential step on the road to total domination is to kill the juridical person in man."[33] The legal persona is unmasked from the face of the stateless people and those subjected to totalitarian government. This unmasking resulted in these individuals losing the "right to have rights,"[34] which brings forth three fateful exigencies. To begin with, the law no longer protects life itself.[35] Moreover, stateless people are denied the possibility of participating in a community bounded by law; that is, they are denied the possibility to appear in the political arena. Lastly, lacking a legal persona, these people cannot appeal to the courts. The loss of the legal persona that grants the law's protection over life and bans humans from appearing in the political arena and courts is placed by Arendt as a prerequisite to the unmasking of the other two personas people put on (the moral and the political).

---

[30] Developed here by Hannah Arendt: "to move along a rectilinear line in auniverse where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order […] the human capacity to achieve this was remembrance, Mnemosyne, who therefore was regarded as the mother of all the other muses." Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 42-43.

[31] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.

[32] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 456.

[33] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 447.

[34] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296.

[35] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 447-51.

In her presentation of the second persona stripped of naked human life, Arendt appoints the *martyr* as its icon:

> The next decisive step in the preparation of living corpses is the murder of the moral person in man. This is done in the main by making martyrdom, for the first time in history, impossible: How many people here still believe that a protest has even historic importance? This skepticism is the real masterpiece of the SS. Their great accomplishment. They have corrupted all human solidarity. Here the night has fallen on the future. When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony. To demonstrate when death can no longer be postponed is an attempt to give death a meaning, to act beyond one's own death. In order to be successful, a gesture must have social meaning. There are hundreds of thousands of us here, all living in absolute solitude.[36]

Before dwelling on the moral persona, I wish to present the third unmasking, which takes place only after the moral persona has already been stripped away, destroying any shred of singularity and individuality, "For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man's power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events."[37] In her later work, most explicitly in *The Human Condition*, such power is endowed by Arendt upon the political persona, a persona that Arendt views as "the hardest to destroy (and when destroyed is most easily repaired)."[38]

[36] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 451.

[37] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 455.

[38] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 665.

Table 2: The "Persona theory" in *the Origins of Totalitarianism*

THE PERSONA UN-MASKED	LEGAL	MORAL	POLITICAL
ORDER OF UNMASKING	First	Second	Last
THE THING BEING ELIMINATED	Right to have rights	Martyrdom	Spontaneity
SPACE OF UN-MASKING	Refugee camp	Forced labor camp	Concentration camp
IMAGE	Hades	Purgatory	Hell
ORDER OF REHABILITATION	Last	Second	First

C. THE CHANGEOVER: THE MORAL PERSONA CANNOT BE UNMASKED

Since Arendt does not offer us a definition of what is martyrdom, made impossible in hell on earth, I'll use the following definition, as revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the tormented flesh of the martyr: martyrdom is an act of choosing truth over life in the face of political rule. It is described as such by Tatian:

> Does the sovereign order the payment of tribute, I am ready to render it. Does my master command me to act as a bondsman and to serve, I acknowledge the serfdom. Man is to be honoured as a fellow-man; God alone is to be feared,– He who is not visible to human eyes, nor comes within the compass of human art. Only when I am commanded to deny Him, will I not obey, but will rather die than show myself false and ungrateful. [39]

We can see that *making martyrdom, for the first time in history, impossible* amounts to the stripping of the persona in which human beings perpetuate truth

[39] Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 4.

in the flesh as revealed in the gaze of the spectator. As testified by Rousset, whom Arendt quotes, *the real masterpiece of the SS* was not the denial of the human ability to die by putting an end to their own life. *Their great accomplishment* was denying the belief that there would be a testimony to *the attempt to give death a meaning, to act beyond one's own death.* The great achievement of the SS was that they managed to make the inmates of the camps believe that choosing truth over life would not be perpetuated, for the simple reason that for the potential martyr and spectators, the sheer idea that even *one man will always be left alive to tell the story* would have been virtually unthinkable.

Such is the background for the conversion Arendt underwent, bearing witness time and again to the testimonies that she gathered while preparing her *Report on the Banality of Evil*, which manifested in her assertion that *the holes of oblivion do not exist.* These testimonies are held responsible for the bottom line of her report: that martyrdom is always possible because *one man will always be left alive to tell the story*. Arendt's change of heart diametrically opposes Agamben's [40] generalization of Arendt's persona theory in *The Origins,* arguing that the "particular condition of life that is the camp"[41] functions as "The Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern" (and not "just" as the central institution of totalitarian power as claimed by Arendt). An examination of the particular manifestation of the human condition in the camp through the lens of *The Report of the Banality of Evil* reveals that, even in the camp, one thing remains impossible: there is no way on earth the moral persona can be unmasked. It is this persona who is revealed in the gaze of the spectator on *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human,* and in it, the truth of human existence reveals itself. Thus, *humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.*

[40] Agamben relies heavily on Arendt's thought in *Homo Sacer*; it is found in his use of Arendt's distinction between *zoe* and *bios* in Aristotle, and is marked by the notion of "la vita nuda" (translated into English as "bare life"), the very same notion that Arendt used to describe lives in the camp.

[41] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 120.

D. The Martyr

We can appreciate the radical nature of the secularization that can be deduced from Arendt's belated discovery by turning our theoretical gaze to the witness that assures us that the moral persona cannot be unmasked: namely, the Jewish heavens and earth, the Christian Son of God, and Arendtian human plurality.

For the Jews, heavens and earth, to which Moses turns in Deuteronomy 32:1 ("Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear, you earth, the words of my mouth"), are hearsay witnesses that will ensure that the moral persona will not be stripped once more from the face of His people. Another example is found in the story of Cain and Abel, when "The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground; Now you are under a curse and drive from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand'" (Genesis 4:10-11). There is no human person to bear witness to the murderous injustice performed by Cain. Instead, it is the mouth of the earth that testifies to the evil done to God, and it is this hearsay testimony that ensures the enforcement of the moral persona upon the human mode of being. Put differently, according to this conception, humans cannot unmask the moral persona and do wrongs without being severely punished. This state is enforced by the presence of an all-knowing and all-caring God who will pass a final judgment on life on earth, ever attentive to the hearsay testimony of heavens and earth.

The Christians, who hypostatically unite Greek humanism and Jewish faith, take a great leap forward towards humans. As testified by Stephen, the *protomartyr*:

> But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.[42]

[42] Acts: 55-6.

According to the New Testament, Jesus is revealed in the gaze of Stephen as ever-standing on the right hand of God. The incarnation of God the Son ensures that in eternity, one man will always be left alive to tell the story; as such, He ensures the moral behavior of humans qua Christians. Arendt's insight makes the heavens and earth, as well as the incarnation of the Son of God, matters of faith. Their presence is no longer necessary for the purpose of ensuring the perpetuation of the moral persona of humans. This is rendered a matter of free choice because, as claimed by Arendt, there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible; human plurality replaces Christ as the One that ensures that martyrdom remains ever possible. What distinguishes human beings from the rest of created beings is thus *not* the political persona, a persona that can be stripped from the human mode of being. Humans are distinct by virtue of their nature as communal creatures, whose mode of being is equal to their moral persona. Humans, even if as a last resort, can always testify to truth in the flesh, and at least one person who gazes upon them will always be left alive to testify its revelation.

Although offering a radical secularization of the persona of the martyr, Arendt does not equip us with new testimonies that will replace Rousset's account brought forth in *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* avowing the impossibility of martyrdom by questioning the nature of the truth revealed in the spectator's gaze upon the martyr. We must look for these testimonies elsewhere.

Turning to the texts composed by Pre-Christian philosophers, the company that attempts day and night to gaze at Truth offers very little help to us when trying to unravel the precise content of the truth that appears in spectator's gaze at the martyr's tormented flesh. This is so despite the fact that Socrates–*The Philosopher*–whom generations of philosophers made sure to perpetuate as *The Icon* of philosophical *askesis*, was the first to make the choice of truth over life in the flesh. The reason for this disqualification from bearing testimony is found in the choice of Socrates' friends and students to deny him their gaze at the moment of his death, as described in the *Phadeo*:

> But when we watched him drinking and saw that he had drunk the poison, we could do so no longer, but in spite of

> myself my tears rolled down in floods, so that I wrapped my face in my cloak and wept for myself; for it was not for him that I wept, but for my own misfortune in being deprived of such a friend. Crito had got up and gone away even before I did, because he could not restrain his tears. But Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time before, then wailed aloud in his grief and made us all break down, except Socrates himself. But he said, "What conduct is this, you strange men! I sent the women away chiefly for this very reason, that they might not behave in this absurd way."[43]

Instead of gazing at Socrates' dying flesh, his friends' and students' eyes overflowed with tears caused by self-pity, and they covered their faces in guilt. Doing so, they denied *The Philosopher* the opportunity to make truth present in the flesh, since there was no one to testify to its revelation. Moreover, as if trying to prevent Socrates' failed attempt from reoccurring in their theoretical gaze, his students did not follow him down the path he selected; they chose life over truth. Thus, instead of sticking to truth, they labored in their minds to constitute a human community that sanctifies life itself, a community in which the philosopher will never again, even at the price of losing the freedom experienced in community, avoid gazing at the revelation of truth in the flesh. When they failed to do so, they chose life.[44]

If we wish to locate testimonies to the content revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the martyr's flesh, we must turn to the texts composed by Christian philosophers who, in the 300 years following Stephen's martyrdom, had numerous opportunities to practice theoretical gazing at the martyr. But before doing so, we must establish martyrdom as a philosophical *askesis*. Gregory of Nyssa makes this argument in his *First Homily Concerning Stephen, the Protomartyr*:

> Yesterday the Lord of the universe welcomed us whereas today it is the imitator [Stephen] of the Lord. How are they

[43] Plato, *Phaedo*, 117c-e.

[44] Thus Plato argues in his Seventh Epistle that the philosopher "ought to speak, if so be that his speech is not likely to prove fruitless nor to cause his death"(Plato *Epistle 7:* 331d. See also, *Epistle 5:* 322b), and when Aristotle's life was endangered, he chose to flee Athens over testifying truth at the price of life.

> related to each other? One assumed human nature on our behalf while the other shed it for his Lord. One accepted the cave of this life for us, and the other left it for him. One was wrapped in swaddling clothes for us, and the other was stoned for him. One destroyed death, and the other scorned it.[45]

We can see that Gregory positions Stephen as hypostatically uniting two traditions in martyrdom: the philosophical practice following Socrates, and the Christian practice mimicking the operations of Christ. As argued by Gregory, Stephen achieves this union by restoring the philosophical-Socratic tradition, acting in the opposite direction from that of God the Son; while God the Son accepted the cave of this life for us, Stephen left it *in the flesh* for Him. Gregory's use of the image of the cave in this context is no accident. It knowingly refers to the "Cave Parable."[46] The Protomatyr, then, mimics Christ by performing Socratic *Askesis*, making present in the flesh the choice of truth over life as given to the gaze of the spectator.

We can see how the protomartyr is saving philosophical tradition by bearing witness to truth in the flesh when faced with political rule. The question remains as to what is the nature of truth revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the tormented flesh of the martyr. The answer to this question, in at least two of the testimonies handed down to us, is *economy*.

E. Economy

Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of ecclesiastic history, reports that "[the spectators are] struck at the sight of the economy of his [the martyr's] flesh, seeing even the interior of the circulatory system of his blood and his arteries,"[47] and John of Damascus is no less graphic, testifying that "It as though his human

[45] Gregory of Nyssa, "First Homily Concerning Stephen, the Protomartyr," *Patrologia Graeca* 46, 701-4.

[46] Plato, *Republic*, 514-16.

[47] Eusebius, *Patrologia Graeca* 5, 1032 a.

form has disappeared. He is naked, the bones crushed, the parts of the body broken, and one can see the economy of his human nature [*ten oikonminian tes anthropoines phuseo*]."[48] Put differently, both John and Eusebius testify that the thing revealed in the gaze of the spectators at the sight of the martyr, naked, his bones crushed and his arteries cut open, is the economy of human nature in the flesh, an economy that is revealed in *the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human.*

As suggested in the testimonies of the Church Fathers, the economy of human nature revealed in the gaze of the spectator can serve as the vanishing point from which the equivalence of the human mode of *being human and nothing but human* and the moral persona is made present. According to Patristic writings, the economy of human nature[49] is revealed in our choice to partake in some One whose nature is alien to us beyond recognition, and despite this ontological alienness, to participate in it. In the Chalcedonian Creed, the Church Fathers deemed that thing to be divinity in person, with which man unites unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, and inseparably. It is human's partaking in this alienness that assures the Christians that the earthly reality of a moral economy makes common sense due to the fact that, as testified by Stephen at the cost of his life, the Son of man stands on the right hand of God and thus guarantees that one man will always be left alive to tell the story. But for those who choose not to enter communion in the economy of the incarnation of God the Son, the question of the earthly reality of morality makes little sense, and remains to be addressed. We are endowed with the mission of reconstituting the existence of a partnership in alienness by secularizing anew the economy of human nature. Put differently, we are faced with the task of radically secularizing the economy by presenting morality (which is absent from the liberal

[48] John of Damascus, *Patrologia Graeca* 96, 1309a. Translation taken from Marie-Jose Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 41.

[49] For the most comprehensive discussions of the meanings attached to the economy in Christian thought see Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 18-68, and Gerhard Richter, *Oikonomia: Der Gebrauch Des Wortes Oikonomia Im Neuen Testament, Bei Den Kirchenvatern Und In Der Theologischen Literatur Bis Ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

secularization of the economy) as revealed in the abstract nakedness of *being human and nothing but human.*

Here, again, we may return to Arendt, who offers us a way to *secularize the Christian conception of the Godhead as community;* As described by Vladimir Lossky[50] and John Zizioulas,[51] the Cappadocian Fathers revolutionized Greek Ontology by equating persona with the divine mode of being, theorizing the *Godhead* as community (but not *humanity* as community). Attributing this equivalence to "*human* being as communion" offers a radical secularization and another revolution in the ontology that sees its origins in Greek ontology. This, for the simple reason that a quality that was attributed to God alone is now attributed to us humans. It must be said that a secularization achieved by attributing a divine quality to humans does not necessarily exclude the Christian conception of man. In Christianity, after all, man is conceived as created in the image and likeness of God, with the ability to mimic Him qua communal being. Moreover, Arendt's secularization does not necessitate the expulsion of God from the economy, and is therefore not mutually exclusive with the Christian conception of the economy. Thus, the secularization of the economy offered here is radically different from the modern-liberal one. Unlike the liberals, who in their lust to expel both God and sovereign from the economy denied it of morality (and violence, in the case of the sovereign), leaving it at the mercy of utility, Arendt paved the way for another kind of secularization, one that is not haunted by the modern awe of God. Lacking this perverted awe, Arendt's secularization does not rush to expel God from the economy as if possessed by demons. Nor does it exclude the possibility of morality making its appearance in the economy. On the contrary, it posits morality as ontologically prior to utility

[50] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 41-42.

[51] As aptly summarized by John Zizioulas: "By calling the Person a 'mode of being' […] the Cappadocians introduced a revolution into Greek ontology, since they said for the first time in the history of philosophy (i) that a prosopon is not secondary to being, but its hypostasis; and (ii) that a hypostasis, that is, an ontological category, is relational in its very nature, it is prosopon." John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 186.

when it comes to the economy. This is confirmed by the fact that, while utility is lacking from totalitarianism and the camp, morality is not.[52]

The human mode of being that is revealed in the economy of human nature may well function as the vanishing point found on the economic horizon, at which the parallel lines of politics and philosophy converge. As such, it is suited to serve as the vanishing point for a new political philosophy. In other words, for the human mode of being revealed in the moral persona to make common sense in a secular society and to play a role in secular politics, we need to begin with a radical re-secularization of the Christian concept of the economy of human nature as rooted in existential freedom. To begin to reconstitute political and philosophical economy, we must locate something that is revealed in the economy of human nature, a thing that is fully alien to us. At the same time, it must be a thing in which we choose to participate, and for which, despite this ontological alienness, our full participation is commonly sensed. Thus, against Agamben's[53] claim that the thing revealed to us when each and every persona was unmasked is bare life, the new political philosophy that follows Arendt's conversion will insist that the thing revealed in our gaze is the moral persona appearing in the economy of human nature: a glorious and mysterious communion in a thing that is alien to us, and yet still invites our active participation. It seems to me that it is here, in the re-secularization of the

[52] Arendt notes time and again that utilitarian logic is expelled from totalitarianism, as for example: "the totalitarian regimes are thus resolutely and cynically emptying the world of the only thing that makes sense to the utilitarian expectations of common sense […] Common sense trained in utilitarian thinking is helpless against this ideological supersense, since totalitarian regimes establish a functioning world of no-sense." Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 457-58. See also: 347-49, 409-11, 417-19, 440-46, 460. The nature of the totalitarian regime, according to Arendt, is to aim for ultimate power. Such power can be achieved when all human beings, without exception, are subject to control in all aspects of their lives. Such control is achieved in the community of the dead in the camps as described in Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 456-57.

[53] It should be noted that in his *Genealogy of Economy and Government* Agamben does not offer an account of how the economic form of power alters, if at all, our understanding of the camp as the biopolitical paradigm of the modern. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government,* Homo Sacer II, 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2011).

participation in alienness, that the vanishing point for a new political philosophy lies, in an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task in a world in which not even "common sense trained in utilitarian thinking"[54] makes any moral sense any longer.

F. Conclusion: The Partnership in Alienness

> […] gazing upon essential beauty entire, pure and unalloyed […] [the one who] could behold the divine beauty itself, in its unique form […] looking that way, observing that vision by the proper means, and having it ever with him […] he sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible, to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth. So when he has begotten a true virtue and has reared it up he is destined to win the friendship of Heaven; And if another man is to be immortal so does he.[55]

There should be no difficulties in tracing the pan-human appearances of the partnership in alienness. In order to do so, we do not need to go as far as the tormented flesh of the martyr that bears witness to all of his members participating in the economy of human nature; the partnership is commonly sensed by us on a daily basis. To begin with, such a partnership is made present in the faces of our offspring, in which we are full members; despite this partnership, their existence in the world is independent and alien to us. It is to be found in the human condition of natality, in our ability to beget in body and soul. It had already appeared at the moment of the inception of Greek Philosophy, at the culmination point of the dialogue in which Diotima taught Socrates what eroticism is all about. The partnership in alienness is to be found in each kind of "begetting on a beautiful thing by means of body and soul" by which humans erotically aspire to perpetuate themselves. As described by Diotima's students,

[54] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 458.

[55] Plato, *Symposium*, 211-12.

we perpetuate ourselves by bodily begetting our offspring, demonstrating soundness of mind in the economy, passing judgment on the work of the poet, pursuing the ideal mode of life in politics, and liberally engaging in philosophy. Each time we perpetuate ourselves in one of these forms, begetting the economy of human nature in which we, as erotic creatures who beget ourselves perpetually, perpetuate ourselves, we participate in something that is alien to us beyond recognition. I think that we may be able to reconstitute political philosophy based on the self-perpetuation made present by participating in alienness. Thus, for example, self-perpetuation may assist us to evaluate the moral economy as revealed in different human communities. This can be achieved through an evaluation of how self-perpetuation exists in each of the modes enumerated by Diotima conditioned in a given human community.

It must be emphasized, before concluding, that philosophical self-perpetuation occupies a privileged point; in its absence, no other self-perpetuation is made possible. As Diotima told Socrates, *if another man is to be immortal so is the philosopher*. This can be read as an implied threat by *The Philosopher* to his fellow citizens, meaning: "if the philosopher is denied of self-perpetuation, we will make sure that no one else will be able to do so." But it seems to me that Diotima instead offers us the basic measure of any human community, for if the only means left for humans qua philosophers to perpetuate themselves is in the flesh, then we are in the presence of a political community that is genuinely oppressive; it denies the appearance of any other personas in which humans are capable of perpetuating themselves. More importantly, it creates a situation in which that the only place left for the mode of being human and nothing but human to make its appearance is in the economy of human nature, as revealed in the gaze of the spectator at the tormented flesh of the martyr.

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 400-404.
ISSN 2050-392X

Reviews

Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, 463+ pp.

The work of philosopher Giorgio Agamben, although already well known and respected, garnered international fame upon the publication of his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, his first opus in his vast project *Homo Sacer*. It is no surprise that the radicalism and seriousness of the thesis that Agamben puts forward in *Homo Sacer* did not go unnoticed. The political aspect of this work–the question of sovereignty and the state of exception, the centrality of the bare life and the figure of the *muselmann* in the camp–has at length been the centre of interest for commentators and criticism. Consequently, this singular focus has overshadowed the importance of the manner in which each of Agamben's works enlighten one another; as much as an individual work is in itself a representation of Agamben's thought, the space between the different works also sheds light on the details within his text that can appear obscure and paradoxical at times. It is for this reason that an overall perspective could offer particular and important attention to the details of Agamben's work, and it is thankfully on such grounds that Leland de la Durantaye's *Giorgio Agamben, A Critical Introduction* is established.

One of the most striking difficulties when reading Agamben is the multidimensionality of his work. For example, the question of biopolitics deals with many different levels at once: historical, juridical, philological, and ontological. De la Durantaye's book is the first of its kind[1] to truly take into

[1] Leland de la Durantaye refers to Eva Geulen's *Giogio Agamben zur Einfuhrung* (An introduction to Giorgio Agamben) (2005) as effectively being the first book-length introduction to Agamben's work. However, what sets de la Durantaye's work apart is the fact

account the entirety of Agamben's current corpus, from *The Man Without Content* (1970) to *Signaturarerum* (2008). It therefore offers the best perspective for a multidimensional understanding of Agamben.

The book presents itself as an introduction to Agamben. However, this should not be taken to mean a shortcut or condensed summary of Agamben's thought, which would in fact contour his work rather than encounter it. Instead, de la Durantaye provides readers with an introduction in its proper sense; it does not presuppose any familiarity with Agamben's thought, yet has scale and richness of detail that will appeal to those who already have a strong understanding of his work.

While de la Durantaye does not simply present each of Agamben's works to us as purely in isolation from one another, this is not to say that he offers any hidden necessary principles that will harmonise them all. If there is any coherence of Agamben's corpus for de la Durantaye, it is that each work is a "good neighbor" to the other. De la Durantaye explains this notion of "the good neighbor" in his preface, referring to Agamben's discussion of the unusual principle of organisation at the Warburg Institute library, in which works are not organised in alphabetical or chronological order–rather, "each book was to answer or to ask a question of the one next to it."[2]

For de la Durantaye, the research of the good neighbor acts as a true principle of organisation within Agamben's work: "Agamben's eighteen works have proved, in Warburg's sense of the term, good neighbors to one another, both in that they ask and answer questions of one another, and in that these questions are not immediately apparent."[3] De la Durantaye looks at the ways each work connects and relates to the next, each chapter of his introduction following Agamben's work chronologically and using scholia to examine themes that run

---

that Geulen's introduction is strongly focused on the figure of *Homo Sacer*, whereas de la Durantaye aims for a more balanced account of the many different aspects of Agamben's work.

[2] Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), xviii.

[3] Ibid., xviii.

through his work, such as the inoperative, the potentiality of art, and the art of citing without quotation marks.

Extensive and erudite references across numerous disciplines fill the "neighboring spaces" of Agamben's work, the most prominent of which is the question of potentiality. The centrality and importance of this theme is made apparent by the frequency with which Agamben returns to it throughout his works, and de la Durantaye highlights this prominence by opening his book with a discussion of potentiality's fundamental role as the creative source of thought:

> In one of his most recent books, Signatura Rerum (2008), Agamben declares that "the genuinely philosophical element in any work, be it a work of art, one of science, or one of thought, is its capacity for being developed." [...] For Agamben, the philosophical element – rich in potentiality – is that which, while present, goes unstated in a work and is thereby left for others to read between the lines and formulate in their own.[4]

By unravelling the fine threads of the question of potentiality in Agamben, de la Durantaye brings together various notions and subjects of research across Agamben's text. On the one hand the radical experience of potentiality expresses fundamentally what Agamben refers to in *Infancy and History* as the pure experience of language, and its insistence on the limits that run through his work (the limit of language, representation, law and life) and on the other hand it helps to clarify a series of notions which are paradoxical in his texts, such as vocation, inoperative, de-creation, destruction and irreparable.

In de la Durantaye's introduction to Agamben the centrality of the question of potentiality is analysed back to its Aristotelian inheritance, although beyond a simple analysis of the notion, the potentiality is in some way put into play, particularly in the scholia of de la Durantaye's text, offering a subtle but radical displacement of the meaning of the notion. For Agamben the inoperative is not purely inactive, nor is de-creation simply destructive; the vocation is also

[4] Ibid., 9.

fundamentally a revocation, and the rest is non-numerical, in the same way that potentiality is by nature not strictly limited to actuality.

However, the fine threads unraveled in the question of potentiality are not only restricted to ontology and the redefinition of the category of modality, but are also carried through into the sphere of the political and ethical.[5] *The Coming Community* is exemplary on this point, in which the political content is inseparable from ontological reflection. In the same way that de la Durantaye shows us that Agamben's work does not form a community of ideas based on an overall hidden system, but rather according to the immanent principle of "good neighbor," we could also say that the human community in search of a new form of organisation must abandon any condition of belonging that inevitably acts as criteria for exclusion. In this respect, the projects and perspectives Agamben lays out in *Homo Sacer*, from ontology to political philosophy, do not express any fundamental fracture; instead, politics and ethics become the fields in which ontology is understood as operative, and for which philosophical work becomes the research of paradigms rather than an offering of ideas. Thus, de la Durantaye, with detail and diversity equal to Agamben's text, the essential elaboration in which "the Idea of Potentiality" and "the Potential of Paradigms" connect.

It is truly from the point of Agamben's use of the paradigm, central to de la Durantaye's reading of *Homo Sacer*, that de la Durantaye's book takes a more critical turn. De la Durantaye looks back at the numerous articles that critique Agamben and recognises that most point in one common direction: towards Agamben's paradigmatic method. For de la Durantaye, therefore, clarification of Agamben's understanding and use of the paradigm constitutes a key element of an understanding of *Homo Sacer*, and equally the condition for avoiding the trap of an oversimplified critique. Referring back to Benjamin's notion of dialectical images and Foucault's use of paradigm, de la Durantaye exposes the essentially paradoxical nature of a paradigm, its double nature, which is at the same time a concrete historical event and an explicative model for other contexts. It is this

[5] "The problem of potentiality is not a problem among others in *Homo Sacer;* it is *the* problem that gives its logic, and its paradoxes, to all others" (ibid., 233).

paradoxical nature of the paradigm with which the numerous critiques of Agamben so often take issue.

However, if de la Durantaye follows Agamben's complex use of paradigm and defends its subtleties against critique, he will concur with the critics on the *Remnants of Auschwitz*. In his conclusion on the *Remnants of Auschwitz*, he gives us his most direct critique of Agamben:

> Even more than *Homo Sacer*, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, has polarized readers–and with good reason. It is the only one of Agamben's works where steps in reasoning seem to have been silenced or skipped, and it is the only one that shows signs of haste. Its aim seems to shift and its final claim – a refutation of any and all negationist arguments–appears doubly dubious in that such a theoretical refutation is not compellingly presented as something in which readers are in need, and because the theoretical arguments offered rests on a strained analogy. […] Whether the problem lies in the technique or in its execution, there can be little question that a problem lies exists.[6]

Continuing with his reading of Agamben, and essentially considering Agamben's theory of the state of exception and his interpretation of messianic time, de la Durantaye progresses towards the development of the positive form of resolution that Agamben introduces.

De la Durantaye's *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* offers us the rare opportunity to encounter Agamben's work extensively, with a true attention to detail and a sum of references that will satisfy longtime readers of Agamben. It follows the development of Agamben's complex logic with consistency and coherence, helping the reader to overcome the numerous difficulties that Agamben's enigmatic texts often presents. De la Durantaye's book is therefore a true introduction, and thus provides a solid ground for the study of Agamben.

Pierre-Yves Fioraso

[6] Ibid., 297.

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 405-409.
ISSN 2050-392X

James Mumford, *Ethics at the Beginning of Life: A Phenomenological Critique*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 240+ pp.

In this work, emerging from his Oxford doctoral thesis, James Mumford offers a phenomenology of human origins. He seeks to give an account of the ethical implications of the fact that human beings, unlike Aphrodite or Adam, do not appear fully-formed, but are *born*. For Mumford, "phenomenology helps us to get at "nature," suggesting why certain ways of thinking about human emergence and treating nascent human life have not come to terms with the reality of the world" (xvi).

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, Mumford attends to the way in which human persons *are* human bodies, always emerging from the body of another. He emphasizes the state of hiddenness in which what he calls the "newone" emerges, eliciting a sense of maternal "doubling" or "splitting," which amounts to a kind of coexistence. He goes on to probe Martin Buber's approach to ethics, for which the ideal of encounter between 'I' and 'Thou' depends on a kind of commensurability as well as otherness. "Genuine meeting for Buber is characterized by mutuality or reciprocity" (39). Pregnant experience shows the limits of the ethics of encounter, because there is no reciprocity here; it is heavily asymmetrical.

For Mumford, the problem with Buberian ethics, especially as taken up by Karl Barth, is that it "idealizes" interpersonal encounter. As he sees it, this idealization makes pregnant experience less than fully personal. For Mumford, ethics is at bottom the question of what is permitted, and Barthian ethics fails, in his view, because it can offer no prohibition on abortion.

No doubt there are problems with Barth's use of Buber. It is not clear, however, why Mumford focuses on making a case against him. Barth seems a strange opponent to pick in this debate: Mumford does not cite any arguments in favor of abortion based on the ethics of encounter, and he seems willfully to misread Barth. Because he does so, he neglects to show what we might learn from him, and from Buber, in this debate. The I-Thou encounter is not the prerequisite condition for a rule-based ethics, but the *goal* of an ethics of response. After all, there are millions of others with whom I am in asymmetrical relationship or no relationship at all. This does not precipitate any claim for their ethical status–and it certainly does not legitimize killing them.

It might be argued that ethics must, in the end, offer prescriptions, and that Barthian ethics falls short of that goal–but Mumford doesn't make such an argument. He takes it as read that ethics is about determining what courses of action are permissible (making no mention of ethical approaches that would insist that the question is *not* what is permissible, but what is *best*) and reproaches Barth for failing to fulfill this goal. Yet, he seems to miss the promise of Buberian ethics for an understanding of pregnancy, which is precisely that, recognizing this indeterminate *something* as a potential "Thou" and not simply an "it," the passage of time brings the unborn's concretion into an infant "Thou," and grants entry into a growing degree of reciprocity.

Mumford then presents the case against a procedural liberalism based on negative freedom and unencumbered relationships expressed in contract form, beginning with its roots in Locke and Hobbes. Here his critique of the modern form of subjectivity, and the alternative presented by phenomenology, is more convincing. Mumford shows how Locke's vision, though seeming to acknowledge human beings' natural sociality, in fact reconfigures society as the sum of individuals, whose private interests must be enshrined and prioritized. Mumford's analysis of Locke's transformation of Hobbes' work, which refuses the primacy of the political, disguising the exercise of power as economics, is searching.

A phenomenological approach to human becoming, shows Mumford, reveals the priority of "being-with," of kinship–a fact neglected by Heidegger. Though he wants to refuse the priority of reciprocity, he rightly insists on human being as dependent, as being-in-relation. He addresses the asymmetry between *self* and *other* and the complex reality at the root of disputes about abortion: that the development of subjectivity takes time, and offers no clear demarcation between pre-personal and personal phases to match our ethical distinction between persons and non-persons.

But for Mumford, ethics *must* always draw a line between those who "count" for ethical consideration and those who do not; since human beings do not come into the world fully-formed, recognition cannot be granted on the basis of adherence to an adult human ideal. Because of his conception of ethics, Mumford must refuse the claim that there are other ways to construct an ethics beyond the ascription of rights and privileges to an "in group." Behind this lie some troubling assumptions, for though he is asking here about the right to life, Mumford clearly calls into question the language of rights. This project seems to put the question "Who am I allowed to kill?" at the heart of ethics. The answer is "Not an unborn child," though, in the fifth chapter, Mumford endorses justifications of the use of force in other situations. Accepting that the use of force may be permissible in response to physical attack, he opposes Judith Jarvis Thomson's classic defense of abortion (through the analogy of the unconscious violinist), arguing that pregnancy cannot rightly be conceived as an attack, that there is a difference between pregnancy and the kind of parasitism that Thomson's analogy depends on.

On Mumford's reasoning, pregnancy either necessarily constitutes an attack or it never does. The subsequent logic–which argues that, since in some cases pregnancy is not experienced as an attack, then in no case is it an attack–is flawed. In phenomenological terms, the "essence" of pregnancy would need to be established by eidetic variation, and it seems clear that pregnancy still counts as pregnancy, whether experienced as attack or not. There is an imaginative deficit here on Mumford's part, and his unwillingness to take seriously the predicament of those for whom pregnancy *is* experienced as attack leaves him

entrenched in what seems to be the position that motivated this research from the beginning, and thus unable to move beyond a conception of ethics as the determination of universal rules. Phenomenology, though it succeeds to some extent in getting behind particular perspectives on things, cannot escape the general fact of perspective, cannot remove the fact that phenomena are experienced within the context of a life.

It is clear that Mumford's phenomenology of pregnancy is bound up with his perspective–a perspective that is marked by various kinds of privilege. Though he claims to be seeking a first-person account of pregnancy, he does so from a position which is necessarily removed from pregnant experience, and far removed from that of many who seek abortion as a consequence of the desperation of grinding poverty or social marginalization. Mumford acknowledges that any phenomenological description of human emergence must be committed to describing the phenomenon from the perspective of the mother," (xii) but at times he sounds as though he thinks phenomenology gives him access to such a perspective. For Mumford, no ethical vision of the good can abrogate the absolution prohibition on abortion–ethics remains a matter of what is permissible. It can thus pay no heed to the first-person perspective of a woman who finds herself dealing with an unwanted pregnancy, can offer her no comfort or counsel but only a rule to be followed. This seems to fall short of the task of a Christian theological ethics, and remains deeply patriarchal.

In the short, final chapter, Mumford develops a positive theological account of human rights based on Gregory of Nazianzus' 14th Oration, "On the Love of the Poor," in which Gregory appeals to his congregation to recognize the image of God in the poor of the city during an outbreak of leprosy. For Gregory, the church is to include those whom society has excluded, on the basis that they are bearers of the *imago Dei*–not as possessors of certain capacities, but simply as individual humans. For Mumford, as for many of us, this *must* include the unborn.

He does not deal with the difficult questions that arise from practical opposition to abortion: the consequences of the unavailability of safe and legal

abortion are deeply worrying; both the physical risks and the lack of appropriate medical advice and support involved for those who seek illegal abortions, or who travel abroad to obtain a legal one; and the social and human cost of children born unwanted to parents who may be ill-equipped to provide for them. Easily available abortion may well not be the right solution to unwanted pregnancy, but a humane Christian ethics, if it is to achieve anything, will need, like Jesus himself did, to propose a better way, rather than offering absolute prohibitions from a distance.

This book displays a capacious intelligence at work and will no doubt find an enthusiastic readership. Mumford's impressively wide-ranging engagement of the issues offers a significant contribution to the abortion debate, as well as a pioneering investigation at the intersection of phenomenology, ethics, and theology. To this reader, it is disappointing that Mumford does not carry his argument forward on the basis of phenomenological insights (the inaccessibility of foetal experience, the fact that my body always precedes me) into a contextually sensitive ethics, but retreats to a dogmatic premise and a prescriptive ethics. The matter in hand for Mumford is one of wide public debate, and one in which actual human outcomes depend on shared public reasoning far more than they do on the views of individuals or religious groups; it is also a matter in which shared ground between the proponents of liberal thinking and their religious opponents is sorely lacking. Sadly, this book does not contribute to that need.

Orion Edgar

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 410-34.
ISSN 2050-392X

The Grammar of a Cultural Act:
A Review of Matthew John Paul Tan's *Justice, Unity, and the Hidden Christ*

Matthew John Paul Tan, *Justice, Unity, and the Hidden Christ: The Theopolitical Complex of the Social Justice Approach to Ecumenism in Vatican II*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014, 92+ pp.

Conor Thomas Sweeney

Those who critique the secular liberal order do so at their own risk. Those who dare to raise their voice–however softly–against the hegemony of what could be called the "onto-theology" of capitalist practices are often labeled romantics, communists, Marxists, or socialists. If they do get a reading, they tend to become the victims of eisegetical evaluations that, subtly or not, simplify and undermine their message. The fairest readings usually dismiss critiques of capitalism and liberal democracy as in the last analysis offering little by way of positive solutions or alternatives.

With his *Justice, Unity, and the Hidden Christ*, Matthew John Paul Tan embraces these risks, adding his voice to a growing chorus of theological critiques of Christianity's captivity to capitalist modes of living and breathing. And indeed, it is precisely to the ways that secular modernity compels us to "live" and "breathe" its tenets that Tan is drawn. Tan's voice is a robust addition

to a growing number of voices that contend that the "state/society/market complex" of liberalism is not just a neutral form that can be "filled" with Christian content, like one would fill a glass with a desired beverage, but rather a form that embodies a quite antithetical ontology and anthropology. As Tan sees it, a failure on the part of Christians to adequately comprehend the way that the form and *telos* of an act is never neutral, but always carries and expresses the ethos of the lifeworld from which it issues, has led to critical failures in the engagement of Christianity with the culture of modernity–specifically, with its capitalist ethos and practices. Tan's particular aim in this book is to explore the fate of social justice and ecumenism in this social context, in the years following the promulgation of Conciliar document *Unitatis Redintegratio.*

Tan's central argument is that the Conciliar Fathers were too hasty in their baptizing of "a contemporary context where society is circumscribed by the state market" (3). He argues that the framers largely presumed the foundational Maritainean and Murrayite beliefs that i) there is a genuine autonomy of the secular vis-à-vis the sacred, in the precise sense that the latter can have no social embodiment in its own right, and can only expect to have any influence on the forms and practices of the former via indirect and generic interventions of "intentions and hearts," with a further caveat that such interventions must also "be moulded in accordance with the laws of the temporal realm" (16). The credibility of the preceding was underwritten by ii) the belief that there was a factual overlap between the goals and ideals of Christianity and the liberal espousal of rights, dignity, freedom, and the like. At the time of the Council, a new attitude toward the fruits of modernity was underway (*aggiornamento*), one that famously found its way into the first part of perhaps the most influential document of the Council, *Gaudium et Spes.* This growing belief in the positivity of certain elements of the liberal project contributed to the willingness to cede the affairs of the world to a newly conceived temporal realm. Finally, iii) the cumulative effect of this newfound collegial relationship with liberalism was the belief that the Church could therefore quite comfortably co-exist within the parameters of this new temporal sphere, could be guaranteed freedom within a "neutral civil space" (38) that could be counted on to provide the necessary

protection of all freedoms from any encroaching state ambitions–a level playing field for all social voices and a (relatively) common public discourse.

Tan's concern is to see what effect this stance had on the conception of the task of social justice and ecumenism. The immediate consequence was to place the *telos* of the acts of social justice and ecumenism within the contours of the new bifurcation of sacred and secular. That is, such acts could no longer invoke what was unique and particular about Christian narrativity as such, but were instead compelled to conform to the generic, universally accepted standards of temporal discourse. This is how Tan describes it:

> were the Church to engage in those actions [of social justice], the shape of those actions had to be properly framed by technical categories determined by the secular sphere. Critique of these technical categories stood outside the Church sphere of competence. Therefore, it would seem imperative that were the Church to engage the modern world, the physical shape of the Church's action had to conform to the standards set by secular institutions (25).

In other words, the Church could, like any other social body, have input regarding the various domains proper to the world, but by no means could She frame this input from within a properly Christological grammar that might compel a more-than-worldly conception of the social.

The problem with this new strategy, as Tan sees it, was that the neat spiritual-temporal divide presupposed by the Conciliar Fathers was based on a falsely structured engagement rooted in the terms and conditions of a (now usually recognized as defunct) Cartesian structure of knowing and acting. First, the Conciliar Fathers supposed that the Christian subject and the modern subject were, in essentials, the same person, that the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1), Christian or otherwise, were roughly coterminous. Placed in a linguistic register, there was thought to be a simple correlation between the words spoken in each world, spiritual and temporal; each refers more or less to the same reality. At the heart of this correlation was a shared belief in the Cartesian agent as "autonomous, self-sufficient and self-defining, and thus … always certain as to what it knows and

wants" (29). It became a generational assumption that specific narrative particularities only "added to" or qualified as accidents what can for all intents and purposes be called an Aristotelian-Boethian-Thomist account of the person modified by Cartesian and Kantian themes, characterized above all by an individuality that tended to be atomistic, a self-consciousness or rationality that tended to be abstractly ahistorical and acultural, and an autonomy that tended to be defined in naturalistic terms as "freedom from." Such a "mono-ontological" account of the secular person could not, in its basic substance, be 'interrupted' by the spiritual dimension of the person, which seemed to be persistently thought of as a cosmetic veneer that really did not have anything essential to offer for the life of the person in the world, save by way of injecting "Christian spirit" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12) or working "mysteriously on the heart of those who engage in the practices of secular culture" (24).

Tan counters the tenability of this paradigm by suggesting that "the Church's continued engagement via such a reading would have limited application in our contemporary context" (25). It can be noted that most have long since abandoned the belief that the anthropology articulated by the Church and secular culture are substantially the same. Whether one reads the current context as "secularized" in the pejorative sense, as the theoretical and practical forgetfulness of God (Joseph Ratzinger) or simply as "plural" or "de-traditionalized" (Lieven Boeve), there can be little doubt that the serenity of the early *aggiornamento*/correlation project has been severely curtailed. For Tan, at the core of this entire ill-fated endeavour was a failure to grasp the ways in which attempts to accommodate the liberal (Cartesian) version of subjectivity that the Church regarded so hopefully at this time was in fact constructed upon an irenic foundation. Here, Tan's voice resonates with the likes of David L. Schindler, Tracey Rowland, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Charles Taylor, *et al.*, as he develops his critique under the auspices of a sociology of knowledge, relying on figures such as Michel Foucault, Graham Ward, Michel de Certeau, and Peter Berger.

Tan continues fleshing out his argument by pointing out that at the time of the Council there was little consciousness of the mediatory role that culture

plays in the framing or "foregrounding" of knowledge: "there was here an impression that the data yielded by observing these cultural categories were self-explanatory, universally accessible and thus universally valid regardless of the social or cultural context within which the observer was situated" (18). So, again, it was assumed that if liberalism spoke of dignity, freedom, and rights, Christians could be confident that this was more or less something they could agree with (the whole tone and tenor of *Gaudium et Spes* expresses this hope). No one really bothered to ask if apparent surface-level compatibility masked a deeper interior dissonance. Rather, is it not the case that truth is truth wherever you find it? As Rowland has explained it, jumping off a MacIntyrean critique of an instrumental view of language, this is "the idea that it is always possible to distil doctrines from the tradition which embodies them and then represent them in the idiom of an alternative tradition–in this context, the idiom of 'modern man'–without in any way changing the meaning of the doctrines."[1] On the above basis, a whole generation of enthusiasts took up the torch of translating Christian ideas into the idiom of liberal discourse.

This strategy is encapsulated nicely by a comment made by one of the American neo-conservative enthusiasts of liberalism, the late Richard John Neuhaus: "Liberalism is freedom, and what we do with freedom is charged to our account."[2] Here, "freedom" (whose/which freedom?) is assumed as a self-evident (read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident…"), self-referential good *as liberal*, while intentionality––here *Christian* intentionality––("what we do, how we do it") is the sole qualifier that serves to guarantee that "freedom" is always "filled" with appropriate content, qualified by the right "spirit," motivation, and ends. Left unasked, of course, is the question of whether "freedom" itself is not already circumscribed in advance as itself part of a particular lifeworld or "language game," and therefore always already interiorly constituted by the particular set of rules and presuppositions that govern the narrative in which it is

[1] Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), 21.

[2] Richard John Neuhaus, "The Liberalism of John Paul II," *First Things*, 1997: http://www.firstthings.com/article/1997/05/001-the-liberalism-of-john-paul-ii

housed. Also left unaddressed is a cultural question as to the extent to which adopting the language and practices of another tradition would affect the language and practices of the tradition to which you profess loyalty. In other words, are there *cultural* conditions that alter the meaning and *telos* of an act?

Tan approaches this question by framing it within a Foucauldian account of "discursive practices" that always inform this or that position taken in regard to the real (29). Far from being a Cartesian *cogito* that stands in sovereign autonomy over all histories, contexts, and traditions, the subject is in real ways formed by, and is the product of, the social practices of which it has been a participant. Tan follows Ward in the latter's articulation of the instability of the subject "always 'in process,' constantly being affected by the 'time and spacing within which any subject position is oriented'" (29). What this does is undermine the credibility of the claims made by "pure" reason, for "when the subject is performing an act, he is simultaneously being immersed in and formed by a whole array of other practices and symbols…" (29–30). Thus, the subjects produced––and the range of ideas and practices that they take to be "givens"––are always themselves the unique cultural products of this or that ideology and historical configuration. And this means that we cannot hope to get to the meaning of a term such as "freedom" without a broader, more interrogative form of narrative questioning––a questioning of the social and cultural whole––if we wish to determine just what terms like freedom, equality, and rights mean in different contexts, and in our own case, the extent to which Christian practices can be transliterated into the idioms of these sacred cows of liberalism.

So, exactly what kind of subject does liberalism produce? And, as D.L. Schindler would make thematic, what kind of ontology is presupposed in and reinforced by the practices that the liberal subject participates in? Within, or as a consequence of, an individual imagined to stand sovereignly *above* practices as an autonomous, self-conscious, rational will, liberalism produces a subject whose first or primitive relation is not to the *other* (God, other persons), but rather to itself. As Tan somewhat cheekily puts it, the

> anthropological presumptions of both liberalism and capitalism … begin from a position of idiocy. In its original

> Greek meaning, *idios* refers to a position of selfish isolation from the community. Liberalism is idiotic in the sense that it presumes the person to be fundamentally an individual prior to and independent of any communal belonging. The individual is autonomous and self-contained, and thus enters into communal association through no greater force than that of the individual will, hence the modern demarcation of a variety of organisations, social clubs, churches, political, educational and business organisations, as 'voluntary associations.' Furthermore, the will's decision to enter into communion emerges from giving primacy to a rational calculation that aim to maximise the individual's advantage. The rational, autonomous individual is posited as the primary sociological unit and takes precedence over any kind of communal association (48).

Parsed from the perspective of a thick, sacramental notion of belonging and communion articulated by John Paul II,[3] there is little resemblance between the above liberal notion of the self and a "*communio personarum*" account, in which the person is first constituted by a primordial, constitutive capacity for relation that penetrates its being to the core, and which forms the ground of all its social relations––and we will see Tan develop a counterpoint to liberalism based on Trinitarian practices in this vein. For now, though, the point is that the first and constitutive level of reality for the liberal is the individual; the second is an optional and merely constructive (and therefore arbitrary) level that is subordinate and takes form and shape according to what defines the individual *qua* individual.

Tan points out that this anthropology, presupposed by liberalism, feeds into social practices watermarked by "relations of violence." (51). Because the self is properly individual, and because there is no common *mythos*, no thick story of original relational harmony that would unite individuals in more than extrinsic relationships, the 'other' must be viewed as a threat, a potential competitor for

[3] See for example, John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 163: "Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, 'from the beginning' not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world, mirrors itself, but also and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons."

goods that I want or need–as a potential obstacle to my own free self-determination. Within this ontology the social imperative must therefore be the "management of violence…" (51). The threat of violence and social upheaval must be controlled by contractual relations that require the threat of force to compel their obligation. This means that the state must take a central role in mediating and protecting the rights of individuals: "Ultimately, the liberal, autonomous individual is dependent on his membership in the social contract with the state, because the state is seen to be the most proficient wielder of force and thus the most efficient protection of the individual" (51). If the state, then, is the guarantee of my liberty, it becomes my prerogative to protect the state at all costs, as the state is the paternal figure that keeps its children from fighting; without it, we have no (or at least a very thin) common mantle under which to work out our disputes. A people that have bracketed thick primordial accounts of their origin need both the authoritative force offered by the state, as well as a *new*, only *sufficiently* thick, alternative *mythos* that can provide a modicum of social glue to tie people together in a common vision. The first guarantees that when there is bickering and conflict among the children of the state, the state has the ultimate power to act as arbiter in deciding which right or freedom to ignore or enshrine, drawing on both constitutional law and legal precedence, but also, increasingly, on the shrillest voices of its children (cf. MacIntyre)–thus the tendency for law to be interpreted as 'liberally' as possible within liberalism. The second purports to provide a melting pot account of values and goods purportedly amenable to all, *e.g.*, the liberal canon of rights, toleration, non-discrimination, freedom, etc. The long and short of it all is that an individual as the subjective bearer of rights and freedoms goes hand-in-hand with a "soft" totalitarian state necessary to enforce these freedoms, to which is ascribed a quasi-divine status.[4] And so Tan explains: "The defence of liberty then would become the justification to the resort to all means necessary to protect the state, even to the point of using violence against the state's own citizens. Violence

[4] So, on this reading, John Courtney Murray's hope that civil society would provide a buffer zone between the state and the individual failed to recognize that, in fact, the state and the individual have always been lovers conspiring to keep civil society under their control.

then, does not become the anomaly that the state fixes, but is built into the maintenance of the state and the relations within it" (51). We could say, then, that the subject produced by liberalism is thus a fragmented self–fundamentally homeless in relation to the world, to others, and to God–who must, in a naturally violent world, look to the state (and the violence it sanctions) as saviour and protector of his basic rights and freedoms.

All of this is buttressed and attenuated by an economic related to the above anthropological foundations, which for Tan completes the whole state/society/market complex of liberalism. When economic life is governed by an ontology of violence, economic exchange will be characterized by the primacy of the accumulation of goods by the individual in a context of merely contractual relations (51). As Tan describes it,

> [i]n such relations, the barriers between giver, gift, and recipient as autonomous hermetically sealed categories are maintained. The exchangeability of goods and services works on the idea that what is exchanged can be shorn off form the community from which it comes and the persons that participate in it. Indeed, capitalism ensures the exchangeability of all commodities by dissolving the notion of community altogether, dissolving the communal networks of the village, family and church, and entrenching in their stead a series of hub-and-spokes relations between individuals mediated by contracts (51–52).

Invoking Dan Bell and William T. Cavanaugh, Tan next argues that capitalism is only secondarily premised on creating and maximizing wealth. Its real aim is to create the conditions whereby the self will think that it *must* create and maximize wealth. Tan points out that, unlike a "Trinitarian presumption of plenitude, the market institutionalizes the post-lapsarian notion of fundamental scarcity and competition" (52). Fear of the other, provoked by the egocentric individualist self, means a constant anxiety that I will not get my fair share, that someone else's consumption will curtail my own. "Escape from fear becomes dependent on the accumulation of material goods so as to assure physical, psychological, and emotional integrity" (52). Production and consumption thereby become imperative. But what is consumed is not so much a product or thing as it is

desire itself (Cavanaugh)–for if you become fully *satisfied* with this product and that thing, you are no longer a good consumer. If you are to keep consuming, you must be convinced that you always need, and are incomplete without, the newest products. Modern advertising techniques capitalize on this, not by advertising *things*, but rather by advertising *desire* itself. One could suggest that Facebook is the paradigm of capitalist practices–and the fate of civil society in a liberal society–wherein friendship is literally consumed at the most superficial and instrumental of levels.

Paradoxically, then, capitalist consumers are marked by a curious detachment with regard to the things or persons they buy and consume. Their "fix" or "high" becomes the act of consumption itself, "which leads to either an intensifying of what is essentially nihilistic behavior or a lashing out in acts of violence and domination against other consumers in a desperate attempt to regain control. Left alone, the proliferation and intensification of such relations can only degenerate into cycles of inequality, conflict and conquests" (53). The subject produced by liberalism is thus also the consumer self, the self who–and here is the rub–*unwittingly*, and even *eagerly*, allows the calculative, instrumental, and egocentric market forces to dictate and stimulate its desires at the expense of others.

This then, is the burden of Tan's assessment of the ontology and practices of liberalism. The detail he puts into articulating the foundations and ensuing practices of liberalism reflects his conviction that liberalism is definitely *not* a neutral form and set of practices that can be filled with Christian content. Rather, as David L. Schindler puts it,

> liberalism's intended strictly juridical order, in the name of avoiding a metaphysics, advances a definite metaphysics centered in freedom of indifference, whose central burden is to displace the person's natural community with God and others, and with truth and goodness, by an extrinsic and so far voluntaristic community––what is commonly termed a

> contractual community––made up of formal-independent, logically self-centered individuals.[5]

The Church, in adopting the grammar of the cultural act of liberalism, would in fact become, as Tan puts it, "the chaplain of the capitalist order" (42). It would necessarily sign over the *ethos* of its own practices inasmuch as it bound itself to the practices–and therefore the metaphysics–of liberal culture. As a consequence, it would now be "extending the cultural logic of the market, and the violent relation that would emit from that logic" (53). More to the point in question, the Church's attempts to engage ecumenically via the modality of social justice–*i.e.*, to transliterate Christ's love for other via a language of rights, dignity, freedom and the like–would be but a particular extension of the above logic. As Tan explains, "[w]hen framed by liberalism, any act of social justice eventually can become complicit with maintaining a social fabric which is atomizing and fundamentally grounded in conflict and coercion" (51). When an act of social justice is framed within a liberal context, then what is essential about a specifically *Christian* act–the *person* of Christ!–must give way to the generic, situated, and, from Tan's perspective, *false* universality of a secular reason that in its original act excludes the very possibility of both Christ and a deeper form of human relating beyond the strictures of liberal ontology. For Tan, it is impossible that such a conception not undermine the real allegiance of the Christian. For "when spatial dominance is ceded to the state/society/market complex, even ostensibly Christian acts can declare the ultimate social reality to be something other than the Body of Christ" (62). Tan is convinced that social-political configurations draw the subject into a bodily way of living, thinking, and acting that cannot help but communicate an anthropology; obviously, the way that liberalism masks its own fundamental commitments and presuppositions only makes the whole process that much more insidious. The real tragedy, Tan laments, is that the ruse perpetrated by liberalism was not something that happened despite the best efforts of Christians. Rather, it was aided and abetted

[5] David L. Schindler, "The Repressive Logic of Liberal Rights: Religious Freedom, Contraceptives, and the 'Phony' Argument of the New York Times." *Communio* 38 (2011), 533.

by the cultural short-sightedness of a conciliar era that desperately wanted to be relevant and "open to the world." "In the same way that a ceding of thorns allowed the choking of the Word, the lack of Conciliar analysis of these [liberalism's] presumptions led to the often-too-easy acceptance of a Theopolitical complex that dulls the confessionally Christian character of the acts of social justice" (83).

But perhaps Tan overstates his claims. Could it not be argued that he places too great an emphasis on the power of the body and concrete practices in the formation of the self? There are those of a certain philosophical and theological ilk who would call Tan a "socialist" or "Marxist" at precisely this point (if indeed they could restrain their invective long enough for him to make his case fully). In light of this tendency, it is worthwhile to pause and further interrogate the case that understands the self to be fundamentally at the "mercy of the body," to borrow a phrase from Louis-Marie Chauvet.

We have seen Tan articulate the very thick view that "contrary to the presumption of the static Cartesian subject that can decisively impose its will on any object, an agent is always "in process" and being formed by his social context" (45). Tan's real complaint is thus about a subject duped into the practices of an alternative worldview by the hidden ontology of liberalism. He does not simply bemoan individualism, atheism, consumerism, materialism, and the like in the abstract, as if they were simply the fruits of a moral failure to think "rationally" that could be remedied by better thinking and (perhaps) praying. Rather, his interest lies precisely at the point at which thinking and praying are already rendered void by the *practices* that inexorably pollute the best intentions of the will or heart. Immerse yourself in *these* practices, and you will *become* them: in a liberal society, you will become, to one degree or another, a subject who prizes individuality, freedom "from," "religious freedom," and the act of consumption. (In this context, Schindler has spoken of the "practical atheism" in America that thrives quite comfortably–and logically–alongside an otherwise

"incorrigibly religious" society.[6]) Conversely, immerse yourself in *Christian* practices, and you will become a subject who prizes relationship, the "freedom" of being in and for Christ regardless of the cost, and the "consumption" of the Eucharist (cf. Cavanaugh). This is to say that reality is always filtered through practices which themselves are always already "sacramental-liturgical"; practices imprint you with the *ethos* that they signify and mediate. It is here–in the heart and the body, in *this* family, *this* tribe, *this* locale, *this* social body, *this* lifeworld–that "reason" takes shape. To tighten this somewhat, the "body" is the dramatic site or staging of the mind. The body as context, practices, and history is where reason's "wax nose" (Ratzinger) is massaged: where *this* insight is given precedent over *that* insight–where *this* feature is brought out more strongly than *that* feature–which produces *a* "reason" rather than *the* "Reason."

I have become more and more convinced that this operates at a much deeper level than we like to think. Indeed, perhaps what most "realist" theological epistemologies (here I am referring broadly to the "classical" designation in Milbank's division between "romantic" and "classical" theology today) take to be the timeless and eternal truths and structures of reason accessible to all those of sound and open mind are, rather, always already derived theologically (and *only make sense* theologically); a retroactive illumination prompted by faith in a God who is Love, and as such–and *only* as such, as a Person Who has established real relationship with us–has burst open the boundaries of the mind in and through the loving union established in the sacraments, primordially, in baptism, the opening up of the self to the practices of love that most matter. The mind so touched now has a new dramatic staging that cannot simply be sloughed off. This self is now a son or a daughter, an adopted child of a Father; there is nothing this child can do to escape this new orbit or relation, the way in which

[6] Referencing Will Herberg, Schindler argues that "religiosity and secularism in America share an inner logic or framework of reality, such that religion is disposed as a matter of principle to slip into secularism. Religion and secularism thus coexist, and indeed, can grow directly rather than inversely in proportion to one another, because they are largely but different sides of the same coin." David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 70.

the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, continually modifies and conditions the self's ways of thinking and acting.

The problem occurs when Christians with philosophical aims desire to translate their situated, "impure" rationality into cold, impersonal, and abstract categories of Being; these Christians grasp at the "rational" fragments of truth dropped from the plenitude of the theological table (at which said Christians are no longer seated) in order to create a "rational" basis for "truth," the contents of which, now separated from the banquet, are no longer vivified by a primary relation to their ordering Source. They simultaneously perpetrate the illusion of "pure reason" (which is now only a simulacra of Christian belief) while betraying the very source of their argument, cutting off the theological branch upon which are perched. The point is that *they too have been radically informed by their bodily, sacramental practices*, by their context, by their filiation as sons and daughters of the Father, even if they have chosen to downgrade these practices' significance. The point is not to say that intelligibility, truth, reason, or nature are illusions, but rather to point to the manifold ways in which they cannot be thought of as existing outside of worldviews, lifeworlds, practices, culture, and history–indeed, it is to say that they are *only* encountered in the latter. None of this is merely incidental, cosmetic, or can simply be overcome by thinking or praying.

So, Tan's thick account of the cultural dimension of any given act is quite compelling. And it is on the strength of this account that Tan develops his positive alternative. We can begin by noting that in this Tan avoids a double temptation: first, the temptation to move from the culturally constructed nature of an act to a position of either full-blown relativism or a more nuanced position of "radical particularity." This latter position has been developed by "postmodern" Leuven theologian Lieven Boeve, who, against the conciliar project of correlation, argues that we should no longer seek after the chimeric strategies of shared consensus, but should instead be allowed to focus on the particularity of our own traditions–what is unique about them–without being

forced to distil them down to a lowest common denominator.[7] However, in saying this, Boeve makes the simultaneous move of limiting each particularity to itself, for as *radically* particular, it cannot therefore be claimed that there is anything universally true about a tradition or narrative's particularity. Thus, while Christians, for example, are fully encouraged to celebrate their narrative's particularity, at no point may this celebration operate outside of the group within the practices of everyday life in society. That is, Boeve's purported efforts to salvage the robustness of faith traditions is already informed by a prior commitment to a liberal mapping out of space and time. The particularity of traditions is policed by a hidden (liberal) universality that still demands the blood and guts of the heart of religious claims and the ultimate loyalty of the citizen to the state. What emerges quite clearly with Boeve is that his ultimate loyalty is with the secular status quo, although he masks its determinative ontological status with the far more fluffy and ambiguous language of "pluralization" and "de-traditionalization." The long and short of his proposal is that any chance of a thick or robust notion of Christian "identity," even within the faith narrative itself, collapses under the pressure of secular practices that claim the foremost allegiance of the person. This subsequently serves to condition and qualify the shape of the Christian narrative itself, for the subject, held imaginatively captive to the force of secular practices, tends to recreate their own narrative in its image. Particularity–any *real* difference or diversity–then shrivels up under the generic weight of a secular logic of the same. Against this reading, at no point does Tan give up on a robust, thick account of Christian practices *sui generis*.

The second temptation Tan avoids is the confessional or Constantinian temptation, wherein the Church adopts the state's mapping of space and time in order to enforce particular religious claims or its institutional presence in society with the logic of coercion and force. This is particularly anathema for Tan, for, as we have seen, at no point can the properly Christian act be informed by the *telos* of violence and fragmentation. A thick account of Christian identity–*i.e.*, one that embodies a conviction about its universality and its more than merely

[7] Cf. Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (London: Continuum, 2007).

private articulation–cannot be the excuse to then enlist a "strategic" occupation of space and time *à la* state/capitalist practices, whereby domination, surveillance, technique, profitability, results, commodification, marketability, rationalization, conformity, management, analysis, regulation, and the like are "virtues" (67–68). These, of course, constitute the *modus operandi* of the modern nation state (read: NSA surveillance) and the institutions, bureaucracies, and corporations within it, all of which create certain social roles and expectations through the above mechanisms. I would argue that this represents the contemporary "Constantinian" temptation for the Church. Macintyre's "managerial character" corresponds to these characteristics, being a deployment of the need to "direct and redirect their organizations' available resources, both human and non-human, as effectively as possible towards these ends."[8] One could perhaps expand MacIntyre's list of characters with the addition of the corporate psychopath: the (usually delusional, less intelligent, and therefore resentful) character who exploits the state/capitalist repertoire of virtues for his or her own career advancement, or who desires control and pursues it through a skilful, usually passive-aggressive, manipulation of persons by intimidation, fear, and the leveraging of power. No one should need to be told that ecclesial institutions today themselves far too often embody these anti-personal–deeply un-Christlike!–modes of operation, as they eagerly ape corporate and legal models of governance. In each case–relativism and what we could call a certain neo-confessionalism–the Church gives herself over to the extrinsic, incommensurable practices of other *ethoi*, and loses Her soul in the process.

Against both, then, Tan articulates his third way. At its heart, the alternative is built around the premise that the Church must have its own visible economy of practices that embody and reinforce the Christian's fundamental allegiance to Christ (but in a way that does not capitulate to either of the temptations we have articulated). If concrete, embodied cultural practices are the staging whereby reality is mediated, then it is precisely here that the Church must have a presence not reducible to anything else. A religious freedom that is merely a

[8] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 2007), 25.

freedom that safeguards an interior practice of religion that is (only) embodied behind the closed doors of the assembly of believers, or the merely linguistic freedom to exclaim "God bless America!" is not enough. Instead, what is needed is "a concrete alternative communal site" that "prevents the alternative consciousness that the Church wants to nurture from being domesticated by the dominant cultural form" (63). Tan expresses himself most succinctly when he explains that "the Church must embody itself as public in its own right." Precisely how it achieves this in the present liberal context while avoiding the two temptations outlined above is through what Tan, employing categories of de Certeau, calls a "tactical" mode of action (67). As distinct from a "strategic" mode (which operates within a secular mapping of space and time, described by Pickstock as "the sinister project of *mathēsis* or 'spatializing' knowledge, that is to say, of mapping all knowledge onto a manipulable grid"[9]), a "tactical" mode of operation plays on the fact that the Church's proper locus is not of this world. Rather, "eucharistic space challenges the conception of time within the state/society/market complex" (69). It does so by exceeding and re-qualifying its limits. When worldly time is exceeded in the Eucharist, both space and time enter a new hermeneutics. "Eucharistic practice poses a challenge to the status quo because the Eucharist interrupts this flattened time by having eternity 'enter history,' making the liturgy a simultaneously historical and eschatological event that transforms temporal, and indeed, political experience" (70). Both the Church's identity and its *proclamation* of its identity are distinct from an occupation of space and time in a worldly manner.

The Church can have a trans-strategic occupation of space and time because its operations exist on the neither purely interior nor purely exterior basis of a sacramental–eschatological locus. As sacramental and eschatological, the Christian lives in the world according to a vivified mode of existence fed from the springs of the liturgical-sacramental life and the new eschatological "aim" of the person. This, suggests Tan, excavating the original meaning of *leitourgia* as "not merely the worship by individuals of God, but also a work done for the sake

[9] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), xiii.

of a collective occupying a public space" (64), is not meant to affect simply the individual *qua* individual or the gathered community, but rather also affects the individual at the level of action outside the gathered community. As he puts it, "[s]acramental practice … defines a public context for the act." Citing *Deus Caritas Est*, Tan stresses that the *diakonia* (the social mission of love) originates in the Word (*kerygma-martyria*) and is given existential shape and form by the *leitourgia*. It cannot therefore in any way be thought of as having a logic all its own, outside of its two essential qualifiers. As Benedict XVI put it, "[f]or the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 25). The Christian is, aside from anything else, simply dishonest–to others and to him or herself–if he or she purports to practice Christ's love on any other basis. Christian witness is *necessarily* part of the grammar of this act. The Christian's acts must therefore derive from and conform to this *ethos*.

Of course, the question that such an affirmation raises is always a practical one. What can this *really* look like within a liberal space that imposes its practices on the self? The usual knock on positions such as Tan's is that they remain romantic, idealistic, and speculative exercises that have very little of practical value to offer, obliging as they do the self to escape to a Christian ghetto and requiring concerns for the world to be jettisoned. Jeremy Beer draws attention to this perception with regard to Schindler and the *Communio* school of theology, suggesting that what hampers Schindler's influence is that

> he comes to conclusions that are uncomfortable and, from a practical political point of view, seemingly useless. No easy fixes, no programs, emerge from Schindler's work–or, indeed, from the *Communio* perspective as a whole. In fact, the way in which superficial fixes and programs often conceal and even deepen our predicament is in part what Schindler means to reveal.[10]

[10] Jeremy Beer, "Philosopher of Love: David L. Schindler." *The American Conservative*, October 16, 2013. Online: http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/philosopher-of-love-587/.

Something identical could be said about Tan's project. It is not a program or a strategy; it is not a rallying cry for the Church to take up an activist role vis-à-vis secularity in any way that would concretely invest it in those practices. Nor is it a project that anticipates social victory any time soon. Rather, it is a call for the self to deeply consider his or her fundamental allegiance, and the way this allegiance manifests itself in practices. On this plane, Tan's project is fundamentally theological, ontological, and anthropological at heart. The Christian self is called to discover that their way of being can only be understood "from the standpoint of Trinitarian theology," wherein "a person is no longer looked at as a discrete category. Instead, its definition is set in relation to other categories" (47). As Schindler would say, the self is not first defined by a freedom *from* something, but rather as a freedom that is always already set in relation to God and the other. Therefore, "[l]ove is the basic act and order of things."[11] In other words, a Trinitarian order of love is not an addition *ad extra*, not a cosmetic or merely constructed claim–it is reality *par excellence*. We could thus say that Tan's efforts can best be thought of first as an exercise of the imagination: a Christian who understands all of this discovers the full activation of his or her baptism and is invited to make the proverbial "paradigm shift" from a theistically colored existence to an existence lived full in light of this love.

For Tan, the imagination is won first at the level of the deep grammar of sacramental and liturgical practices. In Christian practices, the self comes to concretely realize that he or she is now a citizen of a new Eucharistic community in which divisions between citizens are overcome in the body of Christ. The new relating of selves that occurs in the sacramental and liturgical action–the fundamental locus of the real–makes it no longer possible to image a site outside of this that is somehow immune to these practices. "Sacramental practice as exemplified by the Eucharist thereby enacts an ecclesial public space, one that changes the way one looks at the contours of time and the terms of citizenship. If the terms of sociality become transformed in the Eucharist, then the presumptions and cultural logic of acts of social justice cannot help but

[11] David L. Schindler, *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 1.

become similarly transformed" (72). Tan draws out the consequences of this argument, concluding that "the liturgical imaginary trains recipients to become gifts to one another" (75). The training that one receives in the liturgy, then, is subversive of the self that liberalism wants you to become. In short, Tan reads Eucharistic practices as utterly subversive of the violent, self-centered, capitalist modes of exchange typified in the ontology of liberalism. He sees all of this as constituting a powerful resource of the imagination, so to speak, whereby the Christian can acquire the imaginative capital necessary to subvert capitalist modes of exchange through cultural acts that are genuinely Christian.

Tan concludes by stressing that at the heart of the mission of the Church vis-à-vis liberal secular culture must be a "great refusal" (92) of secular culture, inasmuch as it "actually embodies a secular gospel" and a "secular *leitourgia*" (91). This, as hinted at before, means that the Christian must be willing to constantly scrutinize, back away from, or even renounce his or her place and standing in the secular world. There is no comfortable or easy solution when a real dialogue or exchange is no longer possible between liberalism and Christianity. There must instead be a stubborn praxis of resistance, characterized both by a commitment never to give up on the world–which has been created for Eucharistic communion–but also never to renounce one's fundamental allegiance to the "republic" (91) of the Church, the Kingdom to come. Those looking for silver bullets will no doubt be unhappy; Tan's rejoinder would no doubt be that it is never the path of the Christian to rely on bullets of any kind.

With this book, Tan has crafted a welcome addition to an ever-growing body of literature that continues to deepen its analysis of Christianity's relation to culture, practices, and the presuppositions of the present state/society/market complex of liberalism. Tan has ably showed how an act is *necessarily* cultural, how it cannot slough off its implicit commitment to the lifeworld that constitutes it, and the way in which a thick account of Christian practices can out-narrate the practices of liberalism by providing a basis for an economy of genuine social practices. While the book could have perhaps been strengthened by an additional chapter that provides more concrete detail on just how an act of social justice and ecumenism within a Christian praxis of resistance might be

performed against the context of the pervasive everyday practices of liberalism, Tan has nevertheless done us an important service by impelling us to start thinking about the context in which such acts are performed, no less than MacIntyre has impelled us to start thinking about the role of context in moral theory. All in all, Tan is clear that a Christian ontology and anthropology need not feel compelled to justify themselves at the bar of secular reason or conform themselves to existing social structures. This clearly marks out Tan's own "radically orthodox" sympathies. Perhaps the only area of ambiguity concerns the particulars of the question of precisely *how* theology is radical. This of course is something of a quibble, as I myself am comfortable with the appellation "radical," and I raise the question here solely with the "ecumenical" goal of an ever-deeper clarification of just what "radical" theology really is, or ought to be.

As I see it, one is on the right track if one begins from the ecclesial-sacramental-liturgical practices of faith. If one wishes to identify oneself as a *Christian* thinker, one *must* be a full participant here; one must drink, taste, and savour these practices and be convinced of their broader significance beyond the mere fact of celebration. In other words, one must recognize in them a much more than nominal or cosmetic character as a psychological or political locus of resistance. They must rather be understood as the articulation of *reality itself–all* reality. My line of questioning thereby asks how Christian practices are to be understood as the fruit of the total recapitulation of all in all in Christ (cf. Col 3:11). A risk that accompanies thick accounts of discursive practices is a reduction of Christian practices to a non-ontology that accents their relativization within an eschatological figuration. That is, some take sacramental practices to rupture or interrupt the "body," subverting and supplanting its "natural" commitments with the eschatological figuration enacted in the liturgy.

For example, Graham Ward denies that there are any thick natural commitments that the Christian might have to a primordial teleology that belongs to the order of creation and is ordered to a Christological fulfillment.[12] In

[12] Stephen Shakespeare identifies something of a difference between Ward and his other Radical Orthodoxy compatriots, Milbank and Pickstock, suggesting the Ward is "apparently more open to dialogue with other disciplines, such as cultural theory and queer studies, and

this light, he denies that there is a normative value ascribed to sexual difference,[13] and celebrates "relationality, *per se*."[14] He interprets relationality in a Bataillean way, as a reversible, interchangeable, diverse dynamic, something that he believes the doctrine of Trinity to reinforce. "The labour of Trinitarian love–of difference, in difference, from difference, to different–prescribes the relation of the Godhead to creation and the relation that is possible between two women, two men, or a man and a woman."[15] With this, Ward commits himself to a relationality that automatically brackets the biological as inessential to what constitutes the eschatological fruitfulness of love in the intratrinitarian relations and in the world to come. In this, Ward's notion of what constitutes a Christian practice in this context is decidedly thin in relation to received tradition, even if he thinks it has merits on other bases.

So the question then becomes one of how to mediate between various intra-confessional conceptions of what exactly constitutes a thick or thin Christian, sacramental practice–of what constitutes Trinitarian and Eucharistic practices. This I raise to show how the thickness or thinness of accounts of Christian practices *ad intra* have decidedly important implications when you move beyond the battle between Christian practices and liberal practices at the macro-level. This likely goes beyond the scope of what Tan was trying to accomplish, but in closing I would like to suggest that an even thicker and more robust account of sacramental practices is in fact an important part of preventing Christian practices from being paradoxically collapsed back into the very vacuity and generalized intentionality of a liberal conception it had tried to avoid in the first place.

---

so more willing to discuss how the claims of Christian theology are always conditioned by their context." Stephen Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2007), 36.

[13] Cf. Graham Ward, "There is no Sexual Difference." In *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerald Loughlin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 76-85.

[14] Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 202.

[15] Ibid., 201–202.

Schindler has described John Paul II's theology of the body in the following way: "The body in its physical structure as such bears a vision of reality: it is an anticipatory sign, and already an expression, of the order of love or gift that most deeply characterizes the meaning of the person and indeed, via an adequately conceived analogy, the meaning of all creaturely being."[16] The conception contrasts immediately with Ward's, inasmuch as the *body itself*, *as body*, and not just the body constructed by culture and history, bears a primordial vision of reality. This of course rests on a much different reading of the shape and foundation of Christian practices. The emphases of both John Paul II and Schindler rest on the fact that they do not make a sharp distinction between the physical body and the cultural body at the level of Christian anthropology. That is, the physical body *qua* physical is already circumscribed by a certain culture, namely, the culture that Jesus Christ presupposes and establishes anew in his call for us to "the *living forms of the 'new man'*"[17] (cf. Matt 19:3–8). The physical body is thus, paradoxically, always already more than its physicality. Its physicality is symbolic–*sacramental*, even–of the order of love or gift that constitutes space and time in its essence.

Without going into too much detail, we can parse the burden of John Paul II's sacramental ontology through the triple relationship of *origin*, *relation*, and *difference*, viewed through a hermeneutics of the body. First, to be a body is to come from some*where* and some*one*. The body is the concrete sign of our being-from-another, or put negatively, of our not-being-the-source-of-ourselves. To be a body is to reference our filial *origins*. Placed in the perspective of divine filiation, to be a son or daughter of God the Father is to be the product of a divine, elective, adoptive love (in Jesus Christ) that places us in concrete historical *relation* to an overflowing plenitude, a primordial font of fecundity–an origin that is itself relation inasmuch as it is an overflowing love that then spills out to contain a third. This vertical relation is embodied horizontally, sacramentally in the man-woman relationship, made possible on the basis of the sexual difference,

[16] David L. Schindler, "The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: *Status Quaestionis*." *Communio* 35 (2008), 397.

[17] John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 323.

primordially constituted in the order of creation (Gen 1), and ecclesially constituted in the perspective of the sacrament through Christ's call to go back to "the beginning" (cf. Matt 19:3–8). Within the nuptial relationship, the child is the concrete grammar of origin and relation (manifested at the level of a body iconic of origin and relation), being an echo of the original (Trinitarian) love that cannot be contained and the fruit of spousal relation that is itself fruit of this original (Trinitarian) love. In this, the child is thus also iconic of the structure of *difference*, inasmuch as the child attests to the non-identity of nuptial love with itself–that is, to its sacramental-eschatological structure. The child, whose arrival "surprises" the couple, challenges their love to expand, exposing concretely the very structure and meaning of love as being-from-origin (*e.g.*, to be is to be from love and towards love) and being-towards-divinity (*e.g.*, the eschatological fecundity of the coming Kingdom). The exclusivity of the couple's love–"I love you, and *only* you"–which is constantly threatened by a monistic collapse into itself outside of its properly filial structure, is broken into by the child–always already present in the structure of spousal self-giving as a signifying presence, an immediate fruitfulness of the Spirit–who demands that love consider its filial origins, that it open itself up to the font from whence it came. The logic or grammar of human love is therefore filial-familial/nuptial in its essence.

I would thus suggest that here we have a basis for an even thicker, far more adequate account of Christian practices. It is not, *pace* Ward, "relationality, per se," but rather *the* relationality constituted by the ontology of a body formed by the "culture" and practices of nuptial and filial love. This form of love resists the temptation to simply pour a generic Trinity (*e.g.*, love as intention, love as friendship, love without Trinitarian processions) into any culturally constituted form of relationality in order to call that relationality "Trinitarian." In other words, Christian practices must be formed first and foremost from the very particular account of love that emerges within the sacramental narrative of faith. Indeed, it is precisely within the new filial-nuptial grammar of faith embodied in the sacraments that this becomes clear. Here we can buttress an emphasis on the practices of the Eucharist with the practices of the sacraments of marriage and baptism. John Paul II argued that "the visible sign of marriage 'in the beginning,'

inasmuch as it is linked to the visible sign of Christ and the Church on the summit of God's saving economy, transposes the eternal plan of love into the historical dimensions and makes it the foundation of the whole sacramental order."[18] Further, baptism–"unless you become like this child" (Mk 10:15)–provides the dramatic, existential foreground for the practices of marriage, which is a real belonging to God the Father, through Christ and in the Spirit, that places us and all our activities in a properly sacramental perspective. Not only do marriage and baptism (along with the sacrament of penance) allow a "real," existential overcoming of sin within the *ethos* of redemption, but they also intensify eschatological desire for the fullness of the time, when the marks of our filiation and our capacity for nuptial love will be excessively fulfilled in the Kingdom to come.

Finally returning to Tan's thesis, all of this is simply to suggest that thickening the practices of a Trinitarian anthropology and an economy of Eucharistic practices with the leaven of a concrete ontology of relation suggested by the sacraments of marriage and baptism will provide a robust account of the social practices that might best resist liberal practices. As it stands, Tan's book is to be recommended as essential reading for an understanding of the way the grammar of the Christian act demands its own visible economy of practices. How this might be realized fully in our own times is not something that we can yet foresee but, as Tan makes clear, the first step lies in our willingness to imagine a social space situated not by the practices of liberal capitalism, but by the practices of Love.

[18] Ibid., 503.

Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics, Vol. 2, Number 3 (December 2014): 435-46.
ISSN 2050-392X

Fiction and Poetry

The Service
A Life of the Virgin Mary

by Simone Kotva

I

In God's house
I stood
in the temple
my body

to be sown
like a field
in furrows
of earth.

In God's house
I bent
asking
the ground

tasting
the acrid
sweepings
of slaughter.

Shall I
be opened
by this
grace

received
and greeted
with
a kiss?

Jerusalem
reaps
a harvest
of rue

counts
the signs
for new
arrivals

scans
billboards
above
houses.

On the steps
of the city
a blind man
watches.

For certain
cause
to leave
this post

he marks
the fields
ploughed
and sown.

To God's house
I brought her
temple
to temple

a nubile
line
drawing
eyes.

For God's house
I reared her
the temple's
consent

a servant
with hair
wrapped
in cloth.

Run
to God's house
the vaulted
estate.

I am
emptied
of weight
and sweetness.

II

For this
my trousseau
they send
twelve rods

from which
I kiss
the one
that flowers.

Twelve rods
for the years
and lines
of blood.

Come
take this
sign
of love

lead me
down
to the place
by the sea

make me
the mother
of the many
I was shown.

The fountain
took me
wellspring
and envoy

with cold
water
brought
to bed.

It tinkled
playing
a caper
of sound

unwrapping
the cloth
to fold
and fall.

The light
quickened
I rose
and grew

stepping
on shards
of broken
pitchers.

Apple
without star
her fruit
is seed-less.

Bending
doubled
we saw her
kneel

tell them
she has lain
in daylight
with the dirt.

We saw her
rise
smash
the jars

water
mixing
earth
and clay.

Tell them
she sings
laughing
destroying.

III

I watch
the flower
bloom
and seed

petal
by leaf
for a green
fruit.

I hear
events
like mine
uncanny

I rise
and mount
the aging
hinny

the sun
beating
down
the road.

Cousin
wait
he stops
and slows.

In God's house
the old man
does not
believe

this favour
that comes
without
receipt.

Counts
the days
for words
to loosen

this grace
that comes
to wreck
and ravage.

On the steps
the blind man
cocks
an ear

listens
for a high
pitch
and tenor.

Stop
feel
the kick
and yield

cousin
the two
still
inside

running
like horses
down
a track

they trade
head-starts
grow
and shrink.

Stop
feel
my life
laboured

for the sake
of yours
the younger
one.

IV

They
have gone
to the house
of bread

left
the nephew
to guard
the shop.

Outside
he sits
and draws
in sawdust

circles
lines
sceptres
orbs

a crown
and cloak
spear
and sword.

How will
they reckon
that
prognosis?

Cousin
I lay
crouched
saw water

and blood
parting
my body
saw him

twist free
a warm
weight
at my side.

In the lean-to
I slept
in recompense
for grace.

Am I
restored
made myself
again?

I am
disgorged
of the sweet
weight.

In cities
glory
travels faster
than truth

in streets
stories
increase
details

because
here
things need
mending.

Small things
like sheep-pens
big things
like kingdoms.

On roads
traders
pick
at scars

selling
swapping
giving
without mercy.

V

Carried
to God's house
scourge
to temple

seedless
apple
without
star.

The first
wound
cut
with care

first
and last
scoring
of oaths.

His black eyes
bulge
the mouth
howls.

On the steps
the blind man
rises
to stand.

Jerusalem
is broken
rent
by a cry

a name
peeling
behind
billboards.

On the steps
the blind man
fumbles
and sings

for field
and fruit
the streets
of Jerusalem.

Let him
assume
the sweet
weight

regardless
grace
that wrecks
to save.

Received
by God's house
destruction
by temple.

Go
tie the birds
lover's nest
with a string.

They wait
with silver
to redeem
his rights

to settle
accounts
now
in advance.

Go
tell them
the name
I heard

the name
that suckles
my aching
breasts.

VI

For this
our sake
the streets
are quiet

the house
of bread
disgorged
emptied

and Rachel
mourns
her reaching
child.

For this
our sake
black eyes
accuse.

Come
hide us
keep us
out of sight

lead us
to flee
this requisite
affair.

The sands
retrace
pathways
stories

how once
lead out
lead in
we grew

how once
straying
fleeing
we shrank.

The desert
rears him
he crawls
and walks

running
to doors
of rural
shrines

I lift him
to the heads
of foreign
gods.

There goes
Rachel
large
again

how quickly
restored
by another
comfort.

The city
is sated
Jerusalem
rebuilds

the temple
gleams
the steps
shine.

Each day
knives cut
a small
piece

wearing
the steel
bit by bit
to the bone.

VII

Mother, why
build nests
so near
to heaven?

In God's house
birds
weave
through rafters

pigeons
in niches
rustling
their feathers

a cooing
that jumbles
the muttered
prayers.

Mother,
to whom
do they speak
and sing?

The birds
do not stop
their swooping
to listen.

In God's house
he sits
the temple's
teacher

speaking
and cocking
his ear
for answers.

Three days
living
on butcher's
offcuts

he stays
and hides
leaves us
walking.

Come, turn
the beasts
again
to Jerusalem

to the gates
and steps
of polished
stone.

Mother, why
build
like men
not birds?

At night
the house
was cold
and dark

the moon
playing
behind
the clouds.

Mother
why
did you rush
ahead?

I told them
our home
is beyond
the vaults

I told them
your stories
as if
they were mine.

VIII

Behind
a veil
she sits
and smiles

her hand
tied
to another's
wrist.

I would
touch
that knot
and bless it

borrow
some
of its life
for mine

this mother
who bears
the stone
with the flesh

who laughs
and loves
and pours
her vintage.

Where is
my vagabond
dazzling
the crowd?

Scans
and flicks
his eyes
away

turning
one thing
into
another

a knack
he picked up
in foreign
places.

Always late
but still
surrounded
by chatter

always
some new
story
to tell.

Turning
he speaks
like blades
his words

turn
and leave
the breath
short.

Do you
force me
to act
is this

magic
a play
do you
not see?

Run
my son
and mask
your face

there are
so many
others
to choose.

IX

To the place
of skulls
I ran
and saw

that point
where death
is not
ashamed.

In the place
of skulls
I stood
below

watched
the body
buckle
and bend.

He is
disgorged
of water
and blood

it spilled
and made
the earth
a clay.

The city
watches
holds
her breath

counts
the cries
and mans
her gates.

On half-built
sites
awaiting
orders

tarpaulin
flaps
in a strong
breeze.

The steps
of Jerusalem
are emptied
and quiet

its pigeons
and soldiers
asleep
in the streets.

Mother
look
I found you
another

son better
than I
a temper
less short.

Like blades
his words
turn
and speak.

But what
am I
without
his weight

forced
to walk
into
a lightness

forced
to leave
his body
behind?

X

Where is
my son?
He crawls
walks

trips
tries
a straight
line

staggers
falls
laughs
in the dirt.

Where is
my son?
Faint
fluttering

quickening
leap
of my
consent

talking
pointing
black eyes
on mine.

They come
in groups
of two
or three

all told
(but one)
they stand
and sing

for the heap
of rags
a widow
breathing

grey
and lined
face
to the wall.

They fade
and slump
and cease
and snore

resting
on a smaller
heap
of rags.

There
he turns
and speaks
leaves

the breath
short
the life
shorter.

Mother
why
did you stay
behind?

I went
ahead
to another
house

ribbed
vaults
without
roof

tell them
it was
just
as you said.

XI

In God's house
I stand
my body
a temple

closed
to the seed
like a sated
furrow.

In God's house
I rise
touching
the vaults

my fingers
brushing
a ribbed
arch.

I am
resolved
ravaged
by strength

every inch
of skin
covered
in kisses.

The city
above
decks
her streets

prepares
her guards
for this
arrival.

Sceptres
and orbs
a crown
of stars

nightly
glinting
ghosts
of peace

signs
above
the broken
lands.

Her arms
a gesture
sketched
embrace.

To God's house
I bring
the temple's
living

my arms
an open
frame
of love.

For God's house
they pray
assent
of the temple

hair tied
and hidden
wrapped
in cloth.

Run
depose
the guards
steal back

the sweet
weight
of your
consent.

Cambridge
July-September
2014