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LEARNING TO LOVE: A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF
ASCETIC READING FROM I JOHN TO ERNST TROELTSCH

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VERENA, PETER, und RASMUS

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“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

-1 John 4:12

“None of these things is hid from you, if ye perfectly possess that faith and love towards Christ Jesus which are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith, and the end is love.”

-Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians

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Introduction

What follows is an exercise in integrating a theologian and pastor's training in historical-critical biblical studies with some of the doctrinal and devotional traditions of the Christian churches. Even in the decline of its near monopoly on training in biblical studies in universities and mainline seminaries in the United States, the methods of reading scripture as historical documents remain prominent in many seminaries, universities, and churches.¹ Such reading seeks to interpret the biblical texts in the environments in which they were composed and edited and use them as evidence for piecing together their prehistories and the histories of the communities that generated them. Though the aims, assumptions, and methods of historical-critical study have evolved and continue to evolve, it has generally been characterized by a methodological agnosticism. The reality of God, the Resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the like are bracketed. Doctrines based on the scriptures are, at best, data for the history of interpretation. Even in seminaries, the sort of reading into which students are socialized in their Bible classes is this secular reading. In universities, "theological" and "confessional" are generally used as insults when describing the perspective of a historian. Seminaries and university divinity schools may not be at all hostile to reading and interpreting the Bible for other ends. An M.Div. student in particular must be able

¹ For an interesting empirical account of the state of historical-critical biblical studies in seminaries and university-based ministry training programs, see Dale B. Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal*. Louisville (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008).

to say what the text means as well as what it meant! But such interpretation is generally left to other courses.

For its part, theology has had a tenuous relationship with historical-critical methodologies. In an earlier era, Christian apologists adopted many of their principles in order to dispute their results. Others ignored these methodologies altogether. In more recent decades, many theologians have admitted their usefulness and appropriateness within their proper domain, but have considered them an inadequate foundation for theology and the spiritual life of the church. Other theologians who are interested in doctrines that were originally argued on exegetical but not historical-critical grounds tend not to address the status of those earlier methods. In one of the most important systematic theologies of the last decade, Kathryn Tanner acknowledges that her use of patristic authors who support their positions exegetically is somewhat in tension with the intentions of those same authors, because she is “principally interested in the theological claims that result from such interpretation, and believe[s] the theological merits of those claims to be separable from biblical commentary that at least in its particulars is often dubious from a modern historical-critical perspective.”² Her bracketing of the question of the status of pre-critical reading vis-a-vis historical-critical reading is completely appropriate for her project. It is, however, the very question I take up in this project.

² Kathryn Tanner. *Christ the Key*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 2010). p. x.

Given that, for myself and my likely readers, historical-critical reading and the epistemologies underlying it remain our default mode of operation at least in our day to day lives and have proved fruitful in interpreting their data, is it possible for historical-critical exegesis and revived patristic and medieval modes of exegesis to enhance one another? Thomas Hoyt Jr., an African American biblical scholar, argues that “while many have vigorously criticized the historical-critical method as inadequate for one reason or another, one cannot ignore it.”³ Despite its tendency to restrict itself to the supposed original meaning of the biblical texts, Hoyt points out that “in order to allow the Scriptures to serve as the Word of God that sanctions the church as well as judges it, the historical-critical method was devised.”⁴ It is the historical-critical method that has demonstrated that “Scriptures had their genesis in various ancient faith communities,”⁵ and thus contain (and obscure) multiple voices. When Hoyt commends the experience and wisdom of the African American community and its struggle against racism as an equally valid context for biblical interpretation, it is not a repudiation of historical-critical interpretation, but an enhancement of it and acknowledgment of its limitations. Such is the present project as well.

³ Thomas Hoyt, Jr. “Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church,” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*. ed. Cain Hope Felder. Minneapolis (Fortress Press, 1991). pp. 17-39. This quotation is on p. 23.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 22-23

⁵ Ibid. p. 23

In asking about the validity and authority of later developments as interpretative keys to the biblical texts, we are asking about the status of what most churches call “tradition,” the accretion of new ideas and elements over time which become part of the imaginative framework in which texts are interpreted. Some churches consider certain persons to be the authorized stewards of tradition, while others see it as less formal. But beginning with the insight of historical-critical methodology which Hoyt has named, that the biblical texts were generated by communities, it is fair to say that the interpretative accretion of tradition is not merely found in the reception history of the texts as we have them. The texts are already the products of traditions which, like all traditions, are contested and developed. As I will show in the first chapter with reference to the Johannine literature, some of the biblical texts show internal evidence of the development of tradition.

I ask the question “how can we be meaningfully accountable to the authors and communities which produced the biblical text, while also seeing more in them than was likely apparent to their earliest writers, readers, and hearers (that is to say, while developing the tradition)?” The matter is immediately complicated by the fact that traditions are not univocal. Every retelling is an interpretation. Every interpretation occurs through some medium, to some audience with certain needs, by an interpreter with conscious and unconscious motivations, as well as her own style. And as theologians, we may also add that each occurs in the context of the presence and

activity of God in the interpretive community. An interpreter may appeal to the tradition and its source in order to bolster the claims of her interpretation over and against its competitors, but she is also making interpretive choices in designating what material counts as tradition and, crucially, there is no previous stratum of tradition that is not already itself an interpretation.⁶ This entails that the only way to judge the fittingness of an interpretation is by making another interpretation. The historical-critical methods were supposed to cut through the centuries of interpretation. In the famous words of Leopold von Ranke, the historian “*will bloß zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen.*”⁷ But modern historical methods themselves turn out to be within the history of interpretation rather than outside of it. Interpretation goes all the way down. This is nothing to be resisted by Christians, the basis of whose faith is an act of interpretation, that of Jesus, the Word who “interpreted” (ἐξηγήσατο) God (John 1:18). In asking how to interpret scripture, we are thus asking how to read, judge, and thus continue a history of interpretation whose only beginning is in God.

I propose to examine one trajectory within the history of Christian interpretation (wholly conscious that such a delineation is already an interpretative act), beginning with the New Testament text known as 1 John. My reasons for choosing this text will be

⁶ The assertions in this paragraph are by now well established in humanistic scholarship, including theology. One can find them in such diverse figures as the Catholic feminist Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll, NY (Orbis Books, 2001). p. 1; and the Eastern Orthodox John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006. pp. 15-20. I deal with these issues at greater length in chapter 4.

⁷ Quoted in Ulrich Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*. Neukirchen-Vluyn (Neukirchner Verlag, 2014), p. 133.

explained at greater length in chapter one. For now, suffice it to say that looking at 1 John within the context of the Johannine tradition yields a picture of a community that is interpreting its characteristic insight into the person and teaching of Jesus and contesting other plausible interpretations. I do not ask who is right, but what is at stake. How does the Johannine tradition interpret itself? Or better yet, what allows it to have an insight into Jesus that is distinct from other New Testament communities such as those behind the synoptic gospels, develop that insight, contest other developments, and eventually be integrated with the other New Testament traditions? I conclude that it is this community's understanding of love. I then find love to be at stake in the interpretive theory of Augustine of Hippo in the fourth and fifth centuries and of Hugh and Richard of St. Victor in the twelfth.

At all three of these moments, love is seen as revealed in and characteristic of who and what God eternally is. It is enacted in time by Jesus, which enables human beings to participate in it through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who constitutes the church as the body of Christ. Loving involves not only imitation of the life of Christ, but participation in it. Love also entails interpretation. In this tradition, loving and knowing are closely entwined.⁸ Augustine shows that knowledge of any sort requires love, and the less trivial the knowledge, the less trivial the love. He further shows that distorted love yields distorted knowledge. The purpose of the Incarnation was to give us access

⁸ This topic is developed in chapter 2.

to God by healing our love and knowledge. In this age, that healing takes place through learning to love and know God in a community constituted by its learning to interpret (and thus love and know) creation as signs of God. Chief among the signs given are those in the Bible. Augustine's theory of biblical interpretation and teaching makes its goal of love into an interpretive norm. Learning to read the Bible transforms one's relationship to all of reality by transforming how one interprets reality. The Victorines build on this foundation by offering a comprehensive theory and program of formation of love and knowledge on the model of and through participation in Divine Wisdom, which is nothing other than Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity. By learning to know and love through sustained engagement with scripture leading to contemplation, one's life receives a new form. This formation integrates love and reason, thereby transforming both of them and allowing the latter to participate in mysteries otherwise above it such as the Trinity. One's whole life becomes an act of loving in God's way, thus realizing God's desire for all of creation. In all cases, one learns to love God by learning the scriptures, and learns to interpret the scriptures by learning to love God. It is on the basis of learning to love the persons and communities who speak in scripture that we are able to remain accountable to them, yet advance beyond what they were consciously aware of in their texts. But it does not stop with scripture. The cumulative experience of Christian communities in this endeavor yields insights and norms.

This project does not propose a mere revival of or return to any pre-critical or pre-modern hermeneutic. It takes the modern historical consciousness very seriously as the starting point for most contemporary western readers of scripture, whether or not they have been trained in biblical studies. For modern people, explanatory recourse to spiritual realities is superfluous when available data can be explained in terms of material realities. Although no one could ever prove that certain New Testament texts do not reveal the workings of the Trinity or that Hebrew Bible texts do not prefigure the coming of Jesus, it is possible to offer an adequate interpretation of those texts in their historical contexts, as best as those contexts can be reconstructed. To read New Testament ideas into Hebrew Bible texts or later Christian ideas into New Testament texts would be anachronistic, "eisegesis" instead of exegesis. Furthermore, it is not possible to determine up front which later developments are valid and which are not. Even if a rule can be agreed upon, there can be no rule for the application of the rule. As we have it, it would seem that commitment to a normative tradition of spiritual exegesis must precede rather than follow upon a consideration of which of the many things that have happened in the history of Christian interpretation ought to have happened. Those who promote the revival of pre-modern exegesis usually appeal to the church as the normative site of spiritual exegesis, as do I. But the word "church" has been applied to many different things, and one can only determine when it has been correctly applied if one already knows what it is. I therefore propose a model of

exegesis that cannot be adopted, but must rather be grown into. It does not suspend or supersede our normal ways of knowing, but expands them to be able to take account of more realities.

I term the sort of reading and reasoning I propose ascetic reading and ascetic theology. I do not mean the word ascetic in a primarily privative sense, the foregoing of food or sex for spiritual benefit, though fasting and continence may be part of it. I am using the term as it is used in the Anglican tradition of ascetic theology,⁹ which leans upon the etymology of the word as “practice” or “training.” Ascetic theology is a way of approaching the whole of theology with “the bold and exciting assumption that every truth flowing from the Incarnation, from the entrance of God into the human world as man, must have its practical lesson. If theology is incarnational, then it must be pastoral.”¹⁰ In one sense, ascetic theology refers to a theory of prayer, contemplation, and spiritual exercises. In a larger but related sense, it refers to the whole of Christian theology as a theology of prayer as the center of Christian life. As Thornton clarifies, “Needless to say, when we speak of teaching prayer, we mean that total spirituality which controls the whole of human life, that which includes not only liturgical and formal private prayer but also habitual recollection colouring and inspiring every minute and every action of a lifetime. To the Christian, then, ascetical theologically is the

⁹ For a recent discussion of Anglican ascetic theology as it relates to a renewed focus on practice, habitus, and spiritual exercises in the humanities, see Nathan G. Jennings, *Theology as Ascetic Act: Disciplining Christian Discourse*. New York (Peter Lang, 2010), especially pp. 1-34.

¹⁰ Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology according to the English Pastoral Tradition*. Eugene, OR (Wipf and Stock, 1986). p. 21

key to the art of living as fully, creatively, and indeed joyfully, as mankind is capable.”¹¹

I reframe historical-critical exegesis as a practice of ascetic theology.

As a theory of the Christian life seeking to interpret the mysteries of Christ as the foundation of Christian spirituality, this ascetic theology of scripture places the reading and interpreting of scripture in the context of an understanding of the transformation of one’s relation to God and to all of reality that Jesus works in the church and each individual. Drawing upon my scriptural, patristic, and medieval sources, I frame that transformation in terms of love and knowledge. We are accustomed to practicing historical-critical exegesis for the sake of knowledge. But the Christian ascetic tradition knows nothing of knowledge for its own sake (except perhaps as the vice of *curiositas*). What would it mean to practice it not only for the sake of knowledge, but for the sake of love? ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ, writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:1. I will argue that thus reframed, it makes a very important contribution to Christian theological and ascetic exegesis.

The dissertation proceeds in five chapters. While the whole is conceived as both constructive and historical, the first three chapters primarily set up my constructive work through the way I configure the elements of the history I trace. The first chapter establishes the themes of the interpretation of tradition through the lens of love and knowledge and the theological and christological understandings they entail. It

¹¹ Thornton, p. 25

accomplishes this through a reading of 1 John in the context of the Johannine tradition. It argues that, as conceived by the author of 1 John in relation to the human life of Jesus as the revelation of God, there is an epistemological rootedness and openness in love. The second chapter develops the basic theological framework of the project through an examination of the distortion and healing of love and knowledge in Augustine of Hippo, what role scripture plays and what the norms for interpreting it are based on that role, and how he develops the themes of 1 John into a theory of the church as the interpretive and ascetic community which is enabled by the Holy Spirit to recognize the body of Christ in itself, its scriptures, and its sacraments. The third chapter takes place at the Abbey of St. Victor, a house of Augustinian canons in 12th century Paris, which was a major center of learning and reform. It shows how two of the luminaries of St. Victor, Hugh and Richard, developed Augustine's anthropology through experimentation with scripture and human affect. Through affective and exegetical exercises of self-transformation, the human being can gain access to knowledge of the Trinity and her life can be transformed into christlike love. In the fourth chapter, I address the challenges of modern understandings of history for the recovery of the sort of exegesis practiced by Augustine and the Victorines. I engage with the thought of the nineteenth and 20th century theologian Ernst Troeltsch, the foremost proponent of the modern sensibility. Using the Victorine categories of cultivation and formation, I show how the remoteness of the ascetic and theological sensibility of my premodern sources

from the default epistemologies of modern people is not a weakness, but an opportunity for Christians to cultivate an epistemology of love, and for the church to live into an emerging catholicity. The fifth chapter contains my primary constructive contributions, in which I articulate my ascetic theology of exegesis through a reformulation of the medieval fourfold. I integrate historical-critical reading into the literal way of reading scripture, but do not see that way as foundational for the others. The foundation of all other ways of reading scripture is the anagogical, in which one seeks to discover and receive what God wants to give to the church and the individual through scripture. Upon this basis, historical-critical reading is an exercise in learning to love, and thus gaining access to the imagination of the biblical communities and being made vulnerable to the activity of the Holy Spirit. This both authorizes and is informed by the credal tradition of the church.

Chapter 1

Love in the Johannine Community

"Did you ever talk to Dr. Hoenikker?" I asked.

"Oh, certainly. I talked to him a lot."

"Do any conversations stick out in your mind?"

"There was one where he bet I couldn't tell him anything that was absolutely true. So I said to him, 'God is love.'"

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'What is God? What is love?'"

"Um."

"But God really is love, you know," said Miss Faust, "no matter what Dr. Hoenikker said."

-Kurt Vonnegut, Cat's Cradle

"Love is the fulfillment of the law," Paul writes (Romans 13:10). "God is love," writes the author of 1 John (4:8, 16). Love has been seen as central to Christian ethics and theology since the earliest days of the Christian dispensation. Less widely known, but no less important, is its central role in Christian hermeneutics. Margaret Mitchell has located the birth of Christian hermeneutics in Paul's Corinthian correspondence, in which his employment of rhetorical techniques to contest the interpretation of his own previous writing generated a tripartite anthropology with a corresponding hermeneutic.¹ Spiritual things are discerned by those who are spiritual, a dimension of life that his ψυκικοί correspondents have not yet cultivated. Love is already central to the interpretation of the Gospel in those documents. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1). Love is the goal and adjudicator of spiritual gifts (1 Cor.

¹Margaret M. Mitchell. *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially pp. 18-37. Frances Young makes a similar argument in *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), though her focus is less on Paul and legal education, and more on the whole of Hellenistic education, starting in grammar school.

12:27-14:1). Augustine also explicitly formulates love as a norm of biblical interpretation and teaching in *De doctrina christiana* (written c. 395, finished 426), and that hermeneutic and its place in his theory of the Christian peregrine life (which I will argue is an ascetic theory) will occupy us in the next chapter. But there is another place in the New Testament where love does important hermeneutical work, and it is to this, the Johannine literature and especially 1 John, that I will direct our attention in this chapter. My goal in this chapter is to show why, following Augustine and others, I have selected love as the key to biblical reading and interpretation from among many other possibilities (e.g. faith, covenant, liberation, justice, etc.), especially when it would seem that love is a vague concept (if it is a concept at all) which severely underdetermines interpretation (or ethics, for that matter). Based on the role it plays in the Johannine imagination, I hope to demonstrate that when love is taken to be revealed in the life and death of Jesus as the enactment in time of what God is and does eternally, it gives the Christian communities both a rootedness and an openness in their theology and practice. It provides a boundary for development (albeit a contestable one), while also enabling later followers of Jesus to see more in his life and teaching and in the texts which the earliest communities of his followers left behind than was apparent to those earlier witnesses.

The Johannine Tradition

The Johannine tradition, which produced the Fourth Gospel and the three

Epistles of John developed differently from the synoptic tradition, which came to be associated with the named disciples of Jesus in the Gospels and their followers (Mark is a companion of Paul in Acts; according to tradition, Mark was also a disciple of Peter. Luke, mentioned by name only in Colossians 4:14, came to be regarded as the companion of Paul whose authorship of Acts is perhaps implied in the “we” passages), and perhaps with Paul.² It has the most clearly developed notion of the pre-existence and divinity of the Word who became flesh in Jesus. It has a different understanding of the commandment to love than other New Testament texts. Love is described as divine, a participation in the being of God and the life of Jesus, but it is not the unconditional love of the neighbor and even the enemy that we find in the synoptic gospels. As such, the Johannine community has a much more hostile attitude toward outsiders, be they “the world,” “the Jews,” or a rival Johannine community. There are several layers of this tradition available to our interrogation in the New Testament, and depending on the scholar one asks, several more may be plausibly conjectured. Almost all scholars agree that the Gospel of John underwent at least one major revision sometime after its composition. Most (though by no means all) scholars believe that the Epistles of John were written at a later stage.³

² See Raymond Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979, pp. 31-34.

³ Urban C. von Wahlde (*The Gospel and Letters of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) argues that 1 John precedes a second major revision of the Gospel. Some scholars, notably Georg Strecker (*The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on First, Second, and Third John*. (Hermeneia 76-78) Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1996) or more recently, Udo Schnelle, “Die Reihenfolge der Johanneischen Schriften.” *New Testament Studies* 57 (2011), pp. 91–113, have argued that 1 John predates the Gospel. This essay presumes something like the chronology proposed in Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, though it does not depend on his exact reconstruction.

Raymond Brown⁴ accounts for the beginning of the distinctive Johannine version of the life and message of Jesus in a Judean group of disciples, whereas the synoptic tradition can be traced back to his Galilean disciples. He bases this largely on the amount of material in John that takes place in Judea.⁵ A core group of the Judean disciples may have been disciples of John the Baptist. John 1:19-51 narrates Jesus' recruitment of his first disciples from John, rather than among Galilean tradesmen. In earlier versions of his theory, he posited several distinct groups of conversions, notably among Samaritans. This group likely had some contact with the Galilean group, and perhaps had rather high regard for them. Throughout the Gospel, the named disciples (contrasted with the anonymous Beloved Disciple) do follow Jesus, sometimes at great risk (11:16), and make professions of loyalty and faith (for example, Peter's "Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" [6:68]). But nevertheless, the disciples who would become the Johannine community had a different and, in their view, deeper insight into the meaning of Jesus than the Galilean group. This is suggested by the way the named disciples are portrayed in the Gospel of John, in contrast to the Beloved Disciple. The named apostles never quite understand what Jesus says and desert him at the cross, where only the Beloved Disciple remains, suggesting that only the Beloved Disciple grasped that this was not the failure of Jesus' mission,

⁴ A version of Brown's theory appears as early as *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Anchor Bible 29). Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966. The theory is refined in Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. A simplified version is offered in the posthumous *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

⁵ Brown, *Introduction*, pp. 64-69.

but rather its completion (i.e. its perfection, its τέλος). Likewise, it is the Beloved Disciple who grasps the significance of the folded burial clothes in the empty tomb, when Peter barges right in. Their insight into the crucifixion was related to their insight into Jesus' origin. They developed their telling of the story of Jesus in distinctive ways, which led to a distinctive theology. They would eventually see these developments as authorized by the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Father in Jesus' name, to reveal the truths about Jesus that he was not able to tell them:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:12-15).

This theology was always rooted in the narrative of Jesus. The depth of the story of Jesus is what the Spirit "declares." This depth is the love of God, in which the community's being is rooted. When a Johannine theology ceased to be rooted in the narrative of Jesus, denying in some meaningful sense that Jesus had come in the flesh, it was no longer seen as a valid development, having undermined the epistemological and ethical foundations of the community. Brown and other scholars see a controversy behind 1 John involving a rival group whom the author takes to be schismatics, whose teaching has gone beyond the acceptable boundaries of the community's tradition by no

longer being rooted in the salvific life of Jesus.⁶

Meanwhile, the synoptic tradition associated with the disciples named in those accounts (whom the Lucan tradition calls “apostles”) also developed, perhaps through association with Paul (though in the case of Matthew, the development may be more of a backlash against Paul).⁷ Paul was not a disciple of Jesus during his life, and both by his own account and according to Luke-Acts, became a member of the church through a personal revelation of Jesus. Yet he still calls the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Peter and John, two of the original disciples, and James, Jesus’ brother) “pillars” (στῦλοι) and cites his acceptance by them in support of his own authority (Galatians 2:9). Through Paul, this tradition also developed similar insights about the divinity of Jesus, especially in the deutero-Pauline epistles. It also reflected on the nature of love, including its epistemic and ethical dimensions. In the Johannine version of the commandment to love (John 13:34; cf. 2 John 5), Jesus disciples are commanded to love one another, but no mention is made of anyone else. In 1 John, the members of the community must love the “brother” (2:10), but must not love “the world” (2:15). In the synoptic tradition, on the other hand, the Great Commandment enjoins love not of the brother, but the

⁶ This is a majority position among New Testament scholars, though it does not enjoy universal assent. For the purposes of this chapter, I will accept Brown’s account (or something very much like it). There is only one other account, that of Judith Lieu, that would be problematic for what I wish to do in this chapter. I give reasons for not following her method in the excursus below.

⁷ David C. Sim, “Matthew, Paul, and the Origin and Nature of the Gentile Mission.” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 64:1 (2008), pp. 377-392: “I have contended that Matthew’s major emphasis on the Torah sets him at odds with the Law-free position of Paul, and that a number of Matthean texts (5:17–19; 7:13–27; 13:36–43; 16:17–19) were included and/or redacted in order to counter either the person or the theology of the apostle. The Great Commission that concludes the Gospel can be added to the growing list of anti-Pauline Matthean texts” (p. 380). For the opposite view, see J. Willitts, “The Friendship of Matthew and Paul: A Response to the Recent Trend in the Interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65:1 (2009), pp. 150-157.

neighbor (Matt 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-38). Elsewhere, Jesus even bids his disciples love their enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36).

As an ethic, there is every reason to prefer the synoptic Great Commandment to the Johannine New Commandment. The synoptic tradition adheres closely to its Hebrew sources.⁸ The Great Commandment is both a stance toward God and a stance toward the world. In the Lucan version in particular, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37; the parable clarifies the Lucan version of the command to love one's neighbor) makes it clear that "neighbor" is to be understood in the most expansive possible sense, encompassing the enemy, and that the commandment enjoins not only a disposition, but action on behalf of a neighbor in need. In the Johannine version, on the other hand, Jesus addresses the command to his disciples and commends a stance toward one another (John 13:34). This appears to be linked to the Johannine community's negative valuation of "the world," fortress mentality, and apparent demonization of outsiders and opponents (and Judas as a symbolic figure--John 12:6; 13:27). This is nowhere more on display than in the author of 1 John's rhetoric, where his opponents are antichrists (2:18), "of the world" (4:5). He heaps up insinuations of false belief and bad ethics. The vitriol culminates in his insistence that his readers not even pray for those who commit a certain "sin unto death" (5:16), by which he probably means his opponents. In contrast to Jesus' insistence on love of every

⁸ The source of the first commandment is Deuteronomy 6:5. The love of neighbor as oneself is from Leviticus 19:18. Both verses are extremely prominent in rabbinic Judaism, the former being recited multiple times each day.

neighbor and even one's enemies in the synoptic Gospels, this limitation of the scope of love sows the seeds of bigotry and violence.

But what the Johannine account of love lacks in breadth, it makes up for in depth. I argue that the Johannine community's distinctive understanding of love enables it to develop by seeing truths in the life, teaching, and death of Jesus that the synoptic tradition did not see, or at least did not emphasize. They saw in Jesus not just a wonder-worker,⁹ a prophet, or a new law giver, but the incarnation of God, whose life revealed the love of God and enabled his followers' participation in it. The special depth or quality of John's Gospel was appreciated very early in the Christian tradition. It was recognized as a development even by people who believed that its author was John, the son of Zebedee. Eusebius reports that Clement of Alexandria called it a "spiritual gospel" (πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον).¹⁰ Irenaeus says that just as Mark emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, Matthew his Jewishness, and Luke his priestliness, John wrote near the end of his long life to explicitly reveal his divine origin.¹¹ Raymond Brown could not launch into his intricate and highly technical analysis of the composition and redaction history of the Farewell Discourses in John 13-17 without the qualification that "none of this should prevent the reader from recognizing that the Last Discourse is one of the

⁹ The theme of Jesus' signs is prevalent in John's Gospel, but the signs serve Jesus' message about himself. See John 14:11. Also note that there are no exorcisms in John, though they are one of the most prominent features of Jesus' ministry in the synoptic gospels.

¹⁰ Eusèbe de Césarée, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 2. ed. G. Bardy. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955. This discussion is at 6.14.5-7.

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies*, III.11.8 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978. pp. 428-9

greatest compositions in religious literature. The one who speaks here speaks as no man has spoken."¹² When each of the four evangelists came to be identified with one of the animals of the throne room in Revelation 5, John was the eagle.¹³ And as for the epistle, it is polemical, and an unflattering picture of its author making an unsavory power play emerges from a study of its rhetorical strategy. And yet, this is the document that gives us "Beloved, let us love another, for love is of God. Whoever claims to know God but does not love lies, for God is love" (4:7-8). It cannot be accused of literary, theological, or ethical penury.

Not much is known of how the synoptic and Johannine trajectories related to one another in the first century. Brown hypothesized that the branch of the Johannine community represented by the Johannine epistles eventually became integrated with the synoptic/Pauline tradition,¹⁴ whereas the opponents of those writings drifted into gnosticism.¹⁵ He suggested that perhaps it was 1 John's interpretation of the Gospel of John which made the latter acceptable to the synoptic tradition.¹⁶ At any rate, we know that in the second century, early writers of what would become the dominant strain of Christianity cite both. The two traditions came to be read together no later than

¹² Brown, *Gospel*, p. 582.

¹³ The Revelation of John may have some links with the Johannine school. See G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI (Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 34-36.

¹⁴ Brown, *Community*, pp. 155-162.

¹⁵ Brown, *Community*, pp. 151-154.

¹⁶ Brown, *Community*, pp. 147-150.

Irenaeus, who makes the case for the four Gospels. The synoptic, Pauline, and Johannine writings came to be placed next to one another in the New Testament, fusing Johannine depth with synoptic breadth. Subsequent Christians and Christian theologians would make use of both. It is my belief that the distinctive understanding of love in the Johannine tradition made it open to new insights and revision. It also opened it to being enhanced by the synoptic tradition, even where that tradition was in tension with certain certain Johannine themes and emphases, not the least of which is love.

A Reading of the First Epistle of John

We will now attempt to understand the rootedness and openness of love in the Johannine tradition through a close reading of the body of 1 John. The document known as 1 John is usually classified as a letter, though it has almost no epistolary characteristics. Neither the sender nor the recipients are identified, no explicit statements are made about the situation of the sender or the recipients, and it does not have the usual structure of a letter. In fact, it is difficult to discern any structure at all. But it was received as an epistle by the earliest sources who refer it, and no other classification has gained wide support. The earliest sources also identify it with somebody named John, who may or may not be John the son of Zebedee, may or may not be the same person who composed the Gospel of John, and may or may not be the same person who identifies himself as “the Elder”¹⁷ in the two letters written in similar

¹⁷ For reasons explained in the appendix to this chapter, I believe that the Elder is also the author of 1 John and will refer to that author as the Elder throughout.

style and with similar themes, with which it is juxtaposed in the New Testament canon. Most contemporary scholars reject the identification of the author of any of these documents with John the son of Zebedee.¹⁸

The relation of 1 John to the Gospel of John is more complicated, though it is clear that there is a relationship. They could have been composed independently, but in the same community of what we usually call Johannine Christianity. First John may have been the direct inspiration for the Gospel of John, or, as I think, the Gospel of John may have been consciously employed as a resource for the Epistle. Though if that is the case, it is also unclear whether the author knew the Gospel in the form in which we have it, or whether he had an earlier version. The majority of scholars believe that the Gospel underwent at least one major revision.¹⁹ But in agreement with Klauck, we may say that it is very likely that the prologue of 1 John is patterned on the prologue of the Gospel, which explains the otherwise perplexing beginning.²⁰

In what follows, I will presume something like Raymond Brown's account of the development of the Johannine community and the composition history of its surviving

¹⁸ Brown originally believed that the authority behind the Johannine traditions was John the son of Zebedee (*Gospel*, pp. lxxxvii-cii), but later changed his mind (e.g. *Community*, pp. 33-34). Strecker identifies the Elder of 2 and 3 John with the figure of John the Elder known from Papias, whom he takes to be clearly distinguished from John the son of Zebedee. He believes that 1 John and the Gospel are dependent on 2 and 3 John (Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*. (Hermenia). tr. Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis (Fortress Press, 1996. pp. xxxv-xlii). Von Wahlde sees three different authors of three editions of the Gospel, none of whom is the author of the Johannine epistles, though that figure may be identified with the Beloved Disciple and Papias' John the Elder (v. 1 pp. 6, 131-132, 224-5, 374-376, v. 3 pp. 409-434).

¹⁹ See Von Wahlde, cited above. Also, Brown, *Gospel*, pp. xxiv-xxxix (especially pp. xxxvi-xxxix).

²⁰ Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der Erste Johannesbrief*. Zürich/Braunschweig: Benziger Verlag/Neukirchener Verlag, 1991, pp. 47-48. See the discussion in the excursus below.

documents. This was the majority position among American New Testament scholars for much of the second half of the twentieth century, and still enjoys wide support, though plausible alternatives have been offered.²¹ If Brown's theory were to be rejected, and particularly if one held that 1 John preceded the Gospel of John, this would require only minor changes to the argument I will make. All I require is the acknowledgement that the Johannine literature is the product of a distinct subgroup of early Christians who shared a similar history, theology, symbol set, and idiosyncratic vocabulary. As such, it invites the reader to put the various documents in conversation with one another.²²

The author of 1 John develops a connection between belief and ethics throughout the epistle, which is presented in various ways. The body of the Epistle²³ begins with the contrast of light and darkness (1:5, also a prominent theme in the Gospel--e.g. John 1). God is light, and those who claim to have fellowship with God must "walk in the light" and "do the truth" (1:6) in order to have fellowship with the congregation (1:7), which is also a fellowship with "the Father and with his son Jesus Christ" (1:3). Those who claim to have this fellowship but walk in darkness and do not do the truth are liars

²¹ Strecker loc. cit.; Schnelle loc. cit.; Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

²² What I will do here is a "final form" analysis of the documents as we have them, but it is my belief that the documents were actually composed in conversation with one another.

²³ I am following Hans-Josef Klauck's breakdown of the epistle's structure around the threefold repetition of the love command (cf. Klauck, pp. 27-28). The three major sections of the epistle body are 1:5-2:17; 2:18-3:24; and 4:1-5:12. My analysis is not dependent on this structure, but it is very helpful for organizational purposes. For an alternative proposal, see Brown, pp. 123ff. Brown proposes that the structure of 1 John is patterned on the structure of the Gospel of John, which he divides into the "Book of signs (chs. 1-12) and the "Book of Glory" (pp. 13-20). The Epistle is then divided into sections pertaining to imitation of the God who is light and the revelation of love.

(1:6). A few verses later, the light imagery is interpreted ethically, but with an epistemic component: “And by this we know that we have known him, whenever we keep his commandments” (2:3).²⁴ Specifically, the author has a commandment in mind that is both old (cf. 2 John) and new. He is alluding to the new commandment Jesus gives the disciples in John 13:34,²⁵ that they should love one another. Violation of this commandment, hating the brother (and note that there is no middle ground offered between loving and hating), is walking blindly in the darkness (2:11). We see that he has linked several sets of oppositions: light/darkness, truth/falsehood, and love/hate. He has mostly used them for ethical purposes in this first section of the body, commending various actions: walking in the light, doing the truth, keeping the love commandment. The whole set of oppositions is developed polemically, against those who claim to be walking in the light, but are not.²⁶

In the second section of the body, when the Elder turns his attention to the antichrists who have come (indeed, have gone out from his own group), he takes up the truth/falsehood opposition again, but this time develops it in terms of belief and confession. “Who is the liar, except for the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” he asks rhetorically in 2:22, and further specifies that “this is the antichrist, the one who

²⁴ My New Testament text is the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th ed. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. Hebrew Bible translations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

²⁵ That the author intends a single commandment, and that it is the love commandment in Jn. 13:34 is persuasively argued by Klauck, based on the chiasmic interweaving of “old” and “new,” as well as the references to love in the preceding and following verses. Hans-Josef Klauck. *Der Erste Johannesbrief*, pp. 120-1.

²⁶ Following Klauck (pp. 116-17), I am interpreting the statements introduced by ὁ λέγων as slogans being imputed to his opponents, possibly ones they actually used.

denies the Father and the Son.” This denial that Jesus is the Christ might be interpreted in at least two ways. It could mean that Jesus of Nazareth is not the promised Messiah of Israel, or it could mean that what was of messianic significance was not the human being Jesus, but the divine “Christ” who somehow shared his existence (perhaps joining him at his baptism and abandoning him at his crucifixion). While the nature of the denial is left open here, it is taken up again in the final section of the body, to which we will turn momentarily (and which gives us good reason to incline toward the later interpretation of this verse). Here, it is sufficient to note that false belief about Jesus is polemicized using the same images that were being interpreted ethically only a moment before. This suggests that the two are closely linked, and that both right action (love of the brother) and right belief (confession of Jesus as Christ) are necessary for the desired fellowship with the Elder and the tradition he represents, and thus with the Son and the Father.

The confessional and ethical threads the author has been developing come together in the third section of the body, where one of the most hostile passages in the Bible (4:1-6) is juxtaposed with one of the most beautiful and profound ever written (4:7-21). The first of these subsections focuses on knowing truth from falsehood, while the second gives the fullest explanation of the love command, and ties it explicitly to the knowledge of God. In both sections, it becomes clear that the confession of Jesus as having come in the flesh and the mutual love that the members of the community are to

have for one another are both tests of one's knowledge of God, and are both necessary conditions for the fellowship of the community with its predecessors from whom it inherits its tradition, and with the Father and the Son.

In the first subsection, the warning against the antichrists is now rephrased as a warning against false prophets, who are animated by lying spirits (4:1).²⁷ These lying spirits are quickly contrasted with the Spirit of God. The spirits may be tested. The idea of testing prophets has its origin in Deuteronomy 13, where no prophet is to be believed, even one who successfully predicts future events, if they instruct the people to worship idols. Here, the test is christological: "By this you know the spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is of God" (4:2). Again, this denial might mean one of two things. It could be taken to mean that Jesus did not have a real body, or that he did have one, but that it was not of salvific significance.

Whichever meaning is intended, the Elder considers it to have destructive effects. John Painter explains:

Clearly for 1 John the human Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Thus to deny Jesus is to deny the Son and to deny the Son is to deny the Father. To have the Son is to have the Father also (2:23). The opponents rejected the identification of the human Jesus with the Christ, the Son of God, the Incarnation, that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2-3). This is to reject the presence of the Son of God, revealing the Father in the human life of Jesus.²⁸

²⁷ This is based on biblical precedent (1 Kings 22:22, Micaiah's vision of a lying spirit who deceives the prophets of Ahab). It is difficult to say whether these are demonic, angelic, or human spirits (cf. Klauck, p. 229). In sharp contrast to the synoptic tradition, there is no other mention of demons or unclean spirits in the Johannine literature, except when Jesus is accused of having a demon (John 7:20; 10:20). These spirits only work through human agents.

²⁸ John Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John (Sacra Pagina 18), Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2008. p. 260.

This is why the opponents merit the title antichrist, which is repeated in the next verse (v. 3). Even though the opponents no doubt consider themselves the heirs of the teaching of Christ, they deny what the author takes to be of decisive significance about Christ, namely, his human life as revealing the love of the Father (which, as will become clear in the next subsection, is the basis of the life of the believing community, and the necessary condition for the mutual love that is to characterize it. To deny the incarnation in one way or another undermines the very reason for the community's existence, as well as the work of Christ and the revelation of God). Therefore, their teaching is "opposed to Christ" or "in place of Christ."²⁹ The opponents are identified with the world (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, v. 5), while the addressees are "of God" (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 6), adding one more set of terms to the dualistic oppositions.³⁰

In the second subsection, we then see how the confessional test is paired with the ethical test, now formulated as love, and that they are in fact two aspects of the same thing. The section begins with the exhortation to the beloved to love one another, for love is of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) (v. 7), thus using one of the terms of the recently developed opposition to connect the section on love with the previous section on discerning the spirits. It goes on to make a second link with the explanation "and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (v. 7b). The connection between knowledge of

²⁹ The preposition ἀντί means both "against" and "in place of."

³⁰ This is not the first usage of these terms. ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου appeared in 2:16, contrasted with ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς.

God and love that has been implicit since 2:3 is now explicit, and becomes even more so when the author goes on to state the inverse in the next verse: "The one who does not love has not known God, for God is love" (v. 8). The "God is" statements in the Johannine literature always have an ethical implication. Because God is light, we are to walk in the light. Because God is spirit (in John 4:24), God therefore ought to be worshipped in spirit and truth. And since God is love, "let us love one another."

The possibility of understanding the love of God and of loving in the way that knowing God's love entails depends on the life of Jesus, and this dependence is such that by denying "Christ Jesus having come in the flesh," the Elder's opponents undercut the possibility of that love. That the life of Jesus is the basis for the mutual love that the author commends becomes clear in verses 9 and 10: "In this, the love of God was revealed among us, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, in order that we might live through him. In this is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent his Son as an expiation for our sins." The love of God is not being considered abstractly, but as it is revealed in the sending of the Son into the world for the life of the community (indeed, the life of the community *through him*). It is explicitly denied in verse 10 that the basis of the love lies in the community itself, but rather in the Son's having been sent as an expiation (ἰλασμός). But the language also makes it clear that the community's love is based on the historical fact of Jesus' life and death, and not merely on love as an eternal divine attribute. In verse 10, where it is affirmed that "he

loved us and gave his Son,” both verbs are in the aorist (ἠγάπησεν and ἀπέστειλεν), meaning that they refer to a single action. The same aorist is repeated in verse 11, when the author spells out the present ethical implications: “Beloved, if God so loved [aorist] us, we also ought to love one another [present: ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν].” The present and ongoing obligation to love is based on the past, concrete action of God having loved, and not on the present or eternal love of God. This accords well with what Jesus says in another document of this same community. When Jesus gives the new commandment in John 13:34, he says “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, so love you one another.” The love enjoined upon the community is in imitation of the love of Jesus, which culminates in his laying down of his life for his disciples, as John 15:12-13 makes clear: “This is my command, that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”³¹

The love that the author has in mind in this song of love is the concrete life and death of Jesus, but the love that the community members are to show for one another is not mere imitation. This is made clear in 1 John 4:12, where the love of the community for one another is the condition for God’s presence among them, and is the means of their access to God: “No one has ever seen God. Whenever we love one another, God

³¹ The Johannine literature is unique in the New Testament in using the language of friendship (cf. 3 John 15). In the Greco-Roman context, friendship is an esteemed relationship of equals. It also implies mutuality and social solidarity. This may be seen in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero’s *On Friendship*. “Neighbor” does not imply any of these things.

abides among us, and his love is perfected in us." When this is read with passages from the Fourth Gospel using similar language kept in mind, there is good reason for thinking that in this community, this language refers to the life and especially the death of Jesus. The phrase "no one has ever seen God" occurs in the Gospel Prologue (1:18), with the only difference being that a different verb is used for "to see" (ὄραω instead of θεάω, though both are in the perfect tense). The Gospel Prologue goes on to say "The one, only-begotten God, in the breast of the Father has made him known [ἐξηγήσατο, lit. "exegeted him"]." The parallel strongly suggests that Jesus is closely linked in the imagination of this community with the presence of God that gives them access to God even though God is not seen. A second parallel with the Gospel that links 1 John 4:12 with the life and death of Jesus has to do with the perfection of love. The word used for "made perfect" is the perfect participle of τελειόω, "make perfect or complete." John 13:1, the verse that introduces the second major section of the Gospel (what R. Brown calls "the book of glory"), reads, "Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour came, that he should cross over out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end [εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς]." The relation of the noun τέλος to the verb τελειόω is obvious. It does mean "end," as it is normally translated here, but it also has the sense of "completion" or "perfection." In the Gospel of John, the perfection and end of Jesus' love is his death. In fact, this verb is his last word: τετέλεσται, "it is finished," as it is usually translated, but also "it is

perfected” or “it is completed.” When 1 John 4:12 says that “God abides in us and his love is perfected in us,” it seems that it is subtly connecting the love that they are to show one another not only to the current presence of God among them, but also to the death of Christ, which though in the past, is somehow made a present reality.

The presence of the now absent Christ is somehow mediated through the Spirit. While it would certainly be a mistake to read 1 John as expounding a Trinitarian doctrine, particularly a Nicene one, the elements that would eventually be interpreted by some Christians in those terms are present here. The presence of the Holy Spirit is connected to the death of Jesus in the Gospel. Jesus introduces the Spirit in John 14:16 as “another Paraclete” (implying that Jesus is also a paraclete, as indeed he is called in 1 John 2:1). He refers to the Paraclete several times in the farewell discourses, saying at one point that if he does not go away, the Paraclete will not be sent (16:7). The Gospel of John does not have a Pentecost narrative like Luke-Acts, but instead records that the risen Christ breathed on his disciples and bade them to receive the Holy Spirit (20:22). However, there is another passage which seems to hint at the giving of the Spirit. We have already discussed the possible significance of Jesus’ last utterance, but we must revisit the moment of his death: “And then when Jesus took the sour wine he said, ‘It is finished.’ And bowing his head, he gave up [παρέδωκεν] the spirit” (19:30). The verb *παράδιδωμι* has multiple meanings. It can mean “give up,” as it is usually translated here, but it also means “hand over” or “hand down” (it is the exact equivalent of the

Latin *tradere*, hence “tradition”). Here, the verse certainly means to indicate Jesus’ death, as the expression “give up the ghost” has come to mean in English. But there is also a very strong case to be made that this is also the Gospel’s way of indicating that the first giving of the Spirit was the moment of Jesus’ death (to the beloved disciple with whom the Johannine community is associated, no less).³² The presence of the Spirit is also linked with Jesus’ glorification in John 7:39. In John’s gospel, Jesus’ glorification refers to his crucifixion, which further confirms the link.

If the flesh of Jesus is denied, whether this denial means that it did not really exist, or that it was insignificant, the basis of the Spirit’s presence in the community and the community’s mutual love would be undermined. There would be nothing for the Spirit to make present. Loving one another as God loved them would, at best, be a matter of deducing how one should behave based on eternal attributes of God, and not of carrying on the presence of God in history and in flesh. It is for this reason that, even though a reading of the flesh of Jesus that downplays its significance (or reality) might be in some sense plausible based on the earlier Johannine tradition,³³ the Elder believes it must be rejected with vehemence. At the risk of using slightly anachronistic language, wrong christology undermines the possibility of correct pneumatology, which

³² This insight is Klauck’s (pp. 252-254, expanded upon in his spring 2010 lecture course at the University of Chicago on *The Three Epistles of John*).

³³ See Brown, *Community*, pp. 113-120. Brown notes that the Gospel seems to relativize or downplay Jesus’ humanity. For example, Jesus seems to claim that he does not need food in 4:32. He displays little emotion, and his oneness with the Father is highly emphasized. Furthermore, John’s Passion account portrays Jesus as largely in control. The cross is his glorious return to the Father. Brown does not think this is the intended meaning of the Gospel, which simply has a different emphasis. But he takes these tendencies in the Gospel as evidence that a group of Johannine Christians might have plausibly held the views which the author of 1 John attributes to his opponents.

undermines the possibility of correct tropology, i.e., the love of the brother.

Let it be noted, however, that in rejecting the opponents' development of tradition, the Elder himself is developing it. Various words clearly mean different things here than in the Gospel. Certain statements in the Gospel have been nuanced or re-evaluated. The most prominent of these is the discussion of prayer near the end of the Epistle. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples, "Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will do for you" (16:23). And then in language that is very similar to 1 John, "Ask and you will receive, in order that your joy may be fulfilled" (16:24). But in 1 John, when a similar promise is made concerning prayer, there is an important difference: "And this is the boldness which we have before him, that whenever we ask anything *according to his will*, he listens to us" (5:14, emphasis added). If the Epistle does indeed follow the Gospel, then this subtle modification may reflect the disappointment of unanswered prayer, perhaps even prayer concerning the author's opponents. A few verses later, after urging his readers to pray for brothers they see committing sins that "are not unto death" so that God may restore life to them, he adds a qualification, "There is a sin unto death. I do not say that you should pray concerning it" (5:16). This narrowing of the scope of prayer may reflect the author's despair over his opponents. It may also have no particular situation in mind, but is simply distinguishing sins which definitively separate the sinner from the community and those which do not, on analogy with capital sins in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. the *ἁμαρτίαν θανατηφόραν* of

Numbers 18:22).³⁴ But this would mean that the author is introducing new language and a new topic in the conclusion of the letter that has no logical connection to the body. More likely, the author refers back to the opponents of the body, and takes the “sin unto death” as the consequence of their severe and persistent lapse which cuts to the heart of the love which is the life of the community.³⁵ This may be an unhappy development, but it is certainly a development. One should perhaps keep open the possibility that praying “according to his will” is a discipline that one slowly cultivates. I will argue for such an ascetic practice in later chapters, though it is difficult to say that any such thing is meant here.

Another important word that is used differently in the Gospel of John and 1 John is “paraclete.” In the Gospel, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a paraclete (specifically, “another paraclete,” leaving open the possibility that he is the first paraclete). In 1 John, it is Jesus who is called the paraclete. When Jesus is the paraclete, the word seems to have more of a legal sense. Schnelle sees the usage in 1 John as invoking a heavenly courtroom in which Jesus is the advocate of the members of the Johannine community before God. He bases this claim on the use of the adjective δίκαιος in 2:1: “And if anyone sins, we have an advocate [παράκλητον] before the Father: Jesus Christ the righteous [Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον]. He notes that in 1:9, δίκαιος was used for God, “*dessen Gerechtheit der*

³⁴ Thus Strecker, p. 203.

³⁵ Klauck, pp. 328-30.

Ungerechtigkeit der Menschen gegenübersteht."³⁶ Schnelle takes this as evidence that the Epistle was written earlier than the Gospel, where the Spirit as the paraclete is an abiding and comforting presence for the suffering believers who leads them into all truth. He is right about the forensic overtones of 1 John, but it does not follow that it was therefore written earlier. If it were written later, in a period of intense contestation with a rival Johannine group, it would be quite understandable that forensic imagery would appeal to the author. The defendant in the trial is not just the individual believer, but the Elder's community and the tradition he represents. This becomes clear when we consider another forensic image, that of the witness. This language becomes particularly important in the fourth chapter: "And we have seen and do bear witness [μαρτυροῦμεν] that the Father has sent his Son into the world as a Savior" (4:14).

Other changes are noticeable as well. Anti-Jewish polemic has largely disappeared from 1 John.³⁷ The prologue has been adapted. Subtle differences in the words and images shift the focus from the pre-existence of the Word with the Father to the origin and continuity of the Johannine community. But if the Epistle prologue is a deliberate allusion to the Gospel prologue, then it underscores the fact that the origin

³⁶ Schnelle, pp. 103-4.

³⁷ This is contested by Terry Griffiths, *Keep Yourself from Idols: A New Look at 1 John* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), who detects anti-Jewish polemic through the text. He downplays the role of the opponents, but sees the material in 5:16-21 as referring to Jewish-Christians who have reverted to Judaism, and the Messiahship of Jesus as being the main point of contention in the letter. He commends his approach as less speculative than approaches that see the opponents as looming rather large in the Epistle, and especially those who seek to reconstruct something of the opponents' position by means of other Johannine and gnostic literature (e.g. Brown). While much of Griffiths' discussion is helpful, his approach is at least as speculative, and he has difficulty accounting for the prologue of the Epistle, which seems to be patterned off of the Gospel (see below).

and ongoing life of the community are grounded in the incarnation of the Word, which would be very consistent with our reading of 1 John 4. Finally, one noteworthy difference for my purposes concerns love in both texts. The noun ἀγάπη is almost completely absent from the Gospel of John (it occurs in 15:9-10), while the verb ἀγαπάω is quite common (mainly in chapters 3 and 13-17). 1 John, on the other hand, contains the extended discussion of ἀγάπη in chapter 4 that we have interpreted above. Love in 1 John is still grounded in the action of loving, especially Jesus' earthly performance of God's eternal loving, but it has also become a subject of theological exploration and contestation whose dynamics within the community can be interrogated.

Furthermore, as the community revised its Gospel at least twice, and maybe three times, development of tradition is clearly not problematic. But at least for the Elder, the driving force behind a valid development seems to be its compatibility with abiding in one another, and in God, in love, which is the presence of the Spirit, making present the historical life and death of Jesus, which was itself the presence of the love of God.

Rootedness and Openness

Three things become clear from this reading of the body (and especially the fourth chapter) of 1 John. First, that love has a definite and concrete content in the Johannine imagination. Second, the definitiveness of love, with its christological grounding, serves as a check on haphazard development of the Johannine tradition. When a Johannine group no longer grounded its life and belief in the human life of

Jesus as the revelation of God's love, they had effectively cut themselves off from the Johannine community. Third, the rootedness of love also authorizes the Johannine community's openness to development, including its eventual integration with the synoptic tradition. This third point merits expansion.

It is clear to all interested parties that the Johannine tradition did in fact develop. First of all, the earliest stage of the Gospel, however it be reconstructed, also reflects a different development of the traditions about Jesus than those represented by the synoptic Gospels, with most scholars holding that the synoptic version more closely reflects the historical Jesus.³⁸ Second, there are the subtle differences in the meanings of various words in the Gospel and Epistle (e.g. ἀρχή, παρακλήτος. The different nuances are addressed above and below in the excursus), and certain striking differences (such as what one is allowed to pray for, the "antichrists" of 1 John, and the polemical tone). Additionally, there is evidence of revision in the Gospel itself. As we have said, most scholars believe it has undergone at least one major revision, and perhaps several more minor revisions. There are differences in Greek style, narrative non sequiturs, repetitions, and passages that seem out of context.³⁹ This has led Brown to posit that a later redactor added major amounts of new material, but interestingly and importantly, he did not remove or change the order of the material that was already there. The new

³⁸ Although some elements of the Fourth Gospel may be quite early. See Brown, *Gospel*, pp. xli-xliii and *Introduction*, pp. 90-114.

³⁹ Brown, *Gospel*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

material stands along the old as an expansion of it. The final chapter seems to be an even later addition, perhaps reflecting the death of the “beloved disciple” figure. This can be argued based on its seeming redundancy. The end of John 20 seems to present itself as a conclusion, but the narrative jarringly resumes in chapter 21. The most likely explanation of this oddity is that the end of chapter 20 was the original conclusion of the work, but that chapter 21 was latter added.⁴⁰

While a cynical reader (Christian or non-Christian) may be inclined to evaluate these developments negatively as the later church putting words in Jesus’ mouth, I believe the Gospel author and redactors’ method of composition respects the insights and way of telling the Jesus story of the redactors’ predecessors in the Johannine community. But while respecting his predecessors, the redactor allows himself and his contemporaries to see more in the story than those who came earlier. This community was clearly not averse to developing its traditions about Jesus, and it would do the contemporary reader (Christian or not) well to allow for the possibility that they did so consciously. If my above reading is correct, the controversy between the author of 1 John and his opponents is not over who has the more original teaching of the community, but over who has the most authentic development.

The community gave an account of why it is able to develop its tradition. We have seen the author of 1 John arguing for his community’s version of the tradition

⁴⁰ Note also the sudden change of setting in chapter 21, which takes place in Galilee.

against that of his rivals on the basis of its rootedness in life of Jesus in a way that allows the Spirit to be present as the love of the members for one another. We have mostly read him negatively, ruling out the other development. But it is also the positive ground for his own development. The Johannine community also gives an account for its ability to be open to new insights in the Farewell Discourses of the Gospel of John, which according to Brown, largely belong to the first major revision. These discourses take love as their major theme, and it is here that the Spirit is introduced.

The presence of the Spirit is backward looking, to a certain extent. It is grounded in and revelatory of Jesus: "But the Advocate [or Paraclete], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). But even as the Holy Spirit points back to the historical life of Jesus, it also points forward. It also reveals the unplumbed depths of the revelation of Jesus, whom John reports as saying:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-15)

The Spirit only reveals Christ, but It reveals more of Christ than was apparent to those who saw him in Galilee. It enables them to understand more and authorizes them to interpret differently because it enables us to love better.

The Johannine tradition, or at least certainly elements of it, was later integrated with the Pauline and synoptic traditions, if only by figures like Irenaeus drawing on both, and its documents eventually being placed in the same New Testament canon.⁴¹ I believe it was the same rootedness and openness in the Johannine understanding of love that let it see more than the synoptic tradition was able to see, but also to be enriched by that tradition. The ascetic theology and practice of exegesis I wish to commend to the church in the following chapters is grounded in this rootedness and openness of love.

Excursus: Reading 1 John in Light of the Gospel of John

This chapter seeks to interpret the development of the Johannine tradition through the lens of a certain moment in its history, that of the document known as 1 John. Certain passages of 1 John, as well as the document as a whole, clearly take on a certain meaning if they are read as explicating the Gospel of John. Assuming that interpretation of the relationship of the documents, I have attempted to use it as a window through which to explore the theological significance of the history of the Johannine community. My central point about the rootedness and openness of love would stand even if the composition history of the documents were construed differently. However, in order to demonstrate the the approach I have taken is legitimate, I will present the principal arguments against reading the Epistle in light of

⁴¹ Though perhaps the integration was occurring by the time chapter 21 was added to the Gospel, as it seems to reflect Petrine leadership.

the Gospel and explain why I do not find them decisive. I will then briefly offer some arguments in favor of my approach. Because we are dealing with the interpretation of minimal historical evidence, no position can be established with certainty. Raymond Brown remarked in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* that he would be pleasantly surprised if even 60% of the theory he painstakingly worked out turned out to be correct.⁴² All of the major academic commentators of the last few decades have been aware of the same evidence and, to a large extent, the arguments in favor of rival interpretations of that evidence. Each of them simply configures the evidence in a different way, and each configuration must ultimately rest on methodological, theological, or even aesthetic assumptions.

On my reading (following Brown and Hans-Josef Klauck), the First Epistle of John is something like a reading guide to the Gospel of John.⁴³ This means that it is written for the sake of advancing one possible interpretation of the Gospel and excluding others. For this reason, some have seen it as a much less rich text, failing to attain the spiritual depth of the narrative. To a certain extent, this must be granted. The Gospel was written to display the glory of the incarnate Word (John 1:15) so that the reader may believe, and through believing, have life in his name (20:31). The Epistles seem to have been written with largely polemical aims in mind. We are warned of

⁴² Brown, *Community*, p. 7.

⁴³ Though not necessarily the Gospel in its final form. Von Wahlde thinks there was a final revision of the Gospel after the Epistles were written, reflecting the eschatological development one sees in the Epistles. (Von Wahlde, pp. 30-33). This would pose no difficulty for the argument I wish to advance, though there are good reasons to think, with Udo Schnelle, that the eschatology of the Epistles is not as different from the Gospel as is commonly asserted.

“antichrists” (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7) who deny central christological claims (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7), abandon the writer and group he addresses (1 John 2:19), do not acknowledge the authority of the elder and those whom he represents (3 John 9) and turn away their emissaries (3 John 10).⁴⁴ Whereas the Gospel seems more concerned with mining the Jesus tradition for its latent possibilities, the Epistles (especially 1 and 2 John) are trying to limit the scope of interpretation and rule out possibilities they take to be illegitimate. For this reason, they may strike one as less profound. Udo Schnelle invokes this lack of profundity in his criticism of the hypothesis that 1 John is a reading guide to the Gospel: *“Als ‘Lesehilfe’ für das Evangelium ist der 1Joh gerade nicht geeignet, denn er weist einerseits zahlreiche Parallelen zum Evangelium auf, andererseits erreicht er aber bei weitem nicht die theologische Vielfalt und Tiefe des Evangeliums.”*⁴⁵ This, along with the fact that 1 John never directly cites or refers to the Gospel, and his opinion that the Gospel has a clear literary structure that does not stand in need of explication, is at the heart of his argument for the priority of 1 John. He marshals several important arguments from the differences in the meanings of key words and images, some of

⁴⁴ Here I am assuming that the three Epistles were written by the same person, and in more or less the same context. This is controversial for a number of reasons. 1 John and 2 John display a number of linguistic and theological similarities, while 3 John is something of an outlier. For example, it has no real theological or christological content, and is the only one of the epistles to name specific people (Gaius, the recipient of the letter, and Diotrephes, his opponent, and Demetrius, whom the Elder recommends to Gaius--vv. 1, 9, 12). While there is almost certainly some relationship between 1 and 2 John, it is hard to rule out imitation, most likely on the part of the author of 1 John, who does not identify himself at all. On my reading, it is clear that whatever the precise relationship of the letters is, an atmosphere of hostility pervades the community at the time of their composition, though Judith Lieu rejects this position, thinking that the polemic language is part of First John’s rhetorical strategy, but not necessarily its historical setting. At most, my position is that Lieu’s argument could suggest that we not take the so-called “slogans” of 1 John as actual positions of the opponents, but the polemic tone is too pervasive--and in too stark a contrast with the themes of joy and love--not to reflect an actual traumatic episode.

⁴⁵ Schnelle, p. 93.

which will be referred to below. He takes these differences to be inexplicable if 1 John had access to the Gospel, because he believes that they would then be a change for the worse, while he would rather see them as an earlier formulation of Johannine theology, which would come to full bloom in the Gospel.

Schnelle's argument is very strong, and it unsettles many of the commonplaces of the last several decades of Johannine studies. But it rests on two assumptions that we have good reasons not to accept. First, he assumes that the richness of a tradition's literature would develop in a linear fashion. But this is not always the case, even when a later writer in a tradition has access to a rich antecedent. For example, Boethius wrote his *De trinitate* a full century after Augustine's work of the same name. It develops Latin trinitarian thought in important ways,⁴⁶ but few readers would call it as rich as Augustine's work. Second, he more fundamentally assumes that 1 John is in fact less rich than the Fourth Gospel. On the one hand, it is hard to dispute that the Gospel of John is a work of unrivaled religious genius.⁴⁷ On the other hand, it must be admitted that the book that gives us "Beloved, let us love another, for love is of God. Whoever claims to know God but does not love lies, for God is love" is rich in its own right. Furthermore, even the generic and grammatical ambiguity of the Epistle which

⁴⁶ For example, by providing a univocal definition for the term *persona*, which Augustine considered a mere term of convenience when applied to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Boethius' definition would be taken up by Aquinas in the parts of the *Summa Theologiae* dealing with the Trinity (see Ia. Q. 29). Note however, that by calling this development important, I do not necessarily endorse it.

⁴⁷ Cf. Brown, cited above: "Yet none of this should prevent the reader from recognizing that the Last Discourse is one of the greatest compositions in religious literature. The one who speaks here speaks as no man has spoken."

frustrates the critic's attempt to produce a definitive interpretation is also a sort of richness. 1 John eludes the reader's grasp. It is a complex, almost living text that will not let itself be boxed in to simple categories or meta-narratives. Reading it is like a spiritual exercise.⁴⁸ One may return to it many times in learning to think the way the author thinks and assimilate his insights into life in God, the love of God, and victory of faith. Moreover, should a reader disagree with any of these assessments of the relative wealth of 1 John (or Boethius), it must be noted that richness is a highly subjective and imprecise category. Our tastes may be anachronistic. What strikes us as a less rich or interesting presentation of the major theological themes of a community might not have struck that community as such.

As for the fact that 1 John never quotes or directly refers to the Gospel of John, this is quite consistent with the author's highly indirect and allusive style. He never refers to anyone by name except for Jesus and Cain, a tendency that 1 John shares with 2 John. Only 3 John refers to anyone directly. As the example of Cain shows in 1 John 3:12, the author has some knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. But he never quotes any text, biblical or otherwise. This does not establish the degree of the author's knowledge of the Hebrew Bible or of the Fourth Gospel, but it does suggest that it is not surprising that he might have knowledge of the Gospel, or even be directly alluding to it, without

⁴⁸ "Spiritual exercise" in Pierre Hadot's sense. See *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995. pp. 81-125. Among Hadot's exercises is "learning how to read" (pp. 101ff.).

ever specifically mentioning it or quoting it. He never quotes anything, and rarely mentions anything or anyone by name.

The other objections to my use of the Gospel of John as the key to what the author of 1 John is talking about would come from those who do not think that the chronology of the Johannine writings can or should be reconstructed. One particularly strong exponent of this way of thinking is Judith Lieu. Lieu notes the anonymity of all of the Johannine writing, but sees it not as a puzzle to be solved, but as a deliberate technique to be respected as central to the texts' meaning. The first task of a commenter, she tells us, is to interpret the text "within its own terms."⁴⁹ When we do so, we see that the anonymity of these texts leads us to see that authority in this community is grounded in shared testimony, rather than in the credibility of a particular eye-witness or those who claim to be the legitimate successors to eye-witnesses.⁵⁰ This approach, which obviously has much to commend it, de-emphasizes not only the role of the Gospel in the interpretation of 1 John, but also of the opponents. On her reading, the inference of a rival party behind the "slogans" of 1 John is unwarranted. Moreover, the author does not seem particularly interested in the thinking of his opponents. He is concerned with the dynamics of his own community.⁵¹ Rather than attempt to look behind the written text to rival communities, we should consider the possibility that the

⁴⁹ Lieu, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Lieu, p. 9.

⁵¹ Lieu, pp. 11-13.

the opponents as well as the anonymous author and recipients of 1 John are part of the fictive setting of the work.⁵²

Prof. Lieu's work is likewise unsettling for anyone who holds to Brown's theory, in however modest a form, and must therefore be taken quite seriously. Should we refrain from drawing connections among various documents in and around the New Testament canon, and take the self-presentation of the authors as part of their rhetorical strategy, rather than something to be clarified, proven, or disproven? This approach certainly has advantages. For example, we can find more interesting insights in or offer more interesting critiques of the deuterio-Pauline or Pastoral Epistles than any inquiry into their "authenticity" has ever yielded. And in the case of the Johannine materials, the goal of any hermeneutic should be to let the other speak for itself as much as possible, without imposing foreign or anachronistic categories, and this is true whether the other is a person or a text. Since these documents do not refer to each other, should we "take each on its own terms" and not seek to interpret them by means of the others? I would very humbly like to suggest that this approach makes two assumptions that a theologically interested reader may not wish to grant. First, this is rather an incomplete arc of the hermeneutic circle. One always arrives at a text with a set of conscious and unconscious assumptions about the text, its relations to other known texts, and the world of which it is a part, which inform the reading and interpretation of that text.

⁵² Lieu, p. 5.

These assumptions can and should be open to revision. Indeed, there would be no point in reading if they were not. But if an ongoing renegotiation of both one's understanding of a text and its context is an integral part of reading and interpreting (and is, to a certain extent, their goal), then it seems like a mistake to refrain from asking about possible connections among the various texts one reads, and what import these connections might have for what a text means. Answers to these questions must always be tentative, and all possibilities should be considered (and in fact, Lieu does this in her commentary). But trying to let a text speak for itself does not necessarily mean taking it in isolation.

Moreover, do the texts in question really ask to be read apart from each other? Lieu is right to caution us against too quick an assumption of dependence on other documents when reading the Johannine material, but the same is true of the assumption that they are unrelated. What seem like allusions to another document might be just that. Both Schnelle and Lieu give some good reasons for their unwillingness to take the prologue of 1 John as an allusion to the Gospel prologue. It is certain that many key images and terms are doing different work in the Epistle than in the Gospel, but it is no more implausible that the author of the Epistle made these subtle changes than that the Gospel author or authors made them. The specific changes include, for example, the subject of the prologues. The Gospel of John specifies that it is about the Logos (1:1) through whom all things were created (1:2), and who becomes flesh (1:14). The subject

of the prologue of 1 John is a neuter, singular relative pronoun with no obvious antecedent. It does not correspond in grammatical gender with the masculine “word of life” (τοῦ λογοῦ τῆς ζωῆς) in verse 1, or the feminine “life” (ζωή) in verse 2, “fellowship” (κοινωνία) in verse 3 or message (ἀγγελία) in verse 5. It is not “in the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ) as in the Gospel prologue (1:1), but rather “from the beginning” (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς). When “from the beginning” is used in John 15:27, it does not refer to eternity or a mythic past, but to the beginning of Jesus’s earthly career. Schnelle concludes from this that the Epistle’s “from the beginning” does not refer to the same eternity or mythical time as the Gospel’s “in the beginning,” but rather to the beginning of the Johannine community.⁵³ Furthermore, it is used in John 8:44 to refer to the devil’s activity “from the beginning,” where it refers to the pre-historical or mythical past, rather than the beginning of the Johannine community.⁵⁴

However, we could grant Schnelle’s interpretation of ὁ and ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς without thereby having to assign the prologue to an earlier stage of Johannine development than the Gospel prologue. The differences may be explained quite simply by the fact that the Epistle is not about the same thing as the Gospel. 1 John does not seek to show how the life of Jesus is an expression of the Word that was with God in the beginning, but rather how the life of the Johannine community is rooted in the life of the Word made flesh, and how (on my reading, based on Brown and Klauck) the author’s opponents who

⁵³ Schnelle, p. 100.

⁵⁴ Cf. Klauck, p. 59.

have left the community and denied key aspects of its rootedness in the life of Christ undermine its christological constitution. This would explain why the author would want to focus on the beginning of the community rather than on the pre-existence of the Word (which his opponents would presumably grant). There is nothing implausible about knowing and assenting to a tradition of pre-existence, perhaps even associated with the word ἀρχή, while choosing at a particular moment to focus on the tradition of the community using a similar phrase. Rhetorically, it is a very effective move, in that it associates one's present utterance with a known authoritative precedent, while actually saying something else. That the two concepts can exist in the same mind is shown by the Gospel of John's use of the phrase ἀπ' ἀρχῆς in 15:27.⁵⁵

If one grants this line of argument so far, then we have reason to regard arguments for the priority of the epistle prologue to (or at least its independence from) the gospel prologue as inconclusive. It remains to be shown whether there is any positive evidence that the Epistle prologue is an allusion to the gospel. Absent any conclusive reason to think the contrary, the remarkable number of very close parallels between the two text makes a very strong case. Klauck displays the most important ones,⁵⁶ noting in particular the use of the imperfect ἦν in association with "the beginning," the use of καὶ to string the elements together, and the first person plural

⁵⁵ Chapter 15 and the prologue in chapter one probably belong to different stages in the Gospel's development, but all that matters for our present purpose is that one of them was placed into a text already containing the other.

⁵⁶ Klauck, pp. 56-58.

verbs, which occur near the end of the Gospel prologue but throughout the Epistle prologue. The fact that elements from both the beginning of the Gospel prologue, which is likely based on an early hymn, and the end of it appear in the Epistle prologue suggests that the allusion is to the Gospel prologue, and not to the hymn. Klauck explains the differences (and in particular, the omitted elements), by differences in length, situation, and genre. “[Der Briefautor] wählt aus, er hebt jene Linien hervor, die ihm in seiner Situation am wichtigsten scheinen, und läßt andere in den Hintergrund treten.”⁵⁷

If the prologue of the Epistle is deliberately patterned off of the prologue of the Gospel, then it rather naturally raises the question of why the author has chosen this opening, with both its similarities and differences. Every retelling is an interpretation, but what is the author’s aim in interpreting the Gospel prologue in this way? I have already suggested that the most compelling explanation is that the author is trying to delimit the scope of legitimate interpretation of the Gospel against a rival trajectory within the Johannine movement, broadly construed. This is Raymond Brown’s thesis, which is developed in several of his books. He has shown that a more docetic understanding of the life of Christ could easily be taken from the Gospel of John, and the prologue in particular would be conducive to such an understanding.⁵⁸ In later formulations of his theory, he did not take the opponents to deny the reality of the Word becoming flesh, but the significance of the life that he lived. The author could not (and

⁵⁷ Klauck, p. 59.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Community*, pp. 93-144; *Epistles*, pp. 86-102.

presumably would not want to) attack the Gospel prologue, so he interpreted it “so as to show that one can understand it properly only if one takes into account the thrust of [the Gospel of John] itself.”⁵⁹ A polemical aim in the prologue is further borne out by the polemical contents of the body of the document, in which a group that the author takes to be schismatics are called worldly antichrists (such a view would be further confirmed if 2 John by the same author as 1 John, though my argument here does not require this).

But what if the polemical content of the Epistle is not polemical after all, or is not polemicizing a rival Johannine group? If this were not the case, there would be less reason to think that the author is defending an interpretation of an established authority such as the Gospel. This view is possible, but I do not think it likely. Judith Lieu notes in support of this opinion that the whole literary context of the document may be only literary and not historical.⁶⁰ It is quite common to write literary epistles whose sender is fictional. Might not the stated recipients also be a fiction? This would seem all the more likely in the case of 1 John, which has no named recipients. Furthermore, Lieu notes that the author shows very little interest in his opponents. His interest seems to be in the dynamics of his own group.⁶¹ It is true that even if the slogans which are often attributed to his opponents are intended as such (as I take them to be), they still tell us very little about those opponents. The takeaway seems to be not that opponents are

⁵⁹ Brown, *Epistles*, p. 181.

⁶⁰ Lieu, p. 5.

⁶¹ Lieu, p. 11.

teaching a certain thing or acting in a certain way, but that certain ways of thinking and acting are spiritually destructive, and his audience should avoid them. Understood in this way, 1 John takes on a very different tone, and the author can be seen in a more flattering light. He is expressing pastoral concern for his readers rather than nursing their and his rancor against an enemy.

But there are several good reasons to take the document polemically. First, it is not the only document we possess from the Johannine movement. We also possess 2 and 3 John, which express similar concerns in similar language. 2 John in particular is concerned with “deceivers” and “antichrists” who “have gone out into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ having come in the flesh” (verse 7). The author warns about what to do if someone “comes to you but does not bear this teaching” (verse 10) in language that suggests it is a distinct possibility that such persons will arrive (it is a simple conditional, with a present indicative verb [ἔρχεται] in the protasis and a present imperative [λαμβάνετε] in the apodosis). We cannot say for certain that 1 John and 2 John were written by the same person, but given the similarity of vocabulary and thought, the likelihood is quite high, even though the brevity of all the documents in question makes a more definitive assessment based on lexical comparison impossible.⁶² Even if they are not by the same person, they are products of the same movement, and possibly the same local community (Lieu believes that 1 John is dependent upon 2

⁶² Brown, *Epistles*, p. 15: “Unfortunately II and III John are so short as to offer inadequate material for making a detailed comparison among the three Epistles, and so no certitude about their authorship is possible. All that one can hope to do is establish probabilities.”

John).⁶³ 3 John is not as similar to 1 John as 2 John is, but it also uses Johannine language to complain to Gaius, its recipient, of a certain “Diotrephes who likes to put himself first,” who does not acknowledge the Elder’s authority in the community (ἐκκλησία) and expels his representatives (verses 9-10). If there is a situation of rival interpretations of doctrine and rival communities in 2 and 3 John, it is fair to read that as the background of 1 John as well (even if other readings are possible). Interestingly, 3 John refers to something that the author has already written to the community (verse 9). The context allows (though does not require) that the “something” in question be 1 John or 2 John. 2 John also links a discussion of the love commandment (vv. 4-6) to “antichrists” and christological confessions (v. 7) like 1 John, except more briefly. Since these two documents are the only ones in the New Testament that use the language of antichrist, and both do so in connection to love and christology, it is fair to ask whether they spring from the same context, if not the same pen. Furthermore, we know of writings that do deny or downplay the fleshly reality of Jesus, even if their relationship to the Johannine community is uncertain, as well as other early Christian writers who were concerned about this trend (the most important being Ignatius of Antioch, who warns the Smyrneans of “partisans of death rather than of truth” who “blaspheme the Lord, not confessing that he bore flesh” [μὴ ὁμολογῶν αὐτὸν σαρκοφόρον]).⁶⁴ The facts that

⁶³ Brown believes that the epistles were written by the same person; Lieu does not. But both agree that the letters are too short to make any definitive determination. See Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 15-19; Lieu, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 5:2. My translation based on the Greek text in ed. Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.

other letters from the same community also portray a picture of conflict between rival authorities and concerns over doctrinal controversies, and that similar controversies are known from other sources, make it reasonable to read 1 John in a polemical light, seeing the recent schism and conflict as central concerns.

In light of this conflict, I believe it is valid to read 1 John as advancing one interpretation of the Johannine tradition against real rivals, with the Gospel of John in the background.

One final objection to reading the text of 1 John as I have, as a document from a particular moment in the life of a community which we may attempt to reconstruct (however tentatively) is an objection to historical-critical study of the sort that produced the hypothesis of a Johannine community. In a *Festschrift* to Raymond Brown, Robert Kysar objects to a positivist epistemology in historical-critical study, including Brown's work (and his own earlier work), as well as a lack of any positive evidence for the existence of a community which produced the various Johannine documents.⁶⁵ Klauck refutes the claim about a lack of evidence in his response (much of which has been touched on above), and also responds to the claim that it is a modern presumption to seek to read a meaning behind the text.⁶⁶ Kysar contends that all readings are ideology-laden, and therefore no attempt to look behind the text can claim to be anything other

⁶⁵ Robert Kysar, "The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community" in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*. ed. John R. Donahue. Collegeville, MN (Liturgical Press, 2005). pp. 65-81.

⁶⁶ Hans-Josef Klauck, "Response [to Robert Kysar]" in *Life in Abundance*, pp. 82-90.

than a statement of the interpreter's ideology. I grant that all readings are informed by explicit or tacit ideologies, but Kysar overreaches when he concludes that a document can no longer be taken as evidence of the circumstances of its composition and preservation which may be interpreted. Klauck rightly suggests that the claims of contemporary historians are much more modest than those of their predecessors, who allegedly sought to establish a single definitive reconstruction of the past. I take this response to be quite adequate to the challenge Kysar offered. But I will return to the issues it raises in my fourth chapter. It is my aim in this project to uphold the value of historical-critical study while re-framing it, such that it will be of more use to those of us whose primary interest in the text is devotional rather than academic, while no longer being liable to the charges of epistemological hegemony.

Chapter 2 Reading the Body of Christ in Augustine

*"If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite."
-William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"*

Everything that exists in God, but human beings live in a state of alienation from God caused by the distortion of the human will, which is the seat of our loving. The soul's disordered love has also distorted the faculty by which human beings know. Rather than knowing and loving God and ourselves and our neighbors as we are known and loved by God, we narcissistically love ourselves and the world as an extension of ourselves. Furthermore, because the possibility of knowing is linked to the possibility of loving, we can have no true knowledge of God, ourselves, or our neighbor. Our relationship to the whole of reality is broken because of our inability to know and love God. Rather than knowing and loving ourselves and all other persons and things as they truly are in God, we relate to them as objects to gratify our distorted desire to possess all things for ourselves. As a result, we know them wrongly, not seeing how each thing is transparent in its own way, opening up to God. It was to mend our broken will and clarify our darkened knowledge that One who shares the very being of God, a Second within God, distinct from the First by virtue of having an origin in the First, and yet sharing everything that the First is so intimately that we cannot say there are two Gods or a greater and a lesser within God, one in whom the whole word was created, became the human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus came to both heal and teach.

Through his healing, we are empowered to participate in the life of God through a Third in God. The Third is the love of the First and the Second, equal to and sharing in the being of the First and the Second, and not just empowering us to love God, but actually being our love, and constituting a community of people who are being healed and taught and being united to Jesus so intimately that they can be said to be his body. Among the gifts that God has given to this community is a book. By learning to read and teach this book in a way that lets us see its words, images, and stories as showing us God, we are trained to see all other words, images, stories, animals, stars, people, and everything else as they are in God, and to love them appropriately. We teach and are taught how to know and love God in all things, and all things in God over the course of our whole lives.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the epistemic rootedness and openness of love. In this chapter, I will begin to build on that foundation by exploring Augustine's theory of biblical exegesis and the theological constellation in which it is set, seeing how this epistemic rootedness and openness becomes exegetical. The discussion will begin with his anthropology and soteriology, in which the Incarnation is central. It will then show that love is exegetically normative because the Incarnation has made it possible for all signs, including the Bible as the book of signs par excellence, to be means of loving and knowing God, which is their purpose. The final section will show how the church as the body of Christ is constituted by the hermeneutical process of teaching

scripture. In effect, I will repeat what was said in the previous paragraph as it emerges from three of Augustine's texts. The reader will forgive me for doing so at much greater length and with a much more technical vocabulary.

As a final preliminary matter, I must introduce the category of ascetic theology. Deriving this term primarily from my Anglican spiritual tradition, I use it to mean theories and practices which aim to facilitate the growth of the Christian and the church in prayer, understood in the deepest sense as communion with God. I understand communion with God to be both the foundation and goal of the whole Christian life. Aspects of this idea of communion with God are often expressed through terms like spirituality, contemplation, *theosis*, and mystic union. I opt for communion because it encompasses all of these, it can mean an individual's inner relationship to God and that of the community, and because it connotes the sacrament of Holy Communion. In this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I explore communion through two of its aspects, love and knowledge. In asking how love and knowledge are to be healed and integrated into the divine life, I am asking how God brings human beings into communion. Ascetic theology assumes that communion is the fruit of the Incarnation. In fact, it is a way of approaching the whole of theology with "the bold and exciting assumption that every truth flowing from the Incarnation, from the entrance of God into

the human world as man, must have its practical lesson. If theology is incarnational, then it must be pastoral.”¹

I opt for the term “ascetic” rather than “mystical” or “contemplative” for several reasons. First, because as I understand and attempt to practice it, theology itself is an ascetic act which seeks not only to help the theologian better understand what gifts God wants to give through the mysteries of the Christian tradition, but to prepare her to receive them and help others to do so. Second, I want to stress its relationship to other ascetic practices such as prayer, liturgical worship, devotional scripture reading, almsgiving, and fasting.² Third, I desire to make it clear that in being ascetic, a theology may still be dogmatic, systematic, constructive, or historical. This dissertation seeks to participate in all of these discourses. Finally, while “mystical” and “contemplative” theology tend to analyze special states attained by some Christians, I am less interested in exceptional experiences than in the theories and practices and the vision of reality of which they are a part. Experiences of the presence of God are not unimportant, but they depend on God’s initiative rather than that of the contemplative. The practices one living the ascetic life must perform are the same whether or not one ever experiences anything she cares to call mystical.

¹ Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology according to the English Pastoral Tradition*. Eugene, OR (Wipf and Stock, 1986). p. 21

² An excellent recent book on the subject is Nathan G. Jennings, *Theology as Ascetic Act: Disciplining Christian Discourse*. New York (Peter Lang, 2010). His introduction (pp. 1-34) relates askesis to the categories of habitus, practice, and spiritual exercises that has taken place in secular humanistic and social scientific disciplines through such thinkers as Foucault, Bourdieu, and Hadot.

I. Anthropology and Incarnation: The Soul's Re-Integration

Like all Christian theologians, Augustine believed that the human being was created *ad imaginem et similitudinem dei*, according to the image and likeness of God. For him, this entailed being created in a relationship with the Triune God, primarily (though not exclusively) involving the immaterial and immortal mind.³ The image of God, he says, is that which “is capable of him and can participate in him; indeed it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image.”⁴ When the mind is in a proper relationship to God, its own powers of memory, understanding, and will are integrated with one another in a unity of operation that is analogous to the persons of the Trinity. The search for the image of God in the human mind and its operations occupies the second half of Augustine’s treatise *The Trinity*, in which he claims to be investigating the same material on the technicalities of the doctrine of the Trinity which occupied the first seven books, but now *in modo interiore*.⁵

While investigating the mind’s knowledge and love of itself in book X, he arrives at memory, intellect, and will as the location of the image of the Trinity by virtue of the fact that the mind always know with certainty that it remembers, understands, and

³ Lewis Ayers, *Augustine and the Trinity*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 2010) explains in pp. 121-144 that from Augustine’s earliest works, he shared the commonplace belief that the world is fundamentally intelligible and that the mind is the highest part of the human being. The mind as *apex mundi* is a natural place to look for the way from creation to God.

⁴ De trinitate, CCCM 50-50a (cited hereafter as De trin.), XIV.8.11. Cited in translation as Edmund Hill O.P. (tr.) *The Trinity* (Works of Saint Augustine I/5). Hyde Park, NY (New City Press, 1991), p. 379: Eo quippe ipso imago eius est quo eius capax est eiusque esse particeps potest, quod tam magnum bonum nisi per hoc quod imago eius est non potest.

⁵ De trin. VIII.x.1, Hill p. 242

wills, a knowledge which he takes to entail that these operations are intrinsic to the mind in a way that anything about itself that it does not know with certainty is not (for example, what material it is made of, if any).⁶ Furthermore, these three activities of the mind parallel the relations of the persons of the Trinity (they are distinguishable in their activities but always act together; they are distinguishable by their relations to one another, but each is equal to the whole mind).⁷

However, the analogy between memory, understanding, and will, on the one side, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on the other, though once widely believed to be Augustine's main contribution to Trinitarian theology,⁸ is almost incidental to his actual purpose. *The Trinity* is a speculative treatise, but not in the sense of venturing to explain matters beyond available evidence (and often matters taken to be of no great importance to the life of people who have to go to work on Monday morning). It is speculative in the older and more literal sense of the word, seeking to gaze upon God in a mirror (*speculum*), in preparation for seeing face-to-face. Its goal is not to convince the reader of the truth of the doctrine (which at any rate, cannot be understood unless it is

⁶ De trin. X.x.16-xi.17, Hill pp. 297-298

⁷ De trin. X.xi.18

⁸ De Régnon set up the paradigm of Eastern theology, typified by the Cappadocians, which began with the activities of the three Persons and attempted to show that they are one substance, while Western theology, typified by Augustine, began with the one substance and showed that it had a threefold activity. George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Augustine and the Orthodox: 'The West' in the East" in their edited volume *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, Crestwood, NY (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), pp. 11-40, summarizes and critiques the trend in 20th century Greek theology of seeing Augustine as understanding the Trinity as intellectual activity, causing him to prioritize the essence of God over the activities.

first believed),⁹ but to be a therapeutic exercise for the believer, whose soul is being restored to its proper relationship to God through the healing and integration of its faculties in the healing bond of the church.

Though Augustine seeks and eventually finds the image of God in the interrelated faculties of memory, understanding, and will (with will being identified with love), he initially seeks them in the love of the just person and the love of the neighbor, arguing that both entail the love of God, especially the latter. The love of the just person is ultimately the love of God because, on Augustine's account, what one loves in loving this person is justice itself, which is in God.¹⁰ The love of the neighbor is explicitly the love of the Trinity, because "God is love," which Augustine takes as a literal equation, so that God is present in the love of the neighbor, and the triad of lover, beloved, and love itself are an image of the Trinity. In order to "quaff something purer and more limpid,"¹¹ he then spends books IX-XIV looking for the image of the Trinity in the mind's own faculties and processes, without reference to any other person. What he finds in the mind's memory, understanding, and will is not the image of God in their relations to one another, but in their relation to God. The human being becomes the image of God in loving and knowing God, and loving and knowing oneself as loved and known by God. Even in the turn inward in books IX-XIV, what is sought (and

⁹ See, eg., *De trin.* I.i.1; VII.vi.12

¹⁰ *De trin.* VIII.vi.9

¹¹ *De trin.* VIII.x.14, Hill p. 255: ...sed ut aliud purius et liquidius hauriamus...

found) is a relationship. This is because God is the good blessedness of the soul, so that in loving and knowing itself perfectly, it will love and know itself loving God. The relationship of the human being to God is even taken to be intrinsic to the soul.¹²

The disintegration of the harmonious operations of affection and intellect is not due simply to the lower faculties ceasing to be ruled by the higher, but to the disorder of both affectivity and intellect. As I will show in the remainder of this section, the knowing and loving activities of the human mind are related in such a way that the disorder of one entails the disorder of the other. Likewise, the healing of one entails the healing of the other, such that the salvation of Christ and life in the church must restore both of them, so that the whole mind can know and love God in all things, and all things in God. In order to understand how we are to reach that happy state, we must see what Augustine has to say about love and its role in knowing.

We begin with love. What is love? Why is it sometimes called love, sometimes will, and sometimes desire? For Augustine, these are all aspects of the same activity of the mind, and the fact that we often experience them as different and in conflict is a result of the fall. Love is an activity of willing for Augustine. In *On the Trinity*, will is introduced in book IX, when Augustine shifts from his discussion of the mental triad of the mind, its self-knowledge, and its self-love to the triad of memory, understanding, and will, which he explains in detail in book X, and where he locates the image of God

¹² De trin. XIV.xiv.18, Hill p. 384-5

in book XIV. In discussing why the mind's love of itself should not be called "begotten" in the way that he has been describing its knowledge of itself (on analogy with the begetting of the Word by the Father, which has been the main occupation of the book), he says that knowledge is begotten by the mind's appetite for learning (*appetitus inueniendi*). He stops short of calling the appetite love, since the thing it would love is not yet known. He prefers to call it will instead: "This appetite, that is inquisitiveness, does not indeed appear to be the love with which what is known is loved (this is still busy getting known), but it is something of the same kind. It can already be called will, because everyone who inquires wants to find out..."¹³ Will to know becomes love of the thing known when knowledge is acquired.¹⁴

However, other passages in *On the Trinity* (as well as other works of Augustine, for example, the *Homilies on First John*, to which we shall turn below) suggest that the distinction between will and love may not be quite as clear-cut as the passage seems to indicate. Love is described not only in terms of will, but also as desire. In the very same book, Augustine describes worship as "the love of him by which we now desire to see him, and believe and hope that we will see him?"¹⁵ In book VIII of the same work, he says that love is "a kind of life coupling or trying [*appetens*] to couple together two

¹³ De trin. IX.xii.18, CCCM 50, Hill p. 281-2: Qui appetitus, id est inquisitio, quamuis amor esse non uideatur quo id quod notum est amatur (hoc enim adhuc ut cognoscatur agitur), tamen ex eodem genera quiddam est. Nam voluntas iam dici potest quia omnis qui quaerit inuenire uult...

¹⁴ Idem. Idemque appetitus quo inhiatur rei cognoscendae fit amor cognitae dum tenet atque amplectitur placitam prolem, id est notitiam gignentique coniungit.

¹⁵ De trin. XII.?.22, Hill p. 334: Et quis cultus eius nisi amor eius quo nunc desideramus eum uidere credimusque et speramus nos esse uisuros...?

things, namely lover and what is being loved.”¹⁶ Hill’s translation of *appetens* as “trying” is not inappropriate, but he might also have opted for “desiring,” or even “desiring passionately.”

Any contradiction between describing love as volition and as desire is only apparent. It may be partly dispelled by recalling that the Latin *velle* has a slightly different range of meaning than the English “to will.” Like the German *wollen* or the French *vouloir*, it indicates something between a desire and an intention. Peter Burnell holds that the appearance is dispelled entirely in the light of Augustine’s theory of emotion, which is developed most fully in *City of God* XIV. There, emotions are essentially acts of will. They can be rightly ordered or not, though note that “a good general volitional state is compatible with a wide variety of emotions because different circumstances appropriately call for different volitional responses.”¹⁷ Burnell’s reading of *City of God* XIV seems to be on solid ground. That book is mainly concerned with showing that the source of evil is not the body or matter, but the soul, and the will in particular. Augustine discusses the emotions in order to refute Stoic beliefs that they would be absent in the purified will, since they held them to be linked to false beliefs. Augustine, however, held that what made an emotion good or bad was the will. “The

¹⁶ De trin. VIII.10.4, Hill p. 255: quid est ergo amor nisi quaedam uita duo aliqua copulans uel copulari appetens, amantem scilicet et quod amatur?

¹⁷ Ibid.

will is engaged in all of them; in fact, they are essentially acts of will.”¹⁸ He names the four classic emotions (*cupiditas, laetitia, metus, tristitia*), and analyses each of them in terms of the will’s disposal to a present or anticipated reality.¹⁹ Hence Burnell’s point that if desire is an emotion, and emotion and volition are the same for Augustine, then there is no conflict between love as will and love as desire.

James Wetzel does not go as far as Burnell in identifying emotion (and thus, desire) with volition, but he likewise downplays the significance of the will as an independent faculty or activity for Augustine.²⁰ Wetzel’s main concern is to show that Augustine’s later doctrine of grace is not a rejection of his earlier Platonism, but an enhancement of it. Unlike for most Platonists, knowledge of the Good lacks sufficient motivating power to determine choice for Augustine. Augustine’s discovery of the will is a discovery of a will at odds with itself. Wetzel insists that the will is not separate from desire, as opposed to what he calls a Pelagian account of the will,²¹ in which the will must choose between identifying itself with knowledge of the good instead of habitual desire for evil (and is free to do so), While knowledge exerts some pull on

¹⁸ City of God XIV.6. CCSL 48. (hereafter DCD) Cited in translation as City of God. tr. Henry Bettenson. London: Penguin 2003.: *Voluntas est quippe in omnibus; immo omnes nihil aliud quam uoluntates sunt.* / Bettenson p. 555

¹⁹Idem: *Sed cum consentimus appetendo ea quae uolumus, cupiditas; cum autem consentimus fruendo his quae uolumus, laetitia uocatur. item que cum dissentimus ab eo quod accidere nolumus, talis uoluntas metus est; cum autem dissentimus ab eo quod nolentibus accidit, talis uoluntas tristitia est.*

²⁰ James Wetzel. *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

²¹ Because “Pelagianism” is largely a construction of Augustine’s, I choose to bracket the question of whether this adequately reflects the view of Pelagius, Julian of Eclanum, or any other supporter of Pelagius or opponent of Augustine on the matter of grace and free will.

desire, that pull cannot overcome the desire of habit. It is only through God's irresistible grace that we can both know and desire the Good, which is God.

The distinction between desire and will for Augustine is explained by John Rist by emphasizing the role of habit in Augustine's understanding of willing.²² We assent to desires, which become compulsions through force of habit, causing us to assent to them more easily in the future. According to Rist, the will is the set of habitual assents to desires, or the set of "accepted" desires: "From desires and loves strengthened by the constant series of assents promoted by habit and easy familiarity arises what we may call a cast of mind, a mind-set, or, in the traditional but ambivalent term, our 'will.' The Latin is *voluntas*, and *voluntas* is a love which has been accepted or consented to." Desire becomes will when it is consciously accepted, such that will consists of desires, and is not a separate faculty by which one adjudicates among them.

Love, then, encompasses what in contemporary language is called volition and emotion, which are two aspects of the same activity of the soul. We must now see how love works in generating knowledge. Knowledge is never neutral for Augustine, but always involves love. The interrelatedness of knowledge and love, and then of will and understanding, is explained in books IX and X of *The Trinity*. He establishes that nothing can be loved unless it is known, and nothing can be known unless it is loved (the knowledge and love of God is a special case, though not an exception). That nothing can

²² John M. Rist. *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 1994). p. 176-7

be loved without being known is fairly axiomatic for Augustine. That nothing can be known that is not loved requires more argument. In book IX, Augustine explains that knowledge is begotten by appetite for learning (*appetitus inueniendi*). In book X, he explains in more detail that the acquisition of new knowledge is always driven by the love of something that is already known, though this may be of any number of kinds. One may have general knowledge and desire something more specific, one may perceive something “in the form of everlasting reason” and love some unknown but reported expression of it, or one may seek new knowledge because of love of something already known (as, for example, when I seek the meaning of a word I do not know out of love of language, which I do know).²³ He shows how in any act of knowing--and especially in self-knowing--memory, understanding, and will are all involved, and that each may be called certain things (substance, life) with respect to itself, but can only be called by memory, understanding, or will with respect to the other two, and that while each is equivalent to the substance of the mind, they are not reducible to each other. So there is no knowing that does not involve the willing and desiring faculty, just as there is no loving that does not involve understanding. Even when he discusses the acquisition of sense knowledge in book XI, will is necessary as the attention that joins the perceiver and the object.²⁴

²³ De trin X.2.4 ...in specie sempiternae rationis...

²⁴ De trin XI.ii.2-4

Because love is always involved in the generation of knowledge, disordered love leads to disordered knowledge, and the two reinforce one another. The deformation of the loving and willing faculty is memorably explored in Augustine's *Confessions*. In the narrative context of having already become convinced of the truth of the Christian gospel, but unable to make the decision to break with his previous way of life, be baptized, and join those who "for the soul's health had given themselves wholly over to you for healing,"²⁵ which for reasons which must be passed over here, he took to involve a life of continence in his own case. He tells us that, somewhat counter-intuitively, his will was the cause of its own bondage.

The enemy had a grip on my will and so made a chain for me to hold me a prisoner. The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links, as it were, connected one to another (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint.²⁶

The will, as we said above, is not a separate faculty by which we adjudicate different desires, but rather consists of those desires with which he have identified ourselves through the force of habit which has become compulsion. It is a willed unfreedom, to which the will has assented and continues to assent. "The law of sin is the violence of habit by which even the unwilling mind is dragged down and held, as it deserves to be,

²⁵ Confessionorum libri XIII (hereafter Conf.) VIII.vii.17. Cited in translation as *Confessions*. tr. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. p. 145: ...quod se totos tibi sanandos dederant...

²⁶ Conf. VIII.v.10, Chadwick p. 140: Velle meum tenebat inimicus et inde mihi catenam fecerat et constrinxerat me. Quippe ex uoluntate peruersa facta est libido, et dum seruitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas. Quibus quasi ansulis sibimet innexis--unde catenam appelaui--tenebat me obstrictum dura seruitus.

since by its own choice it slipped into the habit."²⁷ The will's consent is far more subtle a thing than one is usually aware of, so much so that one may not become aware of a temptation until one is already consenting to it.²⁸ Even something as harmless or even good as eating, delighting in the light, or listening to the psalms chanted can be an occasion for the will's subtle consent to delight in the creature more than in the creator, and even in the resistance of one temptation, one may consent to another. This, I believe, is one of the lessons of Augustine's inventory of his own temptations and vices in *Confessions* X.xxx.41-X.xxxviii.63.

His treatment of music is particularly instructive, because it shows us what is fundamentally wrong with distorted will and desire (namely, that it limits what the objects of desire can convey to the one who desires them). He holds music in high regard, saying that when hearing the psalms sung in church, he is often particularly moved to piety, and commends the ability of music to express every emotion. And yet, his delight in music is also a temptation: "But my physical delight, which has to be checked from enervating the mind, often deceives me when the perception of the senses is unaccompanied by reason...So in these matters I sin unawares, and only afterwards become aware of it."²⁹ I confess myself to be among the foremost of those contemporary

²⁷ Conf. VIII.v.12. Lex enim peccati est uiolentia consuetudinis, qua trahitur et tenetur etiam inuitus animus eo merito, quo in eam uolens inlabitur. Chadwick p. 141:

²⁸ See Augustine's discussion of the love of light in X.xxiv.51, Chadwick p. 209.

²⁹ Conf. X.xxxiii.49, Chadwick p. 208: Sed delectatio carnis meae, cui mentem eneruandam non oportet dari, saepe me fallit, dum rationi sensus non ita comitatur...Ita in his pecco non sentiens et postea sentio.

readers who struggle with Augustine's understanding of physical pleasure here, and even more so in his treatment of eating, finding it to be problematically ambivalent, though not ultimately anti-corporeal.³⁰ But Augustine's concern here is not with enjoying beauty, but with missing the true beauty of music. When desired rightly, the beauty of all creation reveals its createdness (and potentially, its creator). What Augustine regrets is "when it happens to me that the music moves me more than the subject of the song" (i.e. God).³¹ Deformed will (or desire or love) actually limits the enjoyment³² of music's beauty by confining it to the listener's physical enjoyment. If heard and appreciated correctly, the listener could enjoy the beauty of God in the beauty of the music. It is important to note that in the same paragraph, Augustine says that being overly severe in one's regulation of music in church so as not to get carried away also has the effect of blocking its ability to move the listener to God.

From the disorder of love, we now turn to the disorder of knowledge. There is an interplay between disordered love and disordered knowledge in the generation of false knowledge and the stirring up of destructive desires. The role of desire in the production and maintenance of false knowledge is explained in book X of *The Trinity*. In examining the operations of the way in which human knowledge and love can reveal

³⁰ For an excellent treatment of bodies, beauty, and pleasure in Augustine, see Margaret R. Miles, "Facies ad faciem: Visuality, Desire, and the Discourse of the Other" in her *Re-reading Historical Theology: Before, During, and After Augustine*. Eugene, OR (Cascade Books, 2008). pp. 3-19.

³¹ Conf. X.xxxiii.50, Chadwick p. 208

³² "Enjoyment" is being used in its normal sense, not in the technical sense Augustine develops in *On Christian Teaching*, which will be discussed below.

something of the divine Trinity, he attempts to refute materialist accounts of the mind, and also to explain their source. The refutation is based on the mind's self-knowledge (evident since it understands the command "know thyself"). Augustine argues that it could not know itself if it did not know its own substance. Since it does not know itself to be any material substance or arrangement of material substances, but does know itself to remember, to understand, and to will, he concludes that these activities are essential to it in a way that no material is.³³ An evaluation of this argument is not important for our present inquiry. More important is his account of how materialistic understandings of the soul come to be in the first place. They have their root not in misinformation (or the wrong interpretation of data), so much as in the willing or desiring faculty. Augustine gives a fairly succinct account in X.5.7: rather than reposing in God, the mind wants to possess the things for itself that it perceives in God, "and rather than be like him by his gift [*ex eo*] it wants to be what he is by its own right. So it turns away from him and slithers and slides down into less and less, which is imagined to be more and more; it can find satisfaction neither in itself nor in anything else as it gets further away from him who alone can satisfy it."³⁴ In this inherently unstable state, the mind fixates on the restless pleasures [*inquietas dilectiones*] of its own activities and

³³ De trin. X.vii.10-x.16. For an excellent treatment of self-knowledge in De trin, see Rowan Williams, "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De trinitate*" in *Collectanea Augustiniana*. eds. Joseph T. Leinhard, Earl C. Muller, and Ronald J. Teske. New York (Peter Lang, 1993).

³⁴ De trin. X.5.7: *uolens ea sibi tribuere et non ex illo similis illius sed ex se ipsa esse quod ille est auertitur ab eo, mouetur que et labitur in minus et minus quod putatur amplius et amplius quia nec ipsa sibi nec ei quidquam sufficit recedenti ab illo qui solus sufficit*. Hill's translation of *ex eo* as "by his gift" is unfortunate, since gift is the technical name for the Holy Spirit. While it is the Holy Spirit who enables the soul to rest in God, that is not what Augustine is emphasizing at this point.

on a possessive knowledge of external objects [*cupiditate acquirendi notitias ex his quae foris sunt*]. The love with which it fixates on these objects carries it away from both God and a true understanding of itself and attaches it to them “with the glue of care” [*glutino curae*], such that it confuses its own nature with theirs. The deformation of knowledge happens along lines very similar to the deformation of affection. Because it is not tending toward rest in God (note the adjective *inquietus*, with which the reader may be familiar from the *Confessions’ cor inquietus*), it finds itself moving toward misery and instability, a motion which it cannot stop or change by force of will (since, as before, the will is the problem). Here we see that the disorder of the will is also a disorder of knowledge.

Instead of knowing itself as opening up to God, being as it is the image of God and capable of participating in God, the mind comes to know itself wrongly as something material. It regards material things as ends in themselves rather than means of knowing and loving God. “If it does this [i.e., reasoning about bodily things] well, it does it in order to refer them to the highest good as their end; if badly, in order to enjoy them as goods of a sort it can take its ease in with illusory happiness.”³⁵ The loss of a human being’s proper relation to God also entails a loss of its proper relation to the whole world, loving the things in it as ends in themselves (or more accurately, in one’s own self) rather than means to God, and thereby loving and knowing them as less than

³⁵ De trin. XII.xii.17, Hill pp. 331-2: si bene ut eam notitiam referat ad finem summi boni; si autem male ut eis fruatur tamquam bonis talibus in quibus falsa beatitudine conquiescat.

what they are (just as she loves and knows herself as less than what she really is).

Ironically, by narcissistically referring all things to herself, she goes from sharing in the whole of reality to futilely clenching her fist around a tiny part of it.

“By following God’s directions and being perfectly governed by his laws [the soul] could enjoy the whole universe of creation; but by the apostasy of pride which is called the beginning of sin it strives to grab something more than the whole and to govern by its own laws; and because there is nothing more than the whole it is thrust back into anxiety over a part, and so by being greedy for more it gets less...In this way it defiles itself foully with a fanciful sort of fornication by referring all its business to one or other of the following ends: curiosity, searching for bodily and temporal experience through the senses; swollen conceit, affecting to be above other souls which are given over to their senses; or carnal pleasure, plunging itself into this muddy whirlpool.”³⁶

For Augustine, a materialist way of knowing the soul, the universe, or even God is both generated by and productive of an incomplete way of loving them. Rather than knowing all things as revelatory of God in the unity, totality, and beauty of God’s creation and loving them in God, I know and love them, not even as ends in themselves, but as ends in myself, and I find the universe God has created deficient as a way to satisfy my own desires. The same is true for whatever knowledge of God I can have. In Augustine’s former materialist, Manichean doctrine of God, God is known and related to as an object in the world, which like all other objects, is there for me to desire or not.

In the philosophical parlance of our times, this is an “ontotheological” way of knowing

³⁶ De trin. XII.ix.14, Hill p. 330:...cum in uniuersitate creaturae deum rectorem secuta legibus eius optime gubernari potuisset, plus aliquid uniuerso appetens atque id sua lege gubernare molita, quia nihil est amplius uniuersitate, in curam partilem truditur et sic aliquid amplius concupiscendo minuitur...et phantistica fornicatione turpiter inquinatur omnia officia sua ad eos fines referens quibus curiose corporalia ac temporalia per corporis sensus quaerit, aut tumido fastu aliis animis corporeis sensibus deditus esse affectat excelsior, aut coenoso gurgite carnalis uoluptatis immergitur.

and relating to God, or an “I-it” relationship. In the language of piety, it is idolatry. As Jean-Luc Marion puts it, “The good, as soon as it is possessed, loses by definition the divine infinity and assumes the measure of its possessor, finiteness. The good evaporates precisely because it finds itself possessed, therefore finally lost...This is the law of idolatry: I always become what I intend and possess; if I intend less than God, I will become less than him, *therefore less than myself.*”³⁷

The theory of the mutually reinforcing disorders of desire and knowledge that is developed in *On the Trinity* is illustrated narratively in the *Confessions*, where the false materialism into which the mind falls through its habitual, acquisitive love of the material is (like disordered affection) an impediment to the quest for conversion and the contemplation of God in wisdom. A common thread of the Manichaeism that Augustine opposed early in his career as a catholic writer and the Pelagianism he opposed later is that error was caused by ignorance.³⁸ On that account, correct knowledge of oneself and of the universe would free one to live rightly. But as Augustine narrates his own conversion (as when he theorizes the interrelatedness of mental activities), we see that

³⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. tr. Jeffery L. Kosky. Stanford (Stanford University Press, 2012). p. 124.

³⁸ Pelagius, a British monk, objected to Augustine's characterization of the church as a hospital for recovering sinners and the Christian life as a continuing struggle with sin, even after baptism. This famously led to the development of competing anthropologies, Augustine's emphasizing the congenital nature of sin inherited from Adam and Eve such that even infants were in need of the regeneration of baptism, while Pelagius denied any such thing. Pelagius, and Julian of Eclanum after him, thought that Augustine's ideas about the sinful corruption of human nature were a lapse back into Manichaeism, making evil a substance opposed to God and outside of God's control. They had a higher estimation of human nature, believing that a sinless life was possible and therefore obligatory for the true Christian. The purpose of baptism was merely to wash away the actual sins that a person had committed beforehand. Because the life they took as mandatory was possible for only a few, Christianity became an elite affair. For Augustine, both the church and the Christian individual are still “mixed” with the world and in need of healing. See Peter Brown, *Augustine: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. pp. 340-54.

disordered desire cannot be cured simply by correcting false opinion, because the disordered desire is involved in the generation of the opinion. Book VII of the *Confessions* relates how Augustine came to be perplexed by certain aporias concerning the nature of God that his materialist philosophy entailed. He was especially disturbed by its inability to account for the origin of evil. He is convinced by the books of the Platonists that God (like his own soul) is spiritual rather than material, and that evil is privative. But his attempt at neo-platonic contemplation is a failure, and he is thrown back into the “region of dissimilarity.” God pronounces this verdict on Augustine’s contemplative attempt: “I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me.”³⁹ Augustine would later explain in *On the Trinity* that the acquisitive, materialist soul tries to bring foreign material objects into itself. Here in the *Confessions*, he has tried to bring God into himself in the same possessive, materialist manner, and has been rebuffed. In processing why his intellectual quest for God failed, he diagnoses his earlier dualism and materialism as merely symptomatic of a disease. It was illness that caused him to be displeased with the totality of creation because of the evil in it, when he should have seen the totality as God’s handiwork, in which evil has no real existence. Fearing to impute evil to God, he believed instead in a duality of substances, or a god of infinitely extended matter. The associated aporias were resolved by his

³⁹ Conf. VIII.10.16: cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me.

readings in neoplatonism which cleared the way for his conversion, but could not accomplish it. When God refused to let Augustine “turn me into you,” God was refusing to be known and loved in the acquisitive, objectifying, idolatrous way to which Augustine’s habit was still bound, even after he had accepted a non-materialist, Platonic understanding of the world.

As a Christian writer and bishop, he would guide his reader through a neoplatonic ascent in *On the Trinity*, in which the reader would proceed from the contemplation of external things (sense perception in book XI), to internal things (the mind’s knowledge of temporal things in books XII and XIII), to the mind’s knowledge of God (book XIV). The goal would seem to be to ascend from that which is internal to the intellect to that which is above it, which should be possible according to a neoplatonic scheme in which the universe is fundamentally intelligible and the mind is the highest part of a human being (and all the more so if the world is created in the Word).⁴⁰ However, the guided ascent in *On the Trinity* also ends in failure. John Cavadini calls it a deliberate failure, and argues that the whole book is structured around it.⁴¹ We learn from the failure of the ascent that the sought-after contemplation of the Trinity is not gained from subtracting the material from our thoughts about God, but through the humanity of Christ and the salvation he works in the soul through

⁴⁰ Lewis Ayres demonstrates that this sort of Christian platonism was well established in Latin-speaking Christian intellectual circles by the time Augustine encountered it. *Trinity*, pp. 11-92

⁴¹ Cavadini, John. “The Structure and Intention of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 103–23.

faith. This is not so much a repudiation of the neoplatonic tradition, but “a modified understanding of the possibilities offered by the Platonists.”⁴² The contemplation of God as Trinity is the goal of the Christian life, but the disorder of the intellect that we have described prevents this.

The cure for the disorder of the intellect is the same as the cure for the disorder of the will: Jesus Christ, who is both doctor and medicine. Unusually for a 4th and 5th century Christian thinker of his stature, Augustine never devoted a book or treatise to the Incarnation. This is not because he does not have an understanding of the Incarnation, nor because it is unimportant. Rather, the Incarnation is everywhere in his work. It is perhaps most prominent in some of his sermons (for instance, those on 1 John, to which we shall soon turn), but it is a central theme in the *Confessions*, *On Christian Teaching*, and *On the Trinity*. The most prominent description of the work of Christ in Augustine is that of Mediator between God and humanity. Though primarily interested in Augustine’s relation to Chalcedonian and post-Chalcedonian Christology, Brian Daley explains Augustine’s Christology in very useful terms. He describes the role of Christ as having two elements, which I will call passive and active.⁴³ The passive role (or “metaphysical” role, to use Daley’s terminology) is that Jesus is the revelatory point of contact between the transcendent God and created reality. God is immaterial

⁴² Ayers, *Trinity*, 133

⁴³ Brian Daley, “A Humble Mediator: The Distinctive Elements in Saint Augustine’s Christology.” *Word and Spirit* 11 (1987), pp. 100-117.

spirit. A human being is a union of an immaterial substance with a material one, but our experience, perception, and reasoning is dominated by the material substance, the body. The spiritual substance, the soul, is also twisted by pride, and thus affords us no access to the divinity, the contemplation of which is our purpose and sole beatitude. However, the humanity of Christ affords us access to the divinity of the Word, and thus of the Triune God. As book IV of *On the Trinity* makes clear, the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit make their eternal and invisible processions visible in time. Furthermore, because the being of God is love, the love of the three persons of the Trinity in which the Father begets the Son and the Holy Spirit is the loving communion of the Two, it is the Incarnation that reveals the nature of love. But Jesus does not just make information available concerning the processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The active aspect of his role as Mediator is to sufficiently heal the soul so that it can come to his divinity through his humanity. Augustine was “not humble enough for the humble Christ”⁴⁴ until he was enabled by grace to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Conf. VIII.12.29), which James Wetzel rightly interprets as putting on his flesh, letting his own humanity be healed by Christ's humanity.⁴⁵ As he tells God at the outset of the Confessions, he is called back to rest in God “by the *humanity of your Son* and the ministry of your preacher.”⁴⁶ Even in the first book of *On the Trinity*, when Augustine develops an

⁴⁴ Conf. VII.18.24: non enim tenebam deum meum iesum humilis humilem...

⁴⁵ Wetzel, James. “Augustine on the Will,” In *A Companion to Augustine*, edited by Mark Vessey, 339–52. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

⁴⁶ Conf. I.1.1, Italics mine: ...quam inspirasti mihi per humanitatem filii tui, per ministerium praedicatoris tui.

exegetical rule for reading scriptural statements about Christ as sometimes referring to the “form of God” and sometimes to the “form of a servant” (that is, sometimes to his divinity and sometimes to his incarnate humanity), it is clear that the latter has become the point of access to the former. As Ayers explains, this is not just a rule for distinguishing and harmonizing two kinds of texts, but one “implying and revealing a comprehensive conception of what it means to read Scripture at this point in the life of faith, at a point when we should seek to see what is said and done in *forma servi* as a drawing of our desires and intellects towards the *forma Dei* that will remain hidden until the eschaton.”⁴⁷ Rowan Williams explains that “By incarnation, death, and resurrection, the Word creates a relation between himself and the human race that brings all human experience within the scope of healing and restoration. The Word animates the particular soul and body that is Jesus, and in so embracing *this* human nature becomes the animating principle of any and every human identity associated with him by baptismal incorporation and the gift of the Spirit.”⁴⁸

But the salutary possibilities afforded by the Incarnation can only be realized through application of the medicine. Life in Christ becomes a treatment for sin, characterized by exercises prescribed by the Physician. Knowledge must learn to see divinity in the humanity of Jesus, just as affection must learn to love it. The activity

⁴⁷ Ayers, *Trinity*, 146-7

⁴⁸ Rowan Williams, “Augustine’s Christology: Its Spirituality and Rhetoric” in *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in Honor of Brian E. Daley, S.J.*, Peter W. Martens (ed.). Notre Dame, IN (Notre Dame University Press, 2008). p. 181

which trains the intellect to see God in Jesus (and the world as it is in Jesus) is faith.

When Augustine discusses faith in *On the Trinity* (the main treatments are in books IV and XIII), he speaks of faith as the knowledge of temporal things through which we come to a knowledge of God, though the sustained contemplation of God is almost always reserved for the life to come. The temporal thing in question is the Incarnation, by which God became accessible to human perception: “We are incapable of grasping eternal things, and weighed down by the accumulated dirt of our sins, which we had collected by our love of temporal things, and which had become almost a natural growth on our mortal stock; so we needed purifying. But we could only be purified for adaptation to eternal things by temporal means like those we were already bound to in a servile adaptation.”⁴⁹ It is through the humanity of Christ (that is, through his mission in time) that we are enabled to contemplate his divinity, and thus his eternal procession from the Father. The preparation and training for that contemplation is faith: “Now just as the rational mind is meant, once purified, to contemplate eternal things, so it is meant while still needing purification to give faith to temporal things.”⁵⁰ This means that faith is a training of the mind for contemplation, by which it will be replaced when faith becomes sight.

⁴⁹ De trin. IV.18.24, Hill p. 169: Quia igitur ad aeterna capessenda idonei non eramus sordesque peccatorum nos praegravabant temporalium rerum amore contractae et de propagine mortalitatis tamquam naturaliter inolitae, purgandi eramus. Purgari autem ut contempereremur aeternis non nisi per temporalia possemus qualibus iam contemperati tenebamur.

⁵⁰ De trin. IV.18.24, Hill p. 169: Mens autem rationalis sicut purgata contemplationem debet rebus aeternis, sic purganda temporalibus fidem.

Though faith is here described as an activity of the intellect, it is also an act of the willing faculty. Book XIII of *The Trinity* tells us that faith works by love and is “impressed from one teaching on the hearts of every single believer.”⁵¹ Furthermore, all of the faculties of the mind, which are only distinguished by their activities, are equal to the mind itself. Faith is the knowledge of temporal things in Christ, which is a training for wisdom, the knowledge of eternal things revealed in Christ. It pertains to the will and to the intellect, because loving and understanding each involve the whole mind, and it trains both faculties for the knowledge and love of God.

But knowledge and love must be integrated to be of any effect. The discussion of the will to happiness in book XIII illustrates this point. There, Augustine follows the eudaimonistic tradition and posits that all people want to be happy, and that happiness cannot be possessed without the hope of immortality. Even if philosophy provides some notion of the immortality of the soul, it gives no reason to think that this immortality is not deficient. Only faith in Jesus can promise “on the strength of divine authority, not of human argument, that the whole man, who consists of course of soul and body too, is going to be immortal, and therefore be truly happy.”⁵² This means that the hope of happiness requires both love (that is, the will to happiness) and the knowledge of faith in the Incarnation. “For surely if the Son of God by nature became son of man by mercy

⁵¹ De trin. XIII.2.5, Hill p. 345: Ex una sane doctrina impressam fidem credentium cordibus singulorum...

⁵² De trin. XIII.9.12, Hill p. 353: Fides autem ista totum hominem immortalem futurum, qui utique constat ex anima et corpore, et ob hoc uere beatum non argumentatione humana sed diuina auctoritate promittit.

for the sake of the sons of men (that is the meaning of the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us), how much easier it is to believe that the sons of men can become sons of God by grace and dwell in God; for it is in him alone and thanks to him alone that they can be happy, by sharing in his immortality; it was to persuade us of this that the Son of God came to share in our mortality.”⁵³

Book XIII ends with a resumption of the aporia of love and knowledge of God that has been a major theme of the second half of *On the Trinity*. God cannot be known unless loved, but nothing (including God) can be loved unless it is known. Nor is the human mind properly the image of God when will and intellect do not harmoniously pursue the same end (there may be an inner trinity when something is known but not loved, but one does not both believe the object of understanding to be true and love it).⁵⁴ The participation in God through the contemplation of the Trinity that is the human being’s final state of blessedness therefore requires that all impediments to knowledge and love be removed so that the human being can know and love God, and know and love himself or herself in God.

The complete restoration of this lost blessedness will only happen through the eschatological vision of God, when the mind will be restored as the image of the Trinity

⁵³ De trin. XIII.9.12, Hill p. 353: Si enim natura dei filius propter filios hominum misericordia factus est hominis filius (hoc est enim, uerbum caro factum est et habitauit in hominibus), quanto est credibilis natura filios hominis gratia dei fieri dei filios et habitare in deo in quo solo et de quo solo esse possint beati participes immortalitatis eius effecti, propter quod persuadendum dei filius participis nostrae mortalitatis effectus est?

⁵⁴ See De trin. XIII.20.26, Hill p. 365

and the body as the image of Christ.⁵⁵ But this restoration begins in this life in two steps. First, there is the forgiveness of sin, which occurs in a moment at baptism. The second is the transformation of the sinner. “The first stage of the cure is to remove the cause of the debility, and this is done by pardoning all sins; the second stage is curing the debility itself, and this is done gradually by making steady progress in the renewal of this image.”⁵⁶ The process is described as the believer “transferring his love from temporal things to eternal, from visible to intelligible, from carnal to spiritual things; he is industriously applying himself to checking and lessening his greed for the one sort and binding himself with charity to the other.”⁵⁷ He will of course immediately add that this is only done by divine aid, but the reminder is unnecessary, because “binding” is the activity and “charity” the name of the Holy Spirit, to which we now turn.

A discussion of the Holy Spirit will be essential for our exploration below of the church as the community in which and for whom the Bible is read and interpreted in relation to other works of Augustine. But it is also necessary to tie up everything that has been said here about faith and love, because Augustine believes that the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son, as well as the love human beings have for one another, and the impetus behind their restless search for God. Faith is also the gift,

⁵⁵ De trin. XIV.18.24, Hill p. 390

⁵⁶ De trin. XIV.17.23, Hill p. 389: Ita prima curatio est causam remouere languoris, quod per omnium fit indulgentiam peccatorum; secunda ipsum sanare languorem, quod fit paulatim proficiendo in renouatione huius imaginis

⁵⁷ De trin. XIV.17.23, Hill p. 389: ...qui...transfert amorem a temporalibus ad spiritalia, atque ab istis cupiditatem frenare atque minuere illisque se caritate alligare diligenter insistit.

activity, or even presence of the Holy Spirit. It can rightly be said that for Augustine, the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially of the Holy Spirit, is a working out of the statement from 1 John that “God is love.” As we shall see below, Augustine is developing the same themes that were at play in that epistle, exploiting the Johannine epistemic openness of love to develop them further.

When discussing the persons of the Trinity, each of them is distinguished from the others by a relational name. Father and Son are the relational names of the first two persons, but the proper relational name of the Holy Spirit is “gift,” which is taken from Romans 5:5, a favorite verse of Augustine’s when discussing the Spirit, where the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given (*donum*) unto us. This is worked out in book V, where the Holy Spirit is both the gift of the Father, since it is said to proceed from the Father (John 15:26), but is also called the “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9). Augustine therefore calls the Holy Spirit “a kind of inexpressible communion or fellowship of Father and Son.”⁵⁸ This is elaborated later: “So the Holy Spirit is something common to Father and Son, whatever it is, or is their very commonness or communion, consubstantial and coeternal. Call this friendship, if it helps, but a better word for it is charity.”⁵⁹ This charity is substantial, in the way in which God’s goodness, oneness, and wisdom are substantial, each being equal to God’s

⁵⁸ De trinitate V,11,12: ...ergo spiritus sanctus ineffabilis quaedam patris filii que communio...

⁵⁹ De trinitate VI.5,7: spiritus ergo sanctus commune aliquid est patris et filii, quidquid illud est, aut ipsa communio consubstantialis et coaeterna; quae si amicitia conuenienter dici potest, dicatur, sed aptius dicitur caritas

being.⁶⁰ Augustine has been criticized by some for compromising the personhood of the Spirit by calling it the bond or charity of the other Two.⁶¹ I find this criticism to be mistaken. First, he considers “wisdom” to be a substantial name that is common to the godhead, but is also a special name of the Son. Therefore, if he compromises the Spirit’s personhood, he also compromises the Son’s, but I am not aware of anyone ever making that criticism. Second, Augustine not only considers the Spirit to be equal to the other two persons, but also holds that each of them is equal to the whole Trinity.⁶² What is important for Augustine is that each of the persons is equivalent to the whole Godhead, and yet are not reducible to each other. This is part of what he hopes to clarify with the analogy of memory, understanding, and will.

The Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son, but is also the love that human beings have for God and for one another. To understand this, we must turn to book VIII, where we will discover what we already knew, that “God is love.” After announcing that he hopes to help the one who believes come to understand and asking “from what likeness or comparison of things known to us we are able to believe, so that

⁶⁰ This topic of divine simplicity and substantiality occupies the whole of book VI, but see especially the rest of VI,5,7.

⁶¹ For example, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*. Crestwood, NY (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985). He acknowledges that St. Basil, to whom he is more sympathetic, also describes the Spirit as communion, but in such a way as to deemphasize the essential role of the Spirit in the constitution of the person of Christ (p. 182, esp. n. 37). This is of a piece with his broader claim that western theology compromises the relational character of God’s being by failing to ground it in the person of the Father. This, he alleges, gives priority to the “being” of the One God, to which the Trinity is an add-on. For a rebuttal, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicea and Its Legacy*. Oxford (Oxford University Press, 2004). pp. 364-383.

⁶² VI,5,7: si enim minus magna est ibi caritas quam sapientia, minus quam est diligitur sapientia; aequalis est igitur ut quanta est sapientia tantum diligatur. est autem sapientia aequalis patri sicut supra disputauimus; aequalis est igitur etiam spiritus sanctus, et si aequalis in omnibus aequalis propter summam simplicitatem quae in illa substantia est. et ideo non amplius quam tria sunt: unus diligens eum qui de illo est, et unus diligens eum de quo est, et ipsa dilectio. quae si nihil est, quomodo deus dilectio est? si non est substantia, quomodo deus substantia est?

we may love the as yet unknown God,"⁶³ he directs our attention to love. When love is true (that is, when the right object is loved, "for only if it is true love does it deserve to be called love, otherwise it is covetousness"),⁶⁴ it is God. "There you are, God is love. Why should we go running round the heights of the heavens and the depths of the earth looking for him who is with us if only we should wish to be with him?"⁶⁵ The love he has in mind is the love of the neighbor, who becomes the brother. And when we examine this love, we find that we are not only loving God, but that God is the love we are loving with:

There now, he can already have God better known to him than the brother he loves, certainly better because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure. Embrace love which is God, and embrace God with love. This is the love which unites all the good angels and all the servants of God in a bond of holiness, conjoins us and them together, and subjoins us to itself. And the more we are cured of the tumor of pride, the fuller we are of love. And if a man is full of love, what is he full of but God?⁶⁶

The language is not hyperbolic. He will go on to quote 1 John 4:7 and explicate it thus:

"This passage shows clearly and sufficiently how this brotherly love...is proclaimed on the highest authority not only to be from God but also simply to be God. When

⁶³ De trinitate VIII,5,8: sed ex qua rerum notarum similitudine uel comparatione credamus quo etiam nondum notum deum diligamus, hoc quaeritur.

⁶⁴ De trinitate VIII,7,10 ea quippe dilectio dicenda quae uera est, alioquin cupiditas est..

⁶⁵ De trinitate VIII,7,11 ecce, deus dilectio est. utquid imus et currimus in sublimia caelorum et ima terrarum quaerentes eum qui est apud nos si nos esse uelimus apud eum?

⁶⁶ De trinitate VIII,8,12: ecce iam potest notioem deum habere quam fratrem, plane notioem quia praesentioem, notioem quia interioroem, notioem quia certioem. amplectere dilectionem deum et dilectione amplectere deum. ipsa est dilectio quae omnes bonos angelos et omnes dei seruos consociat uinculo sanctitatis, nos que et illos coniungit inuicem nobis et subiungit sibi. quanto igitur saniores sumus a tumore superbiae tanto sumus dilectione pleniores. et qui nisi deo plenus est qui plenus est dilectione?

therefore we love our brother out of love, we love our brother out of God.”⁶⁷

All of this is to say that the Holy Spirit is not just the agent which transforms our desires and volitions into the love of God, but is the very love by which we love God. Faith, grace, and the love of God and neighbor are nothing other than the Holy Spirit’s infusion of itself into a human being restlessly searching for God, a prodigal and graced desire which gives rise to and is itself stirred up by a true and graced knowledge. Joined to the incarnate Jesus through the Holy Spirit, the whole world, our neighbors and enemies, and we ourselves become ways of knowing and loving God. And as it turns out, this is the only way to love them which respects their otherness. A special way of learning to know and love in Christ, and activity that joins us and the world to the incarnate Christ, is the reading and preaching of Holy Scripture. It is to this that we now turn.

Incarnate Word, Incarnational Reading

To love and know something or someone rightly is to know and love it as it is related to God as its good and its end. To put it another way, it is to see how everyone and everything signifies God. Reading and teaching the Bible in the church is how we learn to know and love other people and the whole world as they are: limitless in their potential meaning, because they all signify the God whom even limitless words could not grasp. The meaning of the Bible too is therefore potentially limitless in Augustine’s

⁶⁷ Idem. ista contextio satis aperte que declarat eandem ipsam fraternam dilectionem...non solum ex deo sed etiam deum esse tanta auctoritate praedicari. cum ergo de dilectione diligimus fratrem, de deo diligimus fratrem

understanding. We will approach Augustine's understanding of scripture by an indirect route. In the late fourth century, a genius of North African Christianity produced an extremely compelling method of reading scripture, which was deeply rooted in its African context, and allowed the interpreter to find the clear voice of the prophetic Spirit speaking to the present-day church. That genius was not Augustine, but the erstwhile Donatist layman and theologian, Tyconius. We will look first at Tyconius' background, then Tyconius himself, and finally, Augustine.

A.) *The Donatist Background*

The Donatist church looms large in both Tyconius' *Book of Rules* and Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*, even though Tyconius had been expelled from the Donatist church by the time of his writing and Augustine does not explicitly write against the Donatists in that work. The schism in African Christianity that led to two competing churches began in the early 4th century. Among other factors, it was fueled by lingering resentment over an episode in which the bishop of Carthage and one of his deacons conspired with the Roman authorities to keep food and other supplies from being delivered to imprisoned confessors. The controversy officially concerned the permissibility of readmitting members of the church who had lapsed during persecution. Such a lapse might have been simply handing over Christian scriptures to the persecuting authorities.⁶⁸ The controversy eventually centered on the validity of

⁶⁸ Karla Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana: Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus*, *De doctrina christiana*. Fribourg (Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1996). p. 4

sacraments performed by bishops. The Donatist movement has been seen as a protest movement,⁶⁹ likewise as the indigenous Christianity of North Africa, which Augustine suppressed by imposing a foreign, Roman ideal of catholicity.⁷⁰ Without attempting to settle the historiographical questions surrounding the schism, the diversity of opinions makes it fair to say that more was involved in the controversy than doctrine and church polity. It can also be said that Augustine's characterization of the Donatists as a local sect cut off from the universal church and stubbornly persisting in a perversion of the faith is hardly fair. The Donatists are drawing on an African tradition with distinctive practices and emphases,⁷¹ especially the veneration of martyrs.⁷² It is also fair to say that Augustine crushed this rival movement through the coercive power of the Roman state.⁷³ However, Augustine is also drawing heavily on North African tradition, especially Cyprian, to whom he could appeal in support of his contention that the African church was part of and accountable to the universal church, with Roman primacy. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, Augustine also attempted to lay claim to the martyrs.⁷⁴ That he should use state-sponsored terror as the means of

⁶⁹ W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*. Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1951).

⁷⁰ James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*. New York (Harper, 2005). See especially pp. 209-244.

⁷¹ For an overview, see Margaret R. Miles, "North African Christian Spiritualities," in *Rereading*, pp. 71-93.

⁷² One of the earliest martyrdom accounts is that of Perpetua and Felicitas, which is of North African origin.

⁷³ O'Donnell, loc. cit. and Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World*. Minneapolis (Fortress Press, 1997). pp. 130-174

⁷⁴ See below and O'Donnell, pp. 174-179.

finally establishing his church as the sole remaining successor to the earlier martyrs of Africa is a bitter irony.

Maureen Tilley argues that the persistence of the Donatists over an extended period can be attributed to their very effective “world-building” and “world-maintenance” in response to changing circumstances, for which they employed their own biblical hermeneutic. In the earlier days of the Donatist movement, the martyrs were seen as the truest interpreters of scripture (in fact, their lives were taken as scripture). As persecution ceased to be a present reality, Tilley detects a shift in hermeneutical focus from the scant evidence available (including what she is able to reconstruct from Augustine and Optatus using the methods of biblical criticism), characterized by four tendencies.⁷⁵ They are 1.) a shift of emphasis from eschatological passages about the future as a source of hope to past models of faithfulness, 2.) a shift from passages that promote the death of the martyr to those that assist the community which supports the martyr, 3.) adoption of assembly of Israel as model for church faithful to observance of law of God, and 4.) taking commands of separation as essence of law, essential for survival of church. This sustained a gradual shift from conceiving of themselves as the “church of the martyrs” to that of the *collecta*, the assembly of the pure within an idolatrous society and, later, within a majority church with its own schisms.

But as with the later Pelagian controversy (also in the background of the later

⁷⁵ Tilley, pp. 9-17.

portions of *On Christian Teaching*), we may say that theologically, the point most at stake was the nature of the church. For Augustine, the church was mixed with the world, and all of its members were, at best, recovering sinners. This put all Christians on the same level, whether they were martyrs, bishops, monks, or laypeople. For the Donatists, on the other hand, the martyrs were elite Christians with special authority. As the Donatist church became the majority in North Africa and eventually ceased to exist as a separate entity (at least legally), they began to see themselves as the pure assembly within a sinful world and a church that included evil in its constitution. This resulted in a two-tiered church.

Exegetically, there were some important differences between the Donatists and Augustine.⁷⁶ For one thing, the Donatists employed a smaller scriptural canon, lacking some of the Catholic epistles. They also used older Latin versions of the Bible than Augustine. They had a strong anti-allegorical sensibility, going back to Cyprian and Tertullian, as well as a hostility to classical learning. Most importantly, they interpreted scriptural events typologically as referring directly to the church in the present (rather than pre-adumbrating Christ in the Old Testament or the parousia in the New). A number of these points characterized Tyconius as well, and they explain why Augustine dwells on a number of topics.

B.) Tyconius and the Liber regularum

⁷⁶ For all of the following points, see Pollmann, pp. 4-11.

For Tyconius, the meaning of scripture is sometimes hidden, but can be unsealed in such a way that through it, the prophetic spirit is clearly understood to be calling the faithless church to repentance. The meaning of scripture is veiled for Tyconius, but once unveiled, can be understood as the direct address of the Holy Spirit to the church. As Kannengiesser explains:

"Tyconius identified only the divine Spirit as the appropriate and effective author of divine scripture. For him, the Law was a divine book, as a means of salvific revelation, but it was also, in a very pre-Augustinian, or better, *non-Augustinian* way, divine as a cultural product. For the Spirit, according to Tyconius, regulated the whole communication of God's message. By using a human language and creating a style proper to scripture, the Spirit directly caused the actual truth of scripture in its written form. The scriptural Spirit operated as an author according to rules, and it is the proper task of a Christian exegete to identify and explain the mystic rules instituted by the Spirit and followed by the Spirit, when the message of scripture in its final draft addressed the community of the faithful."⁷⁷

Tyconius' understanding of scripture is closely related to his understanding of the church. His basic question is what prophecy means for the church of his day, given that the cities raged against by prophets were as remote for 4th century Africans as they are for 21st century Americans.⁷⁸ He took the church to be "bipartite," meaning that it consists of good and bad parts in this age. This means that the evil Catholics are as

⁷⁷ Charles Kannengiesser. "Augustine and Tyconius: A Conflict of Christian Hermeneutics in Roman Africa," In *Augustine and the Bible*, edited by Pamela Bright, 149–77. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999. p. 157

⁷⁸ Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988. p. 9

much a part of the church as the Donatists.⁷⁹ Those in the evil side of the church have the opportunity to cross over to the good side, and thus, scripture directly addresses them and urges them to do so. Thus, the Bible is always addressing present spiritual realities rather than the past or future fulfillment of prophecies, and Tyconius' concern is to make its text readily understandable to his church. As Kugler rightly notes, "That comprehension of the rules leads to proper understanding of the Church makes Tyconius's work a very pastoral piece of literature; he writes with the specific intention of offering a road-map from the evil half of the bipartite Church to its righteous half."⁸⁰

Tyconius set out to write a "book of rules and so to fashion keys and lamps, as it were, to the secrets of the law."⁸¹ Augustine misunderstood Tyconius to mean that Tyconius himself was producing the rules. If these rules were understood, they would make all ambiguities clear. However, more recent scholars take Tyconius to mean that the rules are inherent in the scriptures themselves. Tyconius is fashioning "keys" or "windows" into them. If the logic (ratio) of the rules were grasped, then all that is hidden would be made manifest.⁸² Tyconius follows an African exegetical tradition which takes ambiguities to be part of the Holy Spirit's prophetic strategy. Each of the

⁷⁹ Robert A. Kugler, "Tyconius's Mystic Rules and the Rules of Augustine," In *Augustine and the Bible*, edited by Pamela Bright. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999. pp. 129–48. This point is on pp. 131-2

⁸⁰ Kugler, p. 133, n. 23

⁸¹ Tyconius. *Tyconius: The Book of Rules*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989. p. 3. Babcock's translation is based on the 1984 edition of F.C. Burkitt, which it includes on facing pages: *Necessarium...mihi vedentur libellum regularem scribere, et scretorum legis velute claves et luminaria fabricare.*

⁸² Charles Kannengiesser. "Augustine and Tyconius: A Conflict of Christian Hermeneutics in Roman Africa," In *Augustine and the Bible*, edited by Pamela Bright, 149–77. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999. pp. 155-6

seven rules describes an ambiguity that hides the meaning of the text from unbelievers, but when interpreted, delivers a straightforward meaning to believers. In particular, many ambiguous symbols can be seen according to Tyconius' dual typology of the church as both faithful and faithless, and calling the faithless to repentance.⁸³ Each of the seven rules is a manner in which the Spirit communicates this message in scripture. For example, the first rule concerns the Lord and his body. According to Tyconius, the unity of Christ and the church is such that the same term can be and often is applied to both, which emphasizes the fundamental oneness of the bipartite church, even though the unrighteous half will be destroyed. As examples, he gives Ephesians. 2:21, Matthew 24:2, and 2 Thessalonians 2:7, none of which would seem to have anything to do with a bipartite church. But as Kugler explains, "Tyconius selects Bible passages not so much because of their theological content, as he does on the basis of an underlying preconception of what Scripture is: a set of oracles of God, which when read with the proper logic in mind, address contemporary reality as if they were composed precisely to address it, and it alone."⁸⁴ Tyconius' second rule makes this point even more clearly. The same symbol can sometimes refer to the righteous part of the church, and sometimes to the unrighteous. An example is the city of Jerusalem, which is sometimes praised in scripture and sometimes threatened and judged by God. In the former case, it

⁸³ See Pamela Bright. *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988. p. 9; Robert A. Kugler. "Tyconius's Mystic Rules and the Rules of Augustine," In *Augustine and the Bible*, edited by Pamela Bright, 129–48. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

⁸⁴ Kugler, p. 135

represents the good half of the church; in the latter case, the evil half. When the evil half is addressed, it is called to repent and join the good half. Again, it is a meaning that, while hidden, needs only to be uncovered and heeded by the present day church, whom the Spirit is directly addressing through it.

C.) *Augustine and Doctrina christiana*

In *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine's manual on reading, interpreting, and teaching the Bible, he copies the rules of "a certain Tyconius, who although a Donatist himself wrote against the Donatists with irresistible power."⁸⁵ The discussion of Tyconius and *Book of Rules* belongs to the final stage of *De doctrina christiana*, written near the end of Augustine's life (in fact, he interrupted his *Retractationes* to finish it). Charles Kannengiesser argues that Augustine broke off his work on *De doctrina christiana* in the late 390s because he did not yet know how to deal with Tyconius, whose exegetical theory was deeply embedded in its African context, a context to which Augustine was still relatively new. He resumed his work when he was ready to integrate Tyconius' rules into his own theory and practice.⁸⁶ The ways in which Augustine differs from Tyconius reveal the heart of his understanding of scripture and the purpose of reading and teaching it.

The fundamental difference between the two is that Tyconius takes all scripture is

⁸⁵ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* (hereafter DDC), CCSL 32. Turnhout: Brepols, 1982. III.xxx.42 Cited in translation as tr. Robert Green, *On Christian Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008: Ticonius quidam, qui contra Donatistas inuictissime scripsit, cum fuerit donatista... Green, p. 89

⁸⁶ Charles Kannengiesser. "Interrupted De Doctrina Christiana," In *De Doctrina Christiana: a Classic of Western Culture*, edited by Duane, W. H. Arnold and Bright, Pamela, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995. pp. 3-13.

prophetically ecclesiological, whereas Augustine takes it to be theological and christological.⁸⁷ Unlike for Tyconius, the spiritual reality that scripture reveals is not the mystery of the church; all scripture directly or indirectly reveals God. For Augustine, the goal of the Christian life is the restoration of the soul to the knowledge and love of God which has been lost in the fall. This restoration also entails a relationship to all other realities: one should love and know all created realities as opening up to God, testifying to God, and furthering one's own knowledge and love of God. In Augustine's own terminology, all created realities are signs whose ultimate meaning is God. Signs are meant to be used by their interpreters as a means toward something else. All of reality consists of things and signs. Things are to be "enjoyed," which he defines as "to hold fast to something with love for its own sake."⁸⁸ Signs, on the other hand, are to be used as a means to the enjoyment of things. To use the signs of creation properly is to understand and love them in their relation to God, on whose account they are to be loved. God is the only thing that is not also a sign. Robert Markus beautifully summarizes Augustine's teaching on use and enjoyment: "To 'enjoy' something that is less than the ultimate, infinite satisfaction, that is to say to allow the will to rest in its possession; or to wish to 'enjoy' it, that is to say, to limit desire to its attainment, without pointing to a further horizon, is a perversion of the natural and rational order of willing.

⁸⁷ As we will show below, the church is essential in Augustine's understanding as well, but as the body of Christ in which the proper signification of God is taught and learned.

⁸⁸ DDC I.vi.4: *Frui est enim amore inhaerere alicui rei propter se ipsam*. Green, p. 89:

To allow desire to cease in this way is premature closure of the Christian life, a denial of the restlessness in the depth of the human heart."⁸⁹ The Bible is a divinely inspired set of signs, and the exercise of reading and interpreting them is intended to kindle and increase the love of God and neighbor. It follows that, whereas Tyconius allows the definitive meaning of scripture to be established, the meaning of scripture is inexhaustible for Augustine, because God can never be exhausted (we will deal with the significance of divine inexhaustibility below).

However, there is a twofold problem, which is ontological and moral. Taking the former first, the ontological gap between God and created beings such as humans is also a semiotic gap. God is ineffable, which is to say unsignifiable. Even calling God ineffable is already saying more than can be said properly, because it is saying something about God "of whom nothing can be said worthily."⁹⁰ But God "accepts the praise of human voices," and has overcome the ontological and semiotic gap by becoming incarnate, allowing the divine Word to be signified through the humanity of Jesus. Martha Colish explains, "For Augustine, God creates the world and man through his Word, and he takes on humanity in the Word made flesh so that human words may take on divinity, thereby bringing man and the world back to God. In his redemptive plan, God has already solved for man the problem of his own ineffability. Once joined to

⁸⁹ Robert Markus. *Signs and Meanings: Word and Text in Ancient Christianity*. Liverpool (Liverpool University Press, 1996). p. 112

⁹⁰ DDC I.vi.6: Et tamen deus, cum de illo nihil digne dici possit, admisit humanae uocis obsequium. Green, p. 11.

God in Christ, human nature is restored in mind and body, and man's faculty of speech is empowered to carry on the work of Incarnation in expressing the Word to the world."⁹¹ The Incarnation is central not only to Augustine's theory of redemption, but also to his theory of signification. In fact, the first book of *On Christian Teaching* is largely spent describing redemption in terms of signification.

The problem to which the Incarnation is the solution is also a moral problem, pertaining to love. Because of the very intricate relation of knowledge and love that we explored in *On the Trinity*, the process of signification involves not only rightly understanding signs, but also rightly loving God by means of the signs. In fact, book I of *On Christian Teaching* reads at times more like an ethical treatise than an exegetical one, because it mainly concerns the relation of rightly enjoying things and rightly using signs. Right enjoyment is the love of God, and of the self and the neighbor in God. We do not find ourselves in a state of right enjoyment, however. Our love is narcissistic. We seek dominance over those who are rightly our equals. In order for us to love rightly, "our minds must be purified."⁹² This purification is made possible by the incarnation, which is now explained in medical terms. Christ is the healer who became our medicine. And after his resurrection, he sent the Spirit, which unites us to his body, the

⁹¹ Martha Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study of the Medieval Theory of Knowledge*. Lincoln (University of Nebraska Press, 1983, rev. ed), p. 26

⁹² DDC I.x.10: ...purgandus est animus... Green p. 12

church, “a bond of unity and love like a healing bandage.”⁹³ Christ “purges” his own body by “unpleasant medicines.” Christian teaching, then, is training in how to love God, and how to love the self and the neighbor in relation to God.

The aim of the exercise of scriptural interpretation, which aims to see all the signs of scripture in the light of Jesus as opening inexhaustibly to God, is to come to know and love oneself, other people, and the world correctly, as inherently open to and signifying God. The use-enjoyment distinction and the sign-thing distinction are two sides of the same coin because things have no meaning other than themselves and are to be enjoyed (i.e. loved as ends in themselves), whereas signs signify something else and are meant to be used (i.e. loved on account of and as a means to some other end). As we mentioned above, God is the only thing that is not also a sign, meaning (one would think) that only God is to be enjoyed. Augustine says as much. But while God is unique, in that God alone is loved for no end other than Godself, human beings (by virtue of their rational, immortal soul) and their bodies (by virtue of their close association with us) are to be used, but also loved. Unlike every other element of created reality, human beings and angels (and presumably sentient aliens, if there are any) are created for the enjoyment of God, for which the restless hearts of human beings long. Therefore, the proper “use” of a human being is to love her or him as a subject of divine love. To wrongly enjoy a human being would be to limit her meaning to what she can be for

93 DDC I.xvi.15: Corpus ergo suum...nodo unitatis et caritatis tamquam sanitatis adstringit. Exercet autem hoc tempore et purgat medicinalibus quibusdam molestiis... Green p. 15

oneself, when she should be respected, loved, and wondered at as a sign of potentially limitless meaning.

The language of use may strike us as troubling when applied to human beings. "Using someone" in colloquial English implies disingenuousness or instrumentalization. This is not at all what Augustine meant, and the clarification helps to further our understanding. Here again, Rowan Williams is helpful. "Use" of ourselves and our bodies means loving them in such a way as to see them as open to the love of God, which is, after all, their proper end:

To 'use' the love of neighbor or the love we have for our own bodies (a favorite example of Augustine's) is simply to allow the capacity for gratuitous or self-forgetful *dilectio* opened up in these and other such loves to be opened still further. The language of *uti* is designed to warn against an attitude towards any finite person or object that terminates their meaning in their capacity to satisfy my desire, that treats them as the end of desire, conceiving my meaning in terms of them and theirs in terms of me.⁹⁴

Human beings are intrinsically related to God. The human mind, being the locus of the image of God, is created to be the site where we may contemplate the Archetype (albeit in a mirror, dimly).⁹⁵ The human being should thus be loved in such a way as to allow him or her (and our love for him or her) to open up to God and the love of God. Augustine does not in any way disparage humanity by denying that human beings should be enjoyed as ends in themselves, because

⁹⁴ Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality, and Desire in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*," *Journal of Theology and Literature* 3:2 (1989), pp. 138-150. Quoted text is on p. 140.

⁹⁵ See Ayers, *Trinity*, pp. 137-8. In the context of a discussion of mental analogies in Augustine's trinitarian thought, Ayers emphasizes the intelligibility of creation for Augustine, and of the mind as the highest point of creation.

like everything else in creation, human beings are fundamentally not ends in themselves. Our end is rest in God, and therefore, to “use” a human being in Augustine’s sense is to know and love her as someone whose meaning, like that of the biblical signs, is related to God and therefore inexhaustible.

Having seen how the Incarnation enables creation to signify God to human beings and restores our proper hermeneutical and ethical relationship to God, the world, other people, and ourselves, we are in a position to examine how scripture fits into this program. Reading and teaching scripture plays a role in the realization of the work of the Incarnation. It has become a point of access to the humanity of Christ. Brian Stock points out that, as related in the *Confessions*, Augustine’s conversion is the first in the history of Christianity to be effected by reading scripture, and the scripture that he read both directed him and enabled him to “put on the Lord Jesus.”⁹⁶ Though the early Augustine famously found the spiritual interpretation of scripture he learned from the Christian platonists of Milan made the Bible palatable, his later meditations on the role of Christ as mediator led him to move to what Michael Cameron calls an “incarnational” exegesis.⁹⁷ As Cameron explains, Augustine’s earlier exegesis was characterized by the difference between flesh and spirit, which resulted in a disjunctive theory

⁹⁶ Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation*. Cambridge, MA (Belknap Press, 1996). His insightful analysis of Augustine’s conversion narrative is on pp. 102-111.

⁹⁷ Michael Cameron, “The Christological Substructure of Augustine’s Figurative Exegesis,” in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. Pamela Bright. Notre Dame, IN (Notre Dame University Press, 1999), pp. 74-103.

of signs, an interpretation of the Old Testament as prefiguring the New, and an emphasis on Christ as a humble teacher. In the later paradigm, a conjunctive sign theory emerges from an emphasis on Jesus' role as mediator between divine immutability and creaturely mutability. The new paradigm "acknowledged the ductility of God's power for the world of history and language."⁹⁸ Because of the humanity of Jesus, words and other creaturely signs can now signify the divine. A notable result of this paradigm shift is Augustine's treatment of the Old Testament, which no longer merely anticipates the New Testament, but actually "dispenses" its grace, though "under a veil."⁹⁹ *On Christian Teaching* still describes Jesus as a teacher, but he now teaches from within. This is closely paralleled by the metaphor of the physician who is also the medicine. The very fact that this text is a teaching manual and that the work of scripture is also the work of the Incarnation, it is clear that reading and interpreting the Bible is now a communal exercise whereby the members of the church "put on the Lord Jesus" so as to have their proper signification restored.

The ambiguity or underdetermined meaning of the biblical signs should also be read as an inexhaustibility of possible meaning within the sphere of faith. This is linked to God's ineffability, to the Incarnate Word by whom alone

⁹⁸ Cameron, p. 75

⁹⁹ Cameron, p. 75. See also Cameron's monograph *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*. Oxford (Oxford University Press, 2012), especially pp. 97-132, 165-214, and 251-281. The key development in Augustine's shift from highly Platonic allegorical readings such as he learned from Ambrose to his more Christological mode was seeing Christ as the key to interpreting the Old Testament.

God may be adequately signified, and the Holy Spirit's action in the life of the believer. All signs ultimately signify God, since all things are to be used for the enjoyment of God. In the final analysis, God is the only thing that does not mean anything other than itself.¹⁰⁰ As Rowan Williams glosses Augustine's explanation of God's ineffability in DDC I.vi.6, no sign can adequately signify God.¹⁰¹ "Yet although nothing can be spoken in a way worthy of God, he has sanctioned the homage of the human voice, and chosen that we should derive pleasure from our words in praise of him."¹⁰² Through the Incarnation, the sign of signs, God has so joined Godself to creation that God can be fully signified through Jesus. Jesus is thus the center, not only of scripture, but the web of multivalent signification that is the created universe. Every sign in scripture at least potentially points to Christ, and thus to God. But as Augustine himself notes, a thing may signify another thing in more than one way.¹⁰³ He is making the point that particular signs used as metaphors might mean different things in different contexts, but we can press him slightly further in light of his statements about divine

¹⁰⁰ This is where Richard of St. Victor actually advances the Augustinian tradition, as will be shown in the next chapter. For him, even God's finality is an open, self-transcending one. The love of God for Godself opens up to the love of creation. We will especially see this in the fourth degree of passionate charity. Of course, Richard builds on a possibility that is latent in Augustine's treatment of the Holy Spirit's inherent givability in *De trin.* V and VII.

¹⁰¹ Williams (1989), and Colish.

¹⁰² DDC I.vi.6: *et tamen deus, cum de illo nihil digne dici possit, admisit humanae uocis obsequium, et uerbis nostris in laude sua gaudere nos uoluit.* Green p. 11

¹⁰³ "But since there are many ways in which things may resemble other things, we should not imagine that there is a hard and fast rule that a word will always have the meaning that it has in a particular place." DDC III.xxv.35, Green p. 85.

ineffability and God as the end of all signification, and say that it is possible that any given scriptural sign might lead to Christ in more than one way. And no matter how many different ways God in Christ is signified, the meaning of the God who is beyond all signification can never be finitely exhausted. Therefore, because anything may be a sign of Christ, who is the Sign of God, its meaning is potentially inexhaustible.

Tyconius thought that the task of scripture was merely to call the unfaithful church to join the faithful church, and the ambiguities were merely part of the Spirit's communication strategy to hide the truth from unbelievers, but clearly reveal it to believers, once the logic of scriptural communication is grasped. But for Augustine, the signs of scripture, including the ambiguous ones, are meant to heal the narcissistic disorder of desire and intellect, training them to know and love God, and to see all other things as signs of God. Because the meaning of biblical signs is not a prophetic imperative to the church, but rather the unsignifiable God made signifiable through the Incarnation, scriptural words and images require not only decoding, but also the ongoing vigilant exercise of interpretation.

The the hermeneutical underdetermination of a sign might be taken as an imperfection or a problem for scripture, and would be a problem, if Augustine's goal were that of Tyconius, discerning a definitive meaning of scripture and

nothing more. He would have then needed foolproof rules. Instead, the underdetermination is a providential opportunity for the reader to grow in knowledge and love. "Certainly the spirit of God who worked through the author foresaw without any doubt that [a meaning] would present itself to a reader or a listener, or rather planned that it should present itself, because it too is based on the truth. Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages?"¹⁰⁴ The ambiguity of scripture is now an eloquent ambiguity because the state of the baptized Christian is not static but dynamic, and the purpose of scripture is to guide the restless heart of the reader toward rest in God.

For Augustine, therefore, the ambiguities in scripture serve a pedagogical purpose: they exist in order both "to check pride" and to delight the reader: "Those who fail to discover what they are looking for suffer from hunger, whereas those who do not look, because they have it in front of them, often die of boredom. In both situations the danger is lethargy. It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy

¹⁰⁴ DDC III.xxvii.38: certe dei spiritus, qui per eum haec operatus est, etiam ipsam occursuram lectori uel auditori sine dubitatione praeuidit, immo ut occurreret, quia et ipsa est ueritate subnixta, prouidit.nam quid in diuinis eloquiis largius et uberius potuit diuinitus prouideri, quam ut eadem uerba pluribus intellegantur modis, quos alia non minus diuina contestantia faciant adprobari? Green, p. 87

hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones."¹⁰⁵ Augustine devotes most of book II to unknown signs and most of book III to ambiguous ones, but this is prefaced by a plan for the cultivation of the gifts of the Spirit, which is both the goal of reading and teaching the scriptures, as well as the condition for their correct application. There are seven necessary gifts: fear of the Lord, piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, purity of heart, and wisdom. Bright notes, "He focuses on the third charism, knowledge, and then explains that there are two causes of lack of understanding: unknown signs and ambiguous signs."¹⁰⁶ The progression from fear to wisdom is a pattern that will be followed by later ascetic¹⁰⁷ writers (we will see in Richard of St. Victor in the next chapter), but Augustine adopts it here, inverting the biblical order of the gifts of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2, because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10). He focuses on the third charism, knowledge, saying that it is here that the interpretation of scripture occurs.¹⁰⁸

But what is this knowledge? The knowledge acquired from scripture is a knowledge about love: "What he will find in them is quite simply that he must love

¹⁰⁵ DDC II.vi.8, Green p. 33: Qui enim prorsus non inueniunt, quod quaerunt, fame laborant; qui autem non quaerunt, quia in promptu habent, fastidio saepe marcescunt; in utroque autem languor cauendus est. Magnifice igitur et salubriter spiritus sanctus ita scripturas sanctas modificauit, ut locis apertioribus fami occurreret, obscurioribus autem fastidia detergeret.

¹⁰⁶ Bright, Pamela. "Biblical Ambiguity in African Exegesis," In *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, edited by W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright Duane, 25–32. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995. p. 27

¹⁰⁷ "Ascetic" in the sense explained above.

¹⁰⁸ DDC II.ix.10, Green. p. 34-35

God for himself, and his neighbor for God's sake, and that he must love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, and his whole mind, and his neighbor as himself--in other words, that his love of his neighbor, like his own self-love, should be totally related to God."¹⁰⁹ The result of knowledge is the fourth stage of the ascetic program, fortitude, which he glosses as "a hunger and thirst after righteousness," which is to say, a desire. This desire turns the practitioner from "the fatal charms of transient things" to "the love of eternal things, namely the unchangeable unity which is also the Trinity."¹¹⁰ It should not be surprising that the goal of reading scripture is the integration of love and knowledge, because that is the goal of the entire ascetic life. Knowledge is a stage on the road to wisdom, the contemplation of the Trinity, who is the source of one's goodness, blessedness, and being. The learning and teaching of teaching of scripture is an exercise: "every student of scripture exerts himself."¹¹¹

Within this framework, we are able to understand the program that Augustine then lays out for how to approach the scriptures. First is learning the contents of the Bible "not necessarily to understand them but to read them so as to commit them to memory or at least make them not totally unfamiliar."¹¹² One then proceeds to study the

¹⁰⁹ DDC II.vii.10: ...nihil in eis aliud inuenturus quam diligendum esse deum propter deum et proximum propter deum, et illum quidem ex toto corde, ex tota anima, ex tota mente, proximum uero tamquam se ipsum, id est, ut tota proximi, sicut etiam nostri dilectio referatur in deum. Green p. 34

¹¹⁰ DDC II.vii.10: hoc est fortitudinis, quo esuritur et sititur iustitia. Hoc enim affectu ab omni mortifera iucunditate rerum transeuntium sese extrahit et inde se auertens conuertit ad dilectionem aeternorum, incommutabilem scilicet unitatem eandemque trinitatem. Green p. 34

¹¹¹ Idem. Nam in eo se exercet omnis diuinarum scripturarum studiosus.

¹¹² DDC II.ix.14: ...nosse istos libros etsi nondum ad intellectum, legendo tamen uel mandare memoriae uel omnino incognitos non habere. Green, p. 37

clear doctrinal and ethical precepts. Finally, Augustine repeats the cardinal rule for interpreting difficult passages: “Then, after gaining a familiarity with the language of the divine scriptures, one should proceed to explore and analyze the obscure passages, by taking examples from the more obvious parts to illuminate obscure expressions and using the evidence of indisputable passages to remove the uncertainty of ambiguous ones.”¹¹³

While Augustine acknowledges that the amount of the scripture that is clear will depend on the reader’s capacity and aptitude, it is perhaps clearer to us after 2000 years of exegetical controversy, modern historicism, and post-modern cultural critique that which passages count as clear and unclear depends on a great deal more than intellectual ability, but also on culture, epistemology, the traditions of Christianity in which one is formed (or not), and which passages God makes most transparent for a particular person or community. We will explore this matter at some length in chapter four. Augustine, however, puts his rhetorical training to work and applies his theory of signs to the biblical text, explaining how the failure to understand scripture results from either unknown signs or ambiguous signs.

In order to understand unknown signs, one must acquire knowledge of language, such as one acquires from the grammaticus and rhetor.¹¹⁴ Ideally, one learns

¹¹³ DDC II.ix.14: Tum uero facta quadam familiaritate cum ipsa lingua diuinarum scripturarum in ea, quae obscura sunt, aperienda et discutienda pergendum est, ut ad obscuriores locutiones illustrandas de manifestioribus sumantur exempla et quaedam certarum sententiarum testimonia dubitationem incertis auferant. Green p. 37

¹¹⁴ Well described by Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 76-96.

the original languages of scripture, or at least learns to compare translations.

Particularly in order to understand scriptural metaphors, one must know something of the other arts as well. Augustine specifically highlights biology, music, and arithmetic. Even arts which Augustine regards as harmful superstition, such as divination and astrology, are conceived of in terms of signification. In the case of magical arts, the signs and their meanings are a pact agreed upon with demons which may have some effect in the world.

The learning of grammar (including languages and what we might call textual criticism) enables one to establish a reasonably reliable reading of the text and to resolve ambiguities that are the result of grammar or pronunciation (such as long and short vowels). But there remain those ambiguities that result from metaphorical signs. The treatment of metaphorical signs is closely related to and governed by the goal of reading and teaching scripture, which is the enjoyment of God. Metaphor is rooted in the nature of signs, exploiting the ability of things to be signs of other things which are also signs. This transference of meaning can go on indefinitely. The student of scripture is instructed to interpret anything metaphorically if it cannot be related to correct faith or good morals when understood literally.¹¹⁵ To interpret something literally when it ought to be interpreted metaphorically is to interrupt the process of signification by

¹¹⁵ DDC III.x.14, Green p. 75

taking a sign for a thing. Such an error is at the root of bad interpretation and, for that matter, bad ethics.

The goal of interpreting signs is to “no longer live in slavery, even to useful signs, but rather exercise their minds by the discipline of understanding them spiritually.”¹¹⁶ Ideally, one will determine the intended meaning of the author of a metaphorical sign, but this is not always possible, owing either to the reader’s intellectual limitations or to deliberate obscurity on the part of the author of a passage of scripture (or on the part of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the author). In such cases, the signs still serve scripture’s instructive purpose as long as the reader understands that they are signs. This entails a posture of openness to new possibilities of signification, which must ultimately lead to God. Of course, one may also arrive at a meaning different from that which was intended by the author, but which is still in accordance with correct doctrine and moves the interpreter to the love of God. This should not be seen as a failure, but as a success made possible by God’s providence, and by the nature of signs and the God to whom they point. Different meanings may emerge for different readers, depending on their needs and the needs of their communities. The multiple meanings may be deliberate on the part of the author or not. The reader

¹¹⁶ DDC III.viii.12: nec sub ipsis iam signis utilibus seruiturae, sed exerciturae potius animum in eorum intellegentia spiritali. Green p. 74

may “carve out from the words another meaning which does not run counter to the faith, using the evidence of any other passage of the divine utterances.”¹¹⁷

In the way that this signification operates, we see how *De doctrina christiana* replaces Augustine’s earlier plan of writing a manual on each of the liberal arts, of which only the *De musica* and *De dialectica* were completed. He turns from a plan to write about the arts as an ascent from the visible to the invisible, to a science of scripture. In doing so, he provides a Christian aim to the techniques and disciplines of Roman learning, and this would become the basis for medieval Christian theorizations of the arts (the liberal arts make a comeback in Cassiodorus).¹¹⁸ In discovering and cultivating a scriptural voice, he has channeled all of the sciences into the science of scripture, both preserving and transforming the cultural and educational heritage of Rome into what would become the foundation for medieval learning, including for the figures in the next chapter. But he has done more than put the arts of Roman education at the service of a Christian art; he has put knowledge at the service of an ascetic practice, which is nowhere more apparent than in the way he treats ambiguous signs and their relation to the love of the neighbor and God.

¹¹⁷ DDC III.xxvii.38: ...aliam sententiam de illis uerbis, quae fidei rectae non refragatur, exsculpat, testimonium habens a quocumque alio loco diuinorum eloquiorum. Green p. 87

¹¹⁸ See the essays in Karla Pollman and Mark Vessey, eds. *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*. Oxford (Oxford University Press, 2005), especially Vessey’s introduction (pp. 1-21) on the history of 20th century scholarship on Augustine’s relation to the worlds of classical and medieval learning, and Danuta R. Shanzer, “Augustine’s Disciplines: *Silent diutius Musae Varronis*,” pp. 69-112.

A final point that must be made about the exercise of exegesis and the process of signification and love more generally, which is that all signification and interpretation (and therefore all loving askeis) occurs in a community of signification. Signs only mean anything to *somebody*, and Augustine anticipates certain insights of more recent linguistics and philosophy of language by realizing that words only mean anything by convention.¹¹⁹ The role of a community of signification is well-illustrated in his treatment of magic, which he understands as a pact with demons regarding the meaning of the signs used in the sorcery.¹²⁰ But even divinely instituted signs such as those of the covenant with the Jewish people are instituted for a particular people for whom they are to have a certain meaning, and not for the whole of humanity. This insight lies behind Augustine's insistence that not only natural signs but also customary institutions must be studied for the interpretation of scripture.¹²¹

With regard to this interpretive community, one more contrast with Tyconius is à propos. As we have noted, Tyconius believed that the church is bipartite, meaning that its unfaithful members are truly part of it and may, upon hearing the word of prophecy, become faithful members and escape the eschatological destruction of the unfaithful half. But for Augustine, the church of

¹¹⁹ I take this point from Markus, pp. 105-124.

¹²⁰ Markus, pp. 31-33

¹²¹ DDC II.xxv.39-xxvi.40

the elect is enmeshed with the reprobate. Although the reprobate do not really belong to it, though they may seem to.

The community of signification comes to the forefront when we remember that *De doctrina christiana* is first and foremost a teaching manual, though Augustine only wrote the final book that concerns the technique of teaching at the end of his life. Preaching, like reading, must entail the whole person, both instructing and delighting (and therefore exercising both the intellect and will of the hearer). Rules concerning the proper style for discussing exalted or baser topics have been abrogated by the Incarnation, which follows from the ability of any sign to inexhaustibly signify God in light of that event. And perhaps most importantly and obviously, preaching is always done for an audience. The reader and interpreter of scripture is not engaging in an ascetic training of love and knowledge alone, but is leading the Christian church in such a training.

Christian teaching, the interpretation of scripture for the church, heals the body of Christ by healing the broken and disordered affections and reasonings of its members so that each and every one of them can know and love themselves and the world in the light of the great Teacher and Healer, as they are known and loved by God. Augustine's treatment of the role of the church in *On Christian Teaching* is well summarized in the following passage from book I:

He has already given us so much of his spirit to support us on our journey, in order that in the troubles of this life we may have this enormous

confidence and delight in one whom we do not yet behold; he has also bestowed individual gifts for the consolidation of his church, in order that we may perform the tasks that he has indicated not only without murmuring but even with positive enjoyment. The church is his body, as the teaching of the apostle shows; it is also called his bride. So he ties together his own body, with its many members performing different tasks, in a bond of unity and love like a healing bandage. And at the present time he trains it and purges it by means of various disagreeable medicines so that when it has been saved from the world he may take as his wife for eternity 'the church, which has no spot or wrinkle or any such thing.'"¹²²

For the whole church, as for its members, communion with God is both the end and the means to the end.

We will move from here to Augustine's Homilies on First John, where we will see Augustine engaging in this practice of teaching scripture to his community, explaining his theory of the Incarnation, the church, and the Christian life in a different mode, and even advancing it in important ways. He will also lash out at his Donatist rivals in ways that seem antithetical to his ethical and epistemological principal of love. We will examine how his explanation of these same themes in this homiletical and polemical context show how he believes that the Donatist have disrupted the process of signification (and thus, of knowing and loving God and all things in God) that the Incarnation has made possible. A sinful and broken human being cannot convert to the love of

¹²² DDC I.xv.14: ...ad consolationem huius itineris de spiritu suo tantum dedit, quo in aduersis uitae huius fiduciam caritatemque tantam eius, quem nondum uidemus, habeamus et dona unicuique propria ad instructionem ecclesiae suae, ut id quod ostendit esse faciendum, non solum sine murmure, sed etiam cum delectatione faciamus? Est enim ecclesia corpus eius, sicut apostolica doctrina commendat, quae coniux etiam eius dicitur. Corpus ergo suum multis membris diuersa officia gerentibus, nodo unitatis et caritatis tamquam sanitatis adstringit. Exercet autem hoc tempore et purgat medicinalibus quibusdam molestiis, ut erutam de hoc saeculo in aeternum sibi copulet coniugem *ecclesiam non habentem maculam aut rugam aut aliquid eiusmodi*. Green p. 15

God merely by his or her own choice, even when he or she hears the word of God. Recall that Augustine became persuaded of the truth of the Christian faith in book VII of the *Confessions*, but only received the grace of conversion in book VIII. Furthermore, after conversion, one does not remain in a static condition, but must recover from the disease of sin for the rest of one's life. The church is the community that is constituted by the healing presence of the Holy Spirit.¹²³ It is here that through the teaching of scripture, the Incarnation is made effective by Christians putting on the flesh of Christ. Those who thwart this aim (and he has the Donatists and Pelagians chiefly in mind) effectively deny the Incarnation, are no part of the body of Christ, and because they threaten the healing of knowledge and love that occurs in the church, their teaching must be contested.

Body of Christ as Hermeneutical Community

The themes of love and knowledge in relation to the Incarnation and the presence of the Holy Spirit as love are the same themes that were explored in the previous chapter in relation to the epistemological rootedness and openness of love in 1 John. These themes converge when Augustine develops them into a

¹²³ In exploring Augustine's hermeneutics mainly through the categories of love and knowledge, we may seem to have neglected grace, which is another of the main themes in Augustine, especially as he gets older. It is an especially important aspect of his thought for Protestant readers (of which I am one). A full treatment of grace and hermeneutics in Augustine is impossible here, but many of the same points made here could have been made with an emphasis on grace rather than love. If one reads such later works as *On Grace and Free Choice* (*De gratia et libero arbitrio*. PL 44, 881-912. ed. Migne. Paris, 1841; no critical edition has been made. Translated in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*. tr. Roland Teske, S.J. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999. pp. 70-107), one sees that what is elsewhere as the work of the Holy Spirit is described as the work of grace or the "spirit of grace." Grace is an operation of the Holy Spirit and faith and are nothing other than the Holy Spirit's infusion of itself into a human being restlessly searching for God, a prodigal and graced desire.

full-blown pastoral and ascetic theology (by which I mean a theory of the Christian life in relation to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation) in his treatment of the same text in a series of homilies preached in the Octave of Easter in the heat of the Donatist controversy in 407.¹²⁴ The Donatist schism arose over the treatment of lapsed Christians, especially bishops, in the final persecutions. It is therefore very surprising that Augustine would contend that the dispute was Christological, though we find him doing just that. He employs the same themes with which the author of 1 John concerned himself, though he reasons in a different order. The author of 1 John found that a primarily Christological controversy undermined the mutual love of the community, which was the site of God's presence. Augustine argued that an ecclesiological controversy undermined the incarnation by thwarting its intended effect. It is notable that in some ways, Augustine was arguing from a weak position. The Donatist church was much larger than the Catholic church in North Africa, and had a much more obvious link to the martyrs of the pre-Constantinian era, as we saw above. It had also maintained the line of apostolic succession, so that by Augustine's own understanding, its sacraments were valid (whereas the Donatists argued that the

¹²⁴ In *Iohannis epistulam ad parthos* (cited hereafter as *In Ioh. ep.*). For want of a more recent edition, I use the Latin text of PL 35, 1077-2062. The translation employed in the main text is Boniface Ramsey (tr.), *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*. (Works of Saint Augustine I/14). Hyde Park, NY (New City Press, 2008). There is very little scholarship on this important text. The most recent book-length treatment is Dany Dideberg, *Saint Augustine et la première Épître de saint Jean: Une théologie de l'agape*. Paris (Éditions Beauchesne, 1975). A more recent exploration of the text in relation to the themes of Trinity and incarnation is Lewis Ayres, "Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the Homilies on 1 John," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*. Kevin van Hoozer (ed.). Grand Rapids, MI (Eerdmans, 2001), 67-93.

catholics had allowed the line of succession to lapse through the consecration of Caecelian by bishops whom it deemed *traditores*). Using the occasion of the Octave of Easter, when catechumens have just been baptized, Augustine makes the case that the communion into which they have been baptized has a continuity with the apostolic church which the Donatists lack. To do this, he interprets the language of 1 John in Trinitarian terms, to show that just as the antagonists of the author rendered the communion of love impossible by denying the flesh of Christ, the Donatists have thwarted the Incarnation by breaking the communion of love. Here, he develops the theme of the church as the interpretive community further, though less systematically, than in *On Christian Teaching*, transferring the functions of the incarnate body of Jesus onto the scripture as read and interpreted in the church. In the language of a later era, he develops a theory of the three-fold body of Christ (the historical body of Jesus which is now in heaven, the church as body of Christ, and the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ).¹²⁵ It is fair to say that all three are different presentations of the same reality, but that scripture becomes a stand in for the historical body of Jesus in the constitution of the church and reception of the eucharistic elements. This does not contradict what he says about love being the glue that holds the body of Christ together. Rather, it makes the presence of the

¹²⁵ On the background and fate of the idea of the threefold body of Christ, see Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*. tr. Gemma Simmonds. Notre Dame, IN (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). For the influence of Augustine and the Donatist controversy in particular, see p. 13 ff.

Holy Spirit as love into the concrete process of reading, teaching, and hearing the biblical text and by connecting it back to the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth as the revelation of God's love.

As for the author of 1 John, love as revealed by Jesus and made present by the Holy Spirit is the basis of the church's connection to the earlier tradition. Having access to Pauline as well as Johannine language, Augustine understands the church as the body of Christ, which is closely connected with the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth. When he exegetes the phrase "he pitched his tent in the sun" from Psalm 19:4 in the Second Homily, he comments that "his tent is his flesh; his tent is his church."¹²⁶ Augustine exploits the inevitable slippage between the Pauline metaphor and the actual body that is its literal referent in order to make the point that the fellowship of the church is a stand in for the absent physical body of Christ. He invokes the Thomas episode of John 20 in the First Homily to explain that the fellowship to which the author of 1 John invites his readers in 1 John 1:2-3 is a fellowship with those who actually saw and touched Jesus. This fellowship with those who are announcing what they have seen is a fellowship with the one they saw, and with the One whom he made visible.

"Because [Thomas] touched the man, he confessed God. And the Lord—
consoling us who are unable to touch him with our hand as he is now

¹²⁶ In Ioh. ep. II.3 Tabernaculum eius caro eius; tabernaculum eius ecclesiae eius. Ramsey, p. 42

seated in heaven, although we can touch him by faith—said to him, *Because you have seen, you have believed. Blessed are those who do not see and who believe.* It is we who were described, we who were designated. May there be in us, then, the blessedness that the Lord foretold would come to be. Let us hold firmly onto what we don't see, because those who have seen it are announcing it. *So that you may have fellowship with us.* And what is there that is so great in having fellowship with human beings? Don't disdain it; see what he adds: *And so that our fellowship may be with God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. And we are writing these things to you, he says, so that your joy may be full.* He speaks of full joy in that very fellowship, in that very charity, in that very unity."¹²⁷

Augustine thus claims for his own church a fellowship with the first witnesses of the Incarnation and Resurrection that puts to shame anything the Donatists can claim for their fellowship with the martyrs. In fact, Augustine will go on to point out that “martyr” is the Greek word for witness. Because of its fellowship with the apostolic witnesses, it is the catholic church that is the true church of the martyrs.

Charity is not only the means of continuity with the apostolic church, but also the purpose of the Incarnation. Jesus made known the love of God in his life, and especially in his death, with the aim that his disciples would also show such love for one another, as we noted when looking at the Epistle itself. Augustine claims that “all those who violate charity deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. For, apart from charity, it wasn't necessary for Jesus to come.”¹²⁸ Since Augustine understands the Donatists to

¹²⁷ In Ioh. ep. I.3: quia tetigit hominem confessus est deum. et dominus consolans nos qui christum iam in caelo sedentem manu contrectare non possumus sed fide contingere ait illi: quia uidisti, credidisti. beati qui non uident et crediderunt. nos descripti sumus; nos designati sumus. fiat ergo in nobis beatitudo quam dominus praedixit futuram. firme teneamus quod non uidimus quia illi nuntiant qui uiderunt. ut et uos, inquit, societatem habeatis nobis cum. sequere. et quid magnum habere societatem cum hominibus? noli contemnere. uide quid addat: et societas nostra sit cum deo patre et iesu christo filio eius. haec, inquit, scribimus uobis ut gaudium nostrum sit plenum. Ramsey, p. 23.

¹²⁸ In Ioh. ep. VII.2: omnes negant iesum in carne uenisse qui uiolant caritatem. iesus enim non opus erat ut ueniret nisi propter caritatem. Ramsey, p. 105

have violated charity by creating a schism in the church, which is the body of Christ, he considers them to have effectively denied the flesh of Christ, the putting on of which is the purpose of the church. It does not matter that they profess the same Christological doctrine as Augustine or that they maintain valid sacraments if the end for which the Incarnation and the sacraments were ordained is thwarted: "Whoever violates charity then, let the tongue say what it will, denies by his life that Christ has come in the flesh, and he is an antichrist, wherever he may be, wherever he may enter."¹²⁹

As we know, the healing of both love and knowledge by the Holy Spirit through the humanity of Jesus is the goal of Christian life. Augustine explains in his homilies how the church is the site of that healing. Since the love of the church is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the communion of the Father and the Son, and since the presence of the Spirit is inextricably linked to the life and death of Jesus as the enactment in time of the eternal love of God, the members of the community are being formed into a love like God's (God's love itself, in fact). Their desires are being transformed into God's love, such that they continue Jesus' enactment of the love of God. This transformation does not occur in an instant, but is rather a lifelong therapy. The anointing of the Spirit "teaches within what we are unable to speak, and, because you are now unable to see, let your task consist in desiring."¹³⁰ In Augustine's anthropology, one tends toward the

¹²⁹ In Ioh. ep. VII.2: quisquis ergo uiolat caritatem, quodlibet dicat de lingua, uita ipsius negat christum in carne uenisse, et iste est antichristus ubicumque fuerit, quocumque intrauerit. Ramsey, p. 105

¹³⁰ In Ioh. ep. IV.6: illam unctionem quae intus docet quod loqui non possumus. et quia modo uidere non potestis, officium uestrum in desiderio sit. Ramsey, p. 69

thing one desires and becomes like it. Therefore, when we change the object of our desire or the way in which we desire it, we ourselves change. “The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire” for something that is not seen, Augustine says. “But by desiring you are made large enough, so that, when there comes what you should see, you may be filled.”¹³¹ As the Christian trains herself in the desire of an unseen object, her desire itself is transformed and enlarged: “This is how God stretches our desire through delay, stretches our soul through desire, and makes it large enough by stretching it.”

This transformation of desire relies on a christological transformation of temporality. In making this claim, I am disagreeing with Andrea Nightingale, who argues that in Augustine’s understanding, the human being experiences time in both a psychic and earthly temporalities, pertaining to the soul and body respectively.¹³² The soul’s temporality is characterized by distention and the body’s by decay. Being in time in a punishment from God to be partly overcome through intention, which focus the mind’s dispersed memories and expectations on trying to love God in the present, and hope. The hope is for an overcoming of the human condition as we know it, being eschatologically taken “out of nature” and into what she calls a “transhuman” enjoyment of the presence of God’s eternity. What is missing in Nightingale’s account,

¹³¹ In Ioh. ep. IV.6: tota uita christiani boni sanctum desiderium est...desiderando capax efficeris ut cum uenerit quod uideas, inplearis....sic deus differendo extendit desiderium; desiderando extendit animum; extendendo facit capacem. Ramsey, p. 69.

¹³² Andrea Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature: Augustine on Time and the Body*. Chicago (University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 96-100.

as in so many other discussions of time in Augustine's work, is Jesus. The Incarnation has changed the relationship between God and the world, realizing the potential of created things to signify their ineffable creator. The Incarnation has also created an interpretive community to whom creaturely signs, including those of scripture, are intelligible. The bond that holds this community together as constitutes it as the body of Jesus is the Holy Spirit, the very love of the two whom Augustine's tradition calls the Father and the Son. The church is a halfway house, a hospital for sinners, but the patients are being healed by being united to Jesus by the purification of their own love. The Christian life is a "training in desire." Temporality is no longer the distention that stretches us into nothingness, but the necessary condition for practicing the love of Christ in the Church.

This training of desire is also a training of knowledge, as we discussed in relation to *On the Trinity*. The goal of the Christian life, in which our desire is healed and trained, is in fact the understanding of the Trinity. This understanding is to occur in the context of a contemplation that unites knowledge and desire. In this life, our participation in the life of the church is a way for us to train ourselves to grow in knowledge and love the incarnate Christ, through whom we are eventually able to know and love the invisible Trinity: "Our milk is the humble Christ; our food is the very same Christ, equal to the Father. He nurses you with milk so that he may feed you with bread, for to touch Jesus

spiritually with the heart is to understand that he is equal to the Father.”¹³³

The role of scripture is again central, and its link to the Incarnation is even more explicit. In the second homily, Augustine takes us to the Emmaus episode in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24:13-25), and notes that the risen Jesus did not simply appear to the two disciples, but also opened the scriptures for them (meaning, of course, the Hebrew Scriptures), and explained how it should be read as a prophecy of his life and suffering, “lest they be more shaken if the Lord had risen and less believing if these things hadn’t previously been said of him.”¹³⁴ It is only in reference to Jesus that the scriptures can be understood, but the credibility of his resurrection is established by them. “Faith is firmly established by the fact that everything that happened to Christ was predicted.”¹³⁵ Rather than call this circular reasoning (which would not be totally unwarranted), it would be more helpful to say that Christ was incarnated into a hermeneutical circle. He was born into a community (Second Temple Palestinian Judaism) that was already reading and interpreting the scriptural text, and gave rise to another (the church), which he constitutes. One never approaches this hermeneutical operation from the outside. Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus did not encounter the scriptures in a vacuum, but rather in the context of a community constituted by its relationship to

¹³³ In Ioh. ep. III.1: lac nostrum christus humilis est; cibus noster idem ipse christus aequalis patri. lacte te nutrit ut pane pascat. nam corde contingere iesum spiritaliter, hoc est cognoscere quia aequalis est patri. Ramsey, p. 52

¹³⁴ In Ioh ep. II.1: ...ne illi magis moverentur, si resurrexisset dominus, et magis ei non crederent, si de illo ista ante dicta non essent. Ramsey, p. 37

¹³⁵ Idem. Firmitas enim fidei in eo est, quia omnia quae evenerunt in christo, praedicta sunt.

Jesus (with whom they were literally walking and talking, though they did not realize it). Likewise, Augustine's hearers are also encountering the scriptural text in a community that is constituted by its relationship to Jesus (some have just been baptized, but even a catechumen or a curious visitor is hearing the Bible in the midst of the community of the church). We have already seen that the church is the body of Christ through charity. We may now say that the body of Christ is a hermeneutical process in which the members of the interpreting community touch Christ through scripture, as Thomas did with his hand.

Augustine even suggests that the Incarnation and Resurrection might have been inadequate without scripture. He says, "Although he even offered himself to be touched by them, this wasn't enough for him unless he also strengthened believers' hearts by way of the scriptures. For he was looking forward to us who were to come, since we have nothing to touch but *do* have something to read."¹³⁶ In the absence of Christ's body, the function of the Incarnation has been transferred onto scripture, or perhaps better, onto the hermeneutical community of the church when it is reading scripture. As Cameron puts it, "[Christ and the church] appeared [early in Augustine's pastoral career] as two aspects of one spiritual reality, in fact a single living and speaking person...That voice sounded throughout Scripture as head and body, indeed Christ's saving energy as the head suffused all the accoutrements of his body, above all sacred

¹³⁶ In Ioh. ep. II.1: cum se palpandum praebuisset, non illi suffecit, nisi de scripturis confirmaret cor credentium: prospiciebat enim nos futuros; in quo quod palpemus nos non habemus, sed quod degamus habemus. Ramsey p. 38 (italics are the translator's).

Scripture and the sacraments. Eventually, this 'whole Christ' (*Christus totus*) permeated Augustine's thinking, preaching, and writing."¹³⁷ In being constituted as a hermeneutical process, the church can not only encounter the incarnate and resurrected body in scripture, but even speak with his voice through its interpretation and teaching of scripture.

It is this hermeneutical process which then allows the church as body of Christ to recognize the third presentation of the body of Christ in the sacrament of his body and blood. It was only after Jesus had expounded the scriptures to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Augustine explains that as Jesus was showing the disciples how the scriptures are to lead the reader to the life of Jesus, including his suffering, death and resurrection. At this point, Augustine tells us, "For the whole Church is the bride of Christ, whose origin and firstfruits are the flesh of Christ: there the bride is joined to her bridegroom in the flesh. Rightly, when he was mentioning this very flesh, did he break bread, and rightly were the eyes of his disciples opened, and they recognized him in the breaking of bread."¹³⁸

With the benefit of hindsight, we may find Augustine's obsessive polemics against the Donatists and later the Pelagians to be unfortunate, and may see his collaboration with the Roman state in the suppression of the Donatist church as a

¹³⁷ Cameron (2012), p. 98.

¹³⁸ In Ioh. ep. II.2: Omnis enim ecclesia sponsa christi est, cuius peincipium et primitiae caro christi est: ibi iuncta est sponsa sponso in carne. Merito carnem ipsam cum commendaret, panem fregit; et merito in franctione panis aperti sunt oculi discipulorum, et agnouerunt eum. Ramsey p. 39

betrayal of the love of God as revealed in Jesus. Augustine himself saw it as the application of his theory of love, using force to make the Donatists fulfill their purpose as human beings, which is to be signs of and participants in the love of God.¹³⁹ But for the church to be a community of interpretation in which incarnational reading is practiced under the guidance of a teacher, those elements which were never really part of it and which jeopardize that end had to be exposed and reformed or removed. The theory of love that is the basis of his own exegetical pluralism demands that the church, like the individual, must be healed, or trained and purged “by means of various disagreeable medicines,” as he put it in *On Christian Teaching*. We may regret Augustine’s presumption in attempting to apply the medicine himself by force. But we do see here how, just as the Elder of 1 John found in love not only an epistemic openness but also a rootedness in his communities teaching concerning the Incarnation, Augustine has developed that same rootedness and openness in his theory of the church as the training ground of love and understanding, indeed as the very body of Christ by virtue of its incarnational reading and teaching.

The goal of the Christian life is the love of God, but for Augustine as for 1 John, there is no love of God without love of brother and sister. This is a love expressed in time for one’s fellow temporal beings. It is significant that love starts to become such a

¹³⁹ For a fuller critique of Augustine’s theory of love and its entanglements with Roman force, see Miles, Margaret R. “Love’s Body, Intentions, and Effects : Augustine’s Homilies on the Epistle of First John.” *Sewanee Theological Review* 41:1 (1997), p. 19–33. In a subsequent chapter, I will attempt to reformulate Augustine’s insights in such a way as to free it from its violent entanglements.

prominent theme in Augustine in the Donatist controversy. Theologically, the point most at stake in that controversy was the nature of the church. For Augustine, the church was mixed with the world, and all of its members were, at best, recovering sinners. There is no good church and bad church; there is just the church, which is a mixed bag as long as it is *in via*. The church is full of sinners, including many who are very disagreeable. For Tyconius, they are part of the evil side of the church, which will be chopped off and thrown into the fire on the last day. But for Augustine, everyone in the church is at best a recovering sinner. To be sure, God will separate the wheat from the tares. But for now, they all grow together in the same field. The tares will be revealed never to have really been part of the crop, but there is no way to know that now. So while time endures, there is no option except to love them. And loving them entails not only accepting the painful and frustrating ambiguity of the church as a fact, but as a gift, just like the ambiguity of scripture.

Ambiguity and temporality are tied up with one another. If the church is *in via*, then it is ambiguous. And as long as the individual is desiring to touch Jesus but not yet doing so, he or she is ambiguous. But it is this very temporality which, for now, lets us learn to love. We will love God in eternity and simplicity, but for now, God has given us time. *Distentio* is not undone. But like the signs of scripture, and all the other signs of creation, it has taken on new meaning in Jesus. It is where we practice the virtue of love, which is the virtue of temporality.

Conclusion: Ascetic Theology

For Augustine, the reading and teaching of scripture plays a role in the healing of love and knowledge. He theorized this healing in relation to the Trinity in *On the Trinity*, explained how to read scripture in relation to the process of healing in *On Christian Teaching*, and taught it to the church in his *Homilies on 1 John*. In all three of these activities (theorizing, reading, and teaching), he tries to serve the end of this healing. They are practices by which we enter more fully into the incarnate life of Jesus. I call these practices “ascetic,” because they are a training for loving and knowing God. While Augustine is often not thought of as an ascetic thinker because he downplays the importance of celibacy and emphasizes the role of grace, he has shown how the whole life of the church (and not just monks) is a training in godly desire. The purpose of all of its activities, but especially its interpretation of scripture is to love more, which means to receive more fully the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the very love of God. Ambrose and various eastern Christians held that the ascetic life was that of virgins and monks, and was normative for the whole church. Both the church and the Christian individual should be characterized by purity. Marriage, according to Ambrose, was a concession to the weakness of human beings, and it was allowed but regrettable, as the intact, virginal body was so closely tied to the unmixed and inviolate church.¹⁴⁰ This effectively created a two-tiered church. But for Augustine, at least in some of his moods, marriage was a

¹⁴⁰ For an analysis of Ambrose, see Peter Brown, *Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. pp. 341-65

good, even if celibacy was better. The church was always a mixed body, and in the church, each individual Christian, lay person or consecrated virgin, was still a recovering sinner.¹⁴¹ All Christians are fundamentally on the same level. But as a result, the ascetic life is the life of the whole church. Every Christian is being healed through the re-integration of their love and knowledge through Christ, and learning how to love for its own sake what must be loved for its own sake, and to relate to all other things in a way that respects how they are related to God. Every Christian has access to the scripture in the hermeneutic community of Christ's body. Scripture is not a single prophetic message, as for Tyconius, but a set of signs, and the task of the interpreter is to learn how they signify God through Jesus. In doing so, he or she learns to see how all persons and things signify God through Jesus, and to love them accordingly. It is perhaps for this reason that Augustine conceded that a very spiritually advanced Christian no longer needed the Bible for himself or herself, but only to teach others.¹⁴² She has learned how to read the whole universe as a sign. This is the goal and norm of exegesis and the whole Christian life.

¹⁴¹ Willemien Otten, "The Long Shadow of Human Sin: Augustine on Adam, Eve, and the Fall," in B.E.J.H. Becking and S.A. Hennecke (eds.), *Out of Paradise: Eve and Adam and Their Interpreters*. Sheffield (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 29-49.

¹⁴² DDC I.xxxix.43

Chapter 3
Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum:
Affective and Intellectual Formation in the House of St. Victor

*Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,--
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.*

-William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"

Augustine showed how a new relationship to God through the body of Christ (both the body which he took on at his Incarnation and his body the church), which was based on scripture, entailed at the same time a new hermeneutical stance toward scripture and the whole of reality. Because the Word has become flesh, everything in the world can now be a sign of God if known and loved correctly, including the human being, especially the soul. Augustine wrote most of his works as a bishop, and therefore is mainly concerned with the public teaching of the church, despite the introspective moments in the *Confessions* and *On the Trinity*.¹ In what we call the Middle Ages, the possibilities of exploring the inner life and the natural world opened by Augustine were

¹ It is worth noting that before the Renaissance, the first nine books of the *Confessions* were not widely read.

experimented with by monastic theologians and, later, scholastic ones. Anselm comes to mind as a pioneer of interiority in the eleventh century. The cathedral school of Chartres left no stone unturned in the endeavor to study nature. Changes in society and the church in the 12th century such as urbanization, the foundation of the mendicant orders, anxiety concerning heresy, and the crusades provided fertile ground for some of the most creative and influential work in both of these trajectories. Willemien Otten characterizes much 12th century thought as a new humanism which was interested in “engaging the divine and the universe in joint conversation.”² Otten notes the centrality or even dominance of the human voice in the conversation, giving the human being a sort of equality with the divine.

In this chapter, we will examine two prominent members of the Abbey of St. Victor, a house of Augustinian canons on the left bank of the Seine in Paris. They are also part of the 12th century’s humanist moment. The Victorines proposed a program of reading, meditation, and contemplation. The principal text for reading was scripture, which was also a subject of meditation. But the world was also read and meditated upon, as were one’s inner dispositions and outer conduct. Thus, the Victorines fit Otten’s description of humanism as engaging the universe and the divine in conversation, with the human voice being both natural and central.

² Willemien Otten, *From Paradise to Paradigm: A Study of Twelfth Century Humanism*. Leiden (Brill, 2004), p. 3.

The two figures I have chosen are Hugh and Richard of St. Victor. The house of St. Victor was a community of regular canons in Paris. Regular canons were priests who lived in community under some version of the Rule of St. Augustine. Their movement was one of many new forms of life in the 12th century, alongside monastic reform movements like the Cistercians, and the mendicant orders. All of these movements were attempts to recover the *vita apostolica* for the contemporary church.³ The canons were distinguished by their ideal of *docere verbo et exemplo*. Their communities were devoted to forming members as well as those beyond their walls, both through their teaching and through the example of their life. Caroline Walker Bynum demonstrates that this was a new ideal in religious life.⁴ Earlier monastic literature presented a static life of obedience and virtue as the ideal. While this remained the ideal to a large extent in 12th century monasticism, figures such as Bernard of Clairvaux began to see the monastic life as one of development, especially affective development.⁵ The practices of canons and monks could overlap considerably, as each balanced the tensions inherent in the concept of the apostolic life in different ways. Canons could be quite eremitic and monks quite apostolic.⁶

³ On the apostolic life in the 12th century, the classic is M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*. Jerome Taylor and Lester Little, eds. and trs. Toronto (University of Toronto Press, 1997). pp. 202-238.

⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*. Missoula, MT (Scholars Press, 1979).

⁵ On the dynamics of monastic temporality in Bernard, see M.B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity: Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism*. Stanford (Stanford University Press, 2003). pp. 84-106.

⁶ Bynum, pp. 181-200.

Although Hugh was the fountainhead of Victorine theology and spirituality and was more influential at the time, we will consider him mainly as providing background for Richard. The goal of the Victorine life was the restoration of the image of God through knowledge and virtue, a familiar enough theme for those who know Augustine. The Victorines are thoroughly Augustinian, but they mine their Augustinian inheritance, using both the reading and meditation techniques that had been developed in monasteries for the last thousand years, but also selectively appropriating the style of the emerging scholasticism. Though they themselves lived a mostly cloistered existence, their proximity to Paris and their selective engagement with contemporary trends enabled them to recruit the the whole world and all legitimate human endeavors into the service of the ascetic life much more systematically and comprehensively than Augustine. The integration of all arts into the contemplative life was Hugh's major accomplishment. Richard built on Hugh's foundation by developing an acute psychology, exploring how discursive and affective processes relate to one another and can be used to modify one another in the quest for contemplation. In his earlier and more famous works, it is the intellect which gives birth to a contemplation that transcends it. But in his later work, he integrates love into reason in such a way that he takes himself to be able to open the very Trinity to rational investigation. When he applies the lessons he learns about the intersubjectivity of love from his Trinitarian breakthrough to his analysis of the contemplative life, he is able to chart a course

toward loving in God's way with all of one's feeling and intellect, which amounts to a Latin doctrine of deification. As capable of being made into God, the human being is truly God's partner and, in a sense, equal.

This chapter proceeds by considering the role of intellect and affect in Hugh's scheme of spiritual exercises, in which reading figures prominently. This entails looking at his understanding of God's works of creation and restoration, which serve to lead human beings back to divine wisdom through love and knowledge. We will then turn to the works of Richard. Looking at four works from different moments in his career, we will examine his understanding of contemplation. We will observe which realities are accessible to love and reason in the various stages of contemplation. As love and reason become more integrated in his later work, reason gains access to the very mysteries of the Trinity. A new, more intersubjective understanding of trinitarian personhood results, which will serve as the basis for a new way of imagining the human being's growth in love. Loving in God's way, the human being is deified. As we trace this trajectory, we will observe how the contemplative engages scripture at every point along the way. But first, we must say a word about a prominent theme in this literature.

A Word about Affect and Interiority

While it must be noted that the boundary between the monastery and the world outside of it was often quite fluid,⁷ the development of interiority as a religious theme in the early and high Middle Ages occurred in the context of the ritualized life of the monasteries. Anselm of Canterbury was the paradigmatic example, though the late antique ideas of cultivation of the self had been transmitted to monastic culture by Cassian. Ineke van 't Spijker explains that as the inner life came to greater prominence in the 12th century, it was transformed by a new emphasis on self-knowledge and experience.⁸ However, it is important to note that “experience” does not have its contemporary “connotations of irreducible authenticity and subjectivity.”⁹ It is, rather, “subject to the process of composition, including both *cogitatio* and *affectus*. As well as *homo interior*, the word 'composing' and its equivalents, or *forma* and its derivatives, can be found in the texts. They refer to the conceptual background of monastic pedagogy, and give access to an important element of how interiority is conceived.”¹⁰ *Affectus* and related words have a broader range than emotion, though they certainly include it. They would also include perception and disposition. Most importantly, affect and experience

⁷ “Categories like monastic and scholastic theology to describe it do not really apply in what is generally a pre-scholastic period, one, moreover, in which the walls of the monastery were by no means impenetrable” (Otten, p. 1). Chenu describes the changes in the 12th century understanding of the apostolic life by saying that the monastery was no longer uniquely the “city of God.” The apostolic life was also practiced by persons living it in the world. “Society existed and Christians lived in it; to do so was their calling” (Chenu, p. 222).

⁸ Ineke van 't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Turnhout (Brepols, 2004).

⁹ Van 't Spijker, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ Van 't Spijker, p. 9.

are subject to transformation through the monastic disciplines. They are not simply something to explore, but also something to achieve, based on the models provided in monastic literature. Monastic life is a work of art. It is mimetic rather than creative, though this distinction may be misleading, since reform is classically understood as part of imitation.¹¹ But practiced diligently, it will restore the lost image of God.¹²

Hugh of St. Victor: Arts, Reading, Meditation, Prayer

Hugh of St. Victor was the most formative and influential member of the Victorine school. His writings include treatises on the various techniques and disciplines of canonical life as practiced at the House of St. Victor as well as exegetical treatises. These exegetical treatises are often of a philosophical or theological nature. For example, his magnum opus, *On the Sacraments*, covers all of creation and redemption. However, whether or not a text is a homily or scriptural commentary, it always plays with scriptural words or images. This is true of Richard as well. These texts fit Hugh's definition of meditation, which we will explore below. All of Hugh's work has the aim of guiding the reader to the restoration of the lost image of God: "This is our entire task--the restoration of our nature and the removal of our deficiency."¹³ He wishes "to

¹¹ Karl F. Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982: "In the Western tradition, reform was clearly understood to be part of imitation. If we contrast imitation with originality, it is only because we have stopped thinking that good imitation must be continual invention, as it was, for example, when Bach imitated Vivaldi" (p. ix).

¹² Van' t Spiker, pp. 9-14

¹³ Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon de studio legendi*. (hereafter, *Didasc.*) ed. C.H. Buttimer. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1939. I.5. Cited in translation as Jerome Taylor (tr.), *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*. New York (Columbia University Press, 1961). p. 52.

restore within us the divine likeness, a likeness which to us is a form but to God is his nature.”¹⁴ The whole of Hugh’s writing and formational program is organized toward this aim, which is accomplished through knowledge and virtue. “The integrity of human nature, however, is attained in two things--in knowledge and in virtue, and in these lies our sole likeness to the supernal and divine substances.”¹⁵

The restoration of the marred image of God continues the Augustinian tradition. Hugh is part of the history of ascetic reading of scripture in which love is both the goal and the norm. While it is true that Hugh does not explicitly discuss love very often in the works we will consider, it is clear that in his pursuit of knowledge and virtue, he has in mind an ascetic program similar to Augustine’s. As with Augustine, this asceticism was neither solitary nor primarily characterized by renunciation, but was a program of self and community formation and cultivation. One will recall from the previous chapter that for Augustine, knowledge and virtue would pertain to intellect and will, respectively. Hugh enhances this tradition by giving a much more detailed pedagogy than Augustine and recruiting both study and disciplined living for the ascetic aim of restoration. Boyd Coolman notes that, whereas motion was the prevailing metaphor for Augustine, with the soul ascending to God by changing the direction of its love through grace, Hugh’s key metaphor is building. Through the exercises he prescribes in the context of a disciplined, communal, and ecclesial life, one rebuilds (or reforms) the

¹⁴ Didasc. II.1, Taylor p. 61.

¹⁵ Didasc. I.5, Taylor p. 52.

derelict image of God, building up a temple in one's heart into which God descends in order to dwell.¹⁶ As part of this formation, he prescribes reading, meditation, action, prayer, and contemplation. Reading is the foundation of the inner edifice that is to be God's dwelling, and contemplation is its consummation.¹⁷ In what follows, we will analyze Hugh's treatment of the reading, meditation, and prayer in order to show how his program seeks to restore the image of God by forming knowledge and love in a very Augustinian fashion. This is to say that it is an ascetic program, as defined at the end of the previous chapter. And while he is writing to Augustinian canons about a special sort of life to which they are devoted, by virtue of the fact that he includes all legitimate human occupation under the heading of philosophy, he has potentially opened up the field of ascetic endeavor to everyone. After all, the life of the canons at St. Victor was to be practiced for the benefit of all the Christians of Paris. Their express purpose was *docere verbo et exemplo*.¹⁸

Taking reading first, we observe that a major change in the reading techniques of western Christian clerics and scholars occurred in the 11th and 12th centuries, and

¹⁶ Boyd Taylor Coolman, *The Theology of Hugh of St. Victor*. New York (Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 1-29, esp. p. 23

¹⁷ Didasc. V.9, Taylor pp. 132-3.

¹⁸ For more on this ideal, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the Twelfth Century*. Berkeley (University of California Press, 1982), pp. 22-58. See also Hugh Feiss, OSB, "Preaching by Word and Example" in *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith. Notre Dame, IN (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013). pp. 153-185.

Hugh was a key figure.¹⁹ Monastic reading had largely been dominated by certain Augustinian principles, but even more so by John Cassian. Initially due to the material constraints of writing without spaces, it was necessary to read aloud in order to distinguish words.²⁰ This way of reading left its indelible mark on Christian reading in the Middle Ages. Memorization and recitation were central to the lives of monks, both in choir and in the privacy of one's own cell. This influenced what it meant to read and meditate on a text. As Robertson says,

In the early monastic rules, as in classical usage, *meditatio* chiefly means repetition, memorization, and recitation. The term refers to the process of learning texts by heart, and also to psalmody and recitation performed while the monk is at work, away from the written page....Reading aloud transforms reading into prayer. Pronouncing the words under one's breath, one quite literally 'tastes' them in the mouth, and more profoundly, in *ore cordis*, 'in the mouth of the heart.' Sounding words out loud (*voce magna*, or *clare legendo*) engages the sense of hearing and opens the ethical dimension of the listening attitude.²¹

Understanding the biblical text was a secondary goal, which occurred as the result of increased familiarity. It was a gift of the Holy Spirit. Augustine had encouraged reading and memorization of the biblical text even if one could not understand it, but Cassian provided the West with a theory of reading and meditation. Memorization and repetition would eventually lead to insight and transformation, and the text would be

¹⁹ See Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*. Chicago (University of Chicago Press, 1993). For a useful non-technical treatment, see also Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*. Collegeville, MN (Liturgical Press, 2011).

²⁰ One may recall Augustine's amazement at Ambrose's ability to read silently. Indeed, much of late Roman education was devoted to deciphering a text correctly by correctly pronouncing it and determining what the words were.

²¹ Robertson, xiv-xv.

encountered differently.²² “As our mind is increasingly renewed by this study, Scripture begins to take on a new face. A mysteriously deeper sense of it comes to us and somehow the beauty of it stands out more and more as we get farther into it. Scripture shapes itself to human capacity.”²³ Hugh did not cease to teach and practice liturgical recitation and *lectio divina*, but his writings nevertheless betray a major shift in the meanings of *lectio* and *meditatio*.²⁴ They were no longer expected to bear fruit over time through mere repetition. Reading was now a *studium*, an activity to be learned and performed with deliberation, requiring aptitude, practice, and discipline.²⁵

Hugh’s theory of reading, its purpose, and the multiple meanings of texts largely follow from his understanding of the relation of creation to Christ and the work of restoration. At the beginning of the first book of the Didascalicon, Hugh orients all human striving toward Wisdom, the Second Person of the Trinity, who makes all other knowledge possible (even self-knowledge): “Of all things to be sought, the first is that Wisdom in which the Form of the Perfect Good stands fixed. Wisdom illuminates man so that he may recognize himself.”²⁶ All created things receive their form from Christ as

²² John Cassian, *Conferences* XIV:10. Cited in translation as Colm Luibheid (tr.), *Conferences*. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.

²³ Cassian, *Conf.* XIV.11, Luibheid p. 165

²⁴ As Illich explains, Hugh revived classical models of memorization, enabling his students to organize and deploy their knowledge of the text free of the limitations of the written page. Furthermore, he brings not only the classical liberal arts, but also the mechanical arts into the service of reading and meditation as their necessary prerequisites.

²⁵ Didasc. III.6, Taylor p. 90

²⁶ Didasc. I.1, Taylor p. 46

Wisdom,²⁷ especially human beings, in whom “the divine likeness” is to be restored through “the contemplation of truth and the practice of virtue.”²⁸ All legitimate human actions are intended to form, reform, or maintain the form of something, whether they have as their explicit aim the maintenance of bodies or the sanctification of souls. To seek the form or idea of all things is to seek Christ in all things, and this was Hugh’s definition of philosophy, derived from Boethius.²⁹ Because all things express Christ as Wisdom, and all activities are oriented toward Wisdom, all arts are part of philosophy. Furthermore, the study and performance of all arts is driven by love.

Because he believes that the whole earth was created for humankind and is to be used for the work of restoration,³⁰ Hugh recruits all of the arts, and all writings that instruct in them, into the service of salvation. “Worldly or secular writings,” he says, “have as subject matter the works of foundation. Divine Scripture has as subject matter the works of restoration.”³¹ Both the *Didascalicon*, the earlier treatise on reading, and *On the Sacraments*, his mature summa of his teaching, instruct the reader on the nature, distinction, and use of all theoretical, practical, and even mechanical arts, calling them

²⁷ Didasc. II.1, Taylor p. 61

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. Much of the *Didascalicon* consists of reworked quotations of classical authors, almost all of which are unattributed. Taylor has done an admirable job of identifying them and their sources in the notes to his translation. For our present purposes, I am not concerned with what is quoted and what is original.

³⁰ Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis* (hereafter, *De sacr.*). PL 176. I.prologue.3. Cited in translation as Roy J. Deferrari (tr.), *Hugh of St. Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007.

³¹ *De sacr.* I.prol.2. Deferrari, p. 4

branches of philosophy, at the service of wisdom.³² Knowledge of these arts is necessary to understand scripture, but also for the sake of providing for the needs of this life. They thus pertain mainly to the work of creation. However, for Hugh, the work of creation and the arts pertaining to it (including the reading techniques associated with those arts) are taken up into the work of restoration. The skills necessary for reading a secular text are also needed for reading scripture, mainly for understanding the literal or historical sense. But there is a further meaning rooted in the historical meaning, because the whole of God's redemptive action in history has a meaning. It is a symbol or "sacrament" of Christ.³³

Because reading is oriented toward both knowledge and virtue, it is linked to one's way of life. This is clear from its requirements. The first, aptitude, is to some extent inborn, but one's manner of life can enhance or diminish it. Aptitude "arises from nature, is improved by use, is blunted by excessive work, and is sharpened by temperate practice."³⁴ It is further enhanced by the other two, discipline and practice. Discipline specifically refers to "leading a praiseworthy life," by which students must "combine moral behavior with their knowledge."³⁵ Practice means the cultivation of

³² De sacr. I.prol.6. Van 't Spijker notes that the inclusion of the mechanical arts is Hugh's innovation. Commenting on the *Didascalicon*: "The inclusion of the mechanical arts in philosophy is incorporated in Hugh's view of the salvatory role of learning" (p. 72).

³³ De sacr. I.prol.5. See De sacr. I.1.12 for an example of the sacramental meaning of the historical narration, in the case, the creation of light.

³⁴ Didasc. III.7, Taylor p. 91

³⁵ Didasc. III.6, Taylor p. 90

natural endowment through “assiduous effort,” and consists of reading and meditation (the *Didascalicon* briefly defines meditation, but defers discussion of it. It is taken up in *On Meditation*, to which we will turn below). Under the heading of practice, he discusses the order in which texts concerning each art should be read, and how it should be expounded. He then lists six things a student needs, classifying some of them under discipline and some under practice. Humility, eagerness to learn, quiet, scrutiny, parsimony, and foreign soil.

Under the heading of practice, the skills of reading and remembering and the knowledge of the arts help one understand the historical meaning of the texts. For secular texts, this is quite sufficient. For sacred texts, however, not only do the words mean things, but things themselves mean something. Here, Hugh is clearly influenced by Augustine’s *signa translata*.³⁶ For Augustine, as Robert Markus puts it, “a text can be taken in its strictest literal meaning and may never the less have, indirectly, a further reference. It is the events narrated by it that may themselves have a meaning, that is to say, they constitute...a divine discourse.”³⁷ Transferred meaning forms the basis for the allegorical and tropological meanings, which pertain to the work of restoration rather than to the work of creation. But whereas Augustine had a strong preference for the

³⁶ Grover A. Zinn Jr, “The Influence of Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana* on the Writings of Hugh of St. Victor” in *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English. Notre Dame, IN (Notre Dame University Press, 1995. pp. 48-60.

³⁷ Robert A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity*. Liverpool (Liverpool University Press, 1996). p. 10. All of pp. 1-44 provide a very useful summary of Augustine’s understanding of signs. See also my previous chapter.

literal meaning of a scriptural text when it did not lead to moral or doctrinal error, and Cassian saw the spiritual senses of scripture as depths of meaning that gradually opened themselves to the reader, Hugh believes that the allegorical and moral meanings are to be sought out through the skills the student acquires from the *grammaticus* and the school of St. Victor.

The second of Hugh's exercise we will discuss is meditation. Hugh wrote a number of short works on spiritual life, one of which is *On Meditation*.³⁸ He defines meditation as "a frequent reflection investigating the manner, the cause, and the reason of each thing."³⁹ He distinguishes three types, which concern creatures, scriptures, and morals. Meditation on creatures receives the smallest treatment, in which Hugh says that "admiration raises inquiry, inquiry investigation, and investigation discovery," these three being associated, respectively, with the arrangement, cause, and reason of creatures. Of much more interest is meditation on scripture and conduct. Meditation on scripture serves an epistemological end: "Meditation on the scriptures is how we ought to know."⁴⁰ Concerning it, Hugh tells us that "Reading offers material to know the truth, meditation assimilates it, prayer lifts it up, action organizes it, and contemplation

³⁸ Hugh of St. Victor, "De meditatione" in *Six opuscles spirituels*, SC 155. ed. Roger Baron. Paris (Les Éditions du Cerf, 1969). pp. 9-16. Hereafter, De med. Cited in translation as Frans van Liere (tr.) "On Meditation" in *Writings on the Spiritual Life* (VTT4), ed. Christopher P. Evans. Hyde Park, NY (New City Press, 2014). pp. 387-94

³⁹ De med. prol. Van Liere p. 388: Meditatio est frequens cogitatio modum et causam et rationem uniuscuiusque rei investigans.

⁴⁰ De med. I. Van Liere p. 387: In scripturis meditatio est, quomodo scire oporteat.

rejoices in it.”⁴¹ Like reading, meditation on scripture can seek historical, allegorical, and tropological meanings. To meditate on the historical meaning is not simply a matter of understanding the narratives or descriptions in the Bible, but it aims “to seek or admire the reason for things that are done,” including divine judgments. Meditating on allegory is here specifically defined as attempting “to order past events” by seeing how they signify future events. Tropological meditation identifies “what fruit certain sayings bring forth...what illumination [scripture] gives for the understanding of virtue, what food it gives to affection, and what instruction it gives on the rule of conduct for the path of virtue.”⁴² Meditation on conduct is something of a misnomer, since the real object of meditation is oneself in the light of scripture. From scriptural meditation, one learns what is right and what possibilities God offers. In light of this, meditation on conduct considers affect, thought, and action. Affect becomes virtue when it is directed toward the right end and in the right way, but thought and action are trickier. The purity of thought is judged by the affection from which it arises and the action to which it gives rise. Action is likewise judged by its motivating thought and affection, but Hugh does not assume that one’s motivations are transparent, even to oneself. For this reason, the motivation is often only known from the result of the action.

⁴¹ Ibid. *Primo lectio ad cognoscendam veritatem ministrat, meditatio coaptat, oratio sublevat, operatio componit, contemplatio in ipsa exultat.*

⁴² De med. III, Van Liere p. 388: *In tropologia, meditatio operatur quem fructum dicta afferant...quid ad intelligentiam virtutis illuminet, quid nutriat affectionem, quid formam vivendi ad iter virtutis edoceat.*

Related to meditation is prayer, the third activity which we shall consider on the way to contemplation. Hugh describes prayer in terms very similar to meditation, especially meditation on scripture, but which emphasize its affective element.⁴³ In *On the Power of Prayer*,⁴⁴ prayer is described as “nothing else than devotion of the mind, that is, turning toward God with a loving and humble feeling, supported by faith, hope, and charity.”⁴⁵ Prayer is of many sorts, ranging from petition to “pure prayer,” in which one’s desire for God becomes self-forgetfulness.⁴⁶ Prayer requires an exercise of affect, “a feeling of complete devotion.”⁴⁷ The words prayed are secondary: “Whatever the words of the one praying are, they are not absurd if only they can be uttered suitably either to arouse the one praying to feel love of God, or, what is greater, if he already burns with love of him, they show his intensity.”⁴⁸ However, this is not a superficial manipulation of emotions upon which the success or failure of prayer depends. It comes about by an exercise of thought. Meditation must either accompany or precede prayer, because one is moved to this devotion either by the consideration of one’s own misery

⁴³ While there is a basic pattern in Hugh and Richard of reading, meditation, and contemplation, the boundaries of the things leading to contemplation are not static, and sometimes the list is expanded.

⁴⁴ Hugh of St. Victor, *De virtute orandi*. in ed. Hugh Feiss O.S.B. and P. Sicard, *L'oeuvre de Hugues de Saint-Victor 1*. Turnhout (Brepols, 1997). pp. 115-171. Hereafter, *De vir. or.* Cited in translation as Hugh Feiss OSB (tr.), “On the Power of Prayer,” in VTT4. pp. 331-348.

⁴⁵ *De vir. or.* V.2, Feiss p. 333: *Nihil ergo aliud est oratio quam mentis deuotio, ed est, conuersio in Deum per pium et humilem affectum, fide, spe et caritate subnixa.*

⁴⁶ *De vir. or.* VII.4, Feiss p. 334

⁴⁷ *De vir. or.* XI.2, Feiss p. 337

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: *Quaecumque ergo sunt uerba orantis, absurda non sunt, si tantummodo ad hoc competenter proferri possint, ut uel orantis affectum ad amorem Dei excitent, uel, quod amplius est, si iam amore eius flagrat, excitatum demonstrent.*

or of God's mercy. One should also make use of scripture for the sake of transforming affects. "Therefore, let each one, when in prayer he sings psalms or any other Scriptures, carefully consider what feeling they serve, and let him expend every effort to rouse his heart to that feeling to which he sees what he is saying most relates, because if he has the feeling of the words which he speaks, through that very feeling he will know better the power of the words and grasp their understanding, and through the understanding of the words he will enkindle his feeling to greater and greater devotion."⁴⁹ No notion of feeling as in some way autonomous is in play here. Affect, like thought, is formed through exercise. Changing one's thoughts also changes one's feeling, and vice versa.

The goal of the three activities of reading, meditation, and prayer is contemplation, which will be of the utmost importance in our discussion of Richard. Hugh most clearly spells out his understanding of contemplation in his first homily on Ecclesiastes. The text is often referred to, but neither a critical edition nor an English translation has been made. His contrast of meditation and contemplation is rhetorically beautiful. Meditation is the deliberate and acute direction of thought, either seeking to uncover something covered or intently penetrating into something hidden. Contemplation is the perceptive and free soaring of the mind for which meditation prepares. While meditation seeks to work out what is hidden, the objects of

⁴⁹ De virt. or. 12.3, Feiss p. 339: Vnusquisque ergo cum in oratione uel psalmos uel alias quascunque scripturas cecantat, diligenter consideret cui affectui seruiant, et ad illum affectum toto nisu cor suum excitet, ad quem id quod loquitur magis pertinere uidet, quia si uerborum que loquitur affectum habuerit, per affectum ipsum melius uerborum uirtutem cognoscet et intelligentiam capiet, et per uerborum intelligentiam in maiorem deuotionem affectum accendet.

contemplation are manifested to it. "Contemplation is that energy of the understanding which holds all things in view and comprehends the things shown to it by vision."⁵⁰ Meditation is a discursive practice, but contemplation is supra-discursive. Meditation can only have one object at a time, but contemplation sees each thing in relation to the whole. It is for Richard to define contemplation more precisely. But it is important for both Hugh and Richard to understand that contemplation is a goal that requires preparation in the form of exercises that engage scripture, the world, and the self through both intellect and affect.

Richard of St. Victor: The Role and Transformation of Intellect and Affect

Two of Richard's treatises on contemplation are among his best known works. The first, *The Twelve Patriarchs* (usually listed in bibliographies under the title *Benjamin minor*),⁵¹ and the work variously titled *The Mystic Ark*, *On the Grace of Contemplation*, and *Benjamin major*. *The Twelve Patriarchs* describes the steps to contemplation through a tropological interpretation of the family of the patriarch Jacob, where each child represents a virtue or habit to be cultivated. The cooperation of reason (symbolized by Leah) and knowledge (symbolized by Rachel) is emphasized. It is knowledge that gives birth to contemplation (represented by Benjamin), though contemplation is described as

⁵⁰ *In ecclesiasten homiliae XIX* (homily 1). There is no critical edition or English translation. The text is found in PL 175.116-118. Lines 117A-B: *Contemplatio est vivacitas illa intelligentiae quae cuncta in palam habens, manifesta visione comprehendit.*

⁵¹ Richard of St. Victor, *Les Douze Patriarch (Benjamin minor)*. SC419. Hereafter Ben. min. Cited in translation as "The Twelve Patriarchs" in *Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, tr. Grover A. Zinn. New York (Paulist Press, 1979). pp. 51-148. At the risk of confusion, I will use Ben. min. in the footnotes, that being the the way the work is commonly cited, but refer to it as *The Twelve Patriarchs* in the main text.

an ecstatic transcendence of the mind. The second work, *The Mystic Ark*, is much longer. It makes only minimal mention of desire or will, being mostly devoted to a tropological interpretation of the Ark of the Covenant, describing the grades of contemplation in and above imagination, reason, and understanding. In both of these works, the mystery of the Trinity is said to be above and beyond reason. However, two later works are devoted entirely to love. One of them, *The Trinity* (not to be confused with Augustine's work of the same name), understands the Trinity in terms of love, building on Augustine, and even offers a proof of the doctrine of the Trinity based on his understanding of love, building on Anselm. The final text we will consider, *On the Four Degrees of Violent Love*, which works out the "mystical corollary of the dogmatic breakthrough" in understanding love and relationality "achieved in *The Trinity*,"⁵² and describes a pattern of ascent and descent that closely parallels the earlier description on contemplation.

All four works qualify as meditations, in Hugh's sense of the word. They are scriptural meditations even, though ones that move very far away from what the Victorines would call the historical meaning of the text. For example, Richard's interpretation of the story of Jacob's family in terms of the faculties and virtues that lead the soul to contemplation seem like a stretch to the literal-minded reader. Either he is contorting the text to make it fit his moral theory, or he has produced a very convoluted

⁵² Bernard McGinn. *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century*. New York (Crossroads Publishing, 1994). p. 413.

moral theory in order to fit the biblical narrative. One may perhaps wonder what the theory of contemplation gains from being associated with a bizarre and complicated story, or a strange and convoluted image, such as in *The Mystic Ark*. However, it would be better to read his wide-ranging meditation not so much as a contortion of the text or the moral theory, but rather a sustained dialogue with the text. As the exercise of reading gives rise to the activity of meditation, the reader's interpretation of the text makes way for the text's interpretation of the reader. As Jean Châtillon says, scripture has become a mirror for Richard "*qui lui permet d'explorer les régions les plus obscures et les plus secrètes de l'être spirituel...Elle met à sa disposition des instruments d'analyse, un vocabulaire, tout un système de symboles et d'images, qui sont autant de moyens d'investigation intérieure.*"⁵³ Richard's meditations offer the reader an opportunity to see herself or himself in the Bible. The squabbles and trials of Jacob's children reveal one's own immaturities and inner conflicts, but also allow one to recognize the Holy Spirit stirring up the flame of desire for God. The details of the ark's construction serve as a pattern for shaping "the heavy weight of this unintelligible world" of the mind into a temple for God. Virtue is coherency, sin is incoherency. The ark of contemplation shows the reader what coherency and beauty is possible and prescribes the artistry needed.

In the Victorines (and other 12th century figures), experience has acquired pedagogical value, though we must hasten to note that the experience in question is not

⁵³ Jean Châtillon, "Richard de Saint-Victor," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, 13 (Paris, 1987), pp. 594-654, p. 631.

that of modern subjectivity, which may be represented in text with varying degrees of adequacy, which may be authentic or inauthentic, and which is an independent criterion by which ideas, institutions, and ways of life are judged. Rather, as Van 't Spijker explains, in the course of directing and modeling the process of contemplation through his interpretation of a biblical text, "More than once Richard appeals to the reader's experience and urges the reader to participate in the process: the epistemological process is not opposed to but subsumed within the reader's *experientia*. The reader constructs his experience in the process. Experience relates to knowledge as well as feelings, and is tied to the reading process and the images evoked by it."⁵⁴

As for Augustine, the biblical text plays a normative role in the ascetic life by training the reader in both knowledge and love, or Hugh's "knowledge of truth and love of virtue." As one advances in the ascetic life, one gains greater insights into the deeper meanings of the text. Though the historical meaning remains foundational, the nature of meditation and the sought-after contemplation enables the canon meditating on scripture to see not only doctrinal truths in biblical stories and images, but also a pattern for their own ascetic and contemplative life that is informed by their experiences, but also structures them. The stages of the contemplative life that Richard describes are a script or blueprint for what Van 't Spijker calls the "composition" of oneself. Composition of one's person and exegesis are "telescoped within each other."

⁵⁴ Van 't Spijker, pp. 146-7

Richard offers an "exegetical narrative which enables [his readers] to reconstruct, after the model of this narrative, a coherent inner life, and which also shows how incoherence will remain inevitable."⁵⁵ The invention or discovery of moral interpretations of the text results from the interplay of text and experience, in the light of the goal of reading and meditation, which is wisdom accessed through knowledge and virtue. Therefore, as for Augustine, the goal of the ascetic life is also normative for scripture. The goal is the contemplation of the Trinity. In Richard's earlier works, where love is simply one step on the path to contemplation which is born in but transcends knowledge, the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation are "above and beyond reason." One accepts them in faith, and eventually contemplates them in *excessus mentis*. But in later works, love has been integrated into reason, which allows meditation to soar to the heights of the Trinity, even offering a logical proof of the doctrine based on the inter-subjective, interpersonal nature of love. Finally, based on this understanding of personhood, he can explain the whole contemplative trajectory and the Incarnation of Christ in terms of love. By being made one with God in love, one ultimately participates in the going-forth of the Incarnation. Though this has been offered by some theologians of just renown as a preferable alternative to Augustine's understanding of the Trinity (and thus of the ascetic life),⁵⁶ it is in fact a development of the possibilities of that

⁵⁵ Van 't Spijker, 129

⁵⁶ For the reception of Augustine's Trinitarian theology by medieval and modern theologians, see Roland Kany, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007. On Richard, see pp. 351-2, and the treatment of both by von Balthasar on pp. 376-8. See also Kany, "Trinity," in Karla Pollman (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, v. 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. pp. 1821-24.

understanding. In the following survey, we will pay careful attention to how reason and love are related, and observe that as this relation changes in later works, the capability of reason to enter into the life of the Trinity is enhanced.

The Twelve Patriarchs

Richard's *The Twelve Patriarchs* is a meditation on scripture that serves as a script or blueprint for the formation of the ascetic on the way to contemplation. This text focuses on the necessary virtues that must be cultivated if one is to enjoy the contemplation of God, as well as the role of God. Though the human must labor long and hard, the Holy Spirit activates the more important virtues, especially love. God's showings are always a gift of divine grace. Contemplation is treated in relation to four faculties, symbolized by the wives and concubines of Jacob. Leah is affection and Rachel is reason. Leah's handmaid Zilpha is sensation; Rachel's servant Billah is imagination. In Victorine fashion, Leah must learn to love virtue and Rachel must learn to know truth, in order that she may give birth to contemplation, symbolized by Benjamin. Leah gives birth to the affections of fear, grief, hope, and love (symbolized by her sons Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah). The love (which is love of justice) causes Rachel to desire to produce offspring. However, the knowledge that is reason's proper offspring requires a process of purification. Pleasure-addicted sensation and wandering imagination must be regulated.

For Richard, the intellect's road to contemplation once it begins to desire it is to proceed through the visible to the invisible, and through the self to God. This too builds on a long tradition, to which Richard has access both through Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. Scripture "condescends to human infirmity" by describing "invisible things through the form of visible things and impresses the memory of them upon our minds through the beauty of certain desirable appearances."⁵⁷ Introducing a three-part division that will become much more significant in *The Mystic Ark*, Richard explains that this ascent involves the ascent through the three stages of imagination. The first is "bestial" imagination, which represents visible things to the mind without representation.⁵⁸ Imagination becomes rational when it moves with deliberation among the elements of the visible world, and is governed by understanding when it rises from the consideration of the visible to the invisible.⁵⁹ Richard is one of the first writers to assign a positive role to imagination as the link between the sensible and the rational. Whereas earlier figures were concerned about its propensity to produce images which distracted from the goal of prayer without representations of the visible,⁶⁰ Richard considered it essential. It must be trained like all the other faculties, but provides the materials with which reason works. It continues to operate in higher levels of reason

⁵⁷ Ben. min. 15, Zinn p. 67: humanae infirmitati condescendant. Res enim invisibiles per rerum visibilium formas describunt, et earum memoriam per quarumdam concupiscibilium specierum pulchritudinem mentibus nostris imprimunt.

⁵⁸ Ben min. 16, Zinn pp. 67-8

⁵⁹ Ben min. 18, Zinn pp. 69-70

⁶⁰ See Cassian's tenth conference, pp. 125-40 in the volume cited above.

and understanding, and is even the means whereby the soul moves from the visible to the invisible.⁶¹

As the soul learns to cultivate the imagination, it must also cultivate sensation, teaching it abstinence and patience. These virtues all work together to protect the heart from sin, and eventually enable Rachel to give birth to Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph is discretion, Benjamin is contemplation. Put differently, Joseph is self-knowledge (both of what the soul actually is and what it potentially is and ought to be), whereas Benjamin is the contemplation of God. “Both are born from this same mother because knowledge of God and of self are learned from reason.”⁶² True knowledge of the self-leads to true knowledge of God, or at least to the desire for knowledge of God. The human being opens up to God, in a manner of speaking. “Therefore, from the vision of this light that it wonders at within itself, the soul is kindled from above in a marvelous way and is animated to see the living light that is above it. I say from this vision the soul conceives the flame of longing for the sight of God.”⁶³

Contemplation is above reason, symbolized by the death of Rachel in giving birth to Benjamin. Reason cannot grasp God, but contemplation is given as a gracious gift after reason is finally stimulated to desire God, but fails. God is known in three

⁶¹ See Ritva Palmén, *Richard of St. Victor's Theory of Imagination*. Leiden (Brill, 2014), pp. 82-133.

⁶² Ben min. 71, Zinn p. 129: Vterque de eadem matre nascitur, quia et dei cognitio et sui ex ratione percipitur.

⁶³ Ben min. 72, Zinn p. 130: Ex huius igitur luminis uisione quam admiratur in se, mirum in modum accenditur animus et animatur ad uidendum lumen quod est supra se. Ex hac, inquam, uisione, uidendi deum flammam desiderii concipit.

ways for Richard: through faith (which is below reason), through reason, and through contemplation, which is above reason. This is tied to Paul's three heavens, which Richard understands to be knowledge of self, knowledge of heavenly realities, and knowledge of God. Only the first two are possible through human effort in this life, though one may be "caught up" into the third like Paul. Ascending into the third heaven is a gracious gift from the one who descended from it. Full self-knowledge is a difficult discipline, requiring work, meditation, and prayer. "For we experience many things by working; we discover many things by investigation; we obtain many things by prayer."⁶⁴ The disciplines of self-knowledge which assist reason are likened to the ascent of the mountain of the Transfiguration. At the height of human effort, one may experience showings of the glorified Christ, attested by the scriptures, which Moses and Elijah symbolize. The three disciples who accompanied Jesus represent sense, memory, and reason, which are transcended in the divine showing. But the contemplation of God is not irrational. In fact, there are two sorts of contemplation. One is above reason, and one is above and beyond reason. The objects of contemplation above reason may still be investigated by human reason; the ones beyond reason seem to contradict reason. In the latter category are the Trinity and "many things concerning the body of Christ that we hold on the indubitable authority of faith."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ben. min. 79, Zinn p. 136: *Multa enim experimur operando, multa inuenimus inuestigando, multa extorquemus orando.*

⁶⁵ Ben. min. 85, Zinn p. 145: *Qualia sunt ea quae de trinitatis unitate credimus, et multa quae de corpore christi indubitata fidei auctoritate tenemus.*

The Twelve Patriarchs is a meditation on scripture which describes an itinerary into contemplation. But at every point in that itinerary, the traveller engages scripture and increases in the perception of its mysteries. We saw above that scripture engages the imagination with visible figures of invisible realities in order to train it to meditate on the invisible. At the end of the journey, when Christ shows himself on the mountain of Transfiguration, scripture has not been left behind. Jesus comes with scripture as his witness, represented by Moses and Elijah in the Gospel. Richard points out that the devil can also masquerade as an angel of light and present glorious visions. It is only through the witness of scripture that the true manifestation of Christ can be known. The whole journey has been one deeper and deeper into the Bible, meditating upon and eventually contemplating its more mystical meanings, until one eventually sees the glorified Jesus in it.

The Mystic Ark

In *The Mystic Ark*,⁶⁶ Richard swaps the dynamic story of Jacob's family for the static image of the ark of the covenant as his object of contemplation. This is fitting, because this longer treatise has very little to say about the way to contemplation. It focuses instead on contemplation itself. He has, in fact, made contemplation its own object.⁶⁷ But contemplation still involves dynamism. He compares it to flight in wider

⁶⁶ Richard of St. Victor, "De contemplatione [Benjamin maior]" in Marc-Aeilko Aris, *Contemplatio: Philosophische Studien zum Traktat Benjamin Maior des Richard von St. Victor mit einer verbesserten Edition des Textes*. Frankfurt am Main (Verlag Josef Knecht, 1996). Anhang pp. [1]-[148]. Hereafter, Ben. maj. Cited in translation as Richard of St. Victor, "The Mystic Ark" in Zinn (tr.), *Richard of St. Victor*, pp. 149-370.

⁶⁷ Van 't Spijker, 144

and narrower circles around its object.⁶⁸ There are six stages of contemplation, symbolized by six parts of the ark. Each stage has several sub-stages, and though he lists and describes them in abundant (some might say convoluted and tedious) detail, he confesses that the reality is less clear than his scheme, with various stages often being mixed with one another.⁶⁹ The text is regressive because the life in which the canon who seeks contemplation is cyclical, and one's growth in virtue and knowledge involves losses as well as gains. Contemplation involves periods of mental concentration as well as relaxation, and the formation and discipline of one's whole person. We will look again at the human and divine roles in contemplation, where love or affect is involved, and to what realities contemplation has access.

Being in the Augustinian tradition, God's role in the contemplative life is primary. Richard refers to "the grace of contemplation" (which is an alternate title of the text). It is this grace that the ark represents: "O how singular a grace! O so singularly preferred, for we are sanctified by it in this life and made happy by it in the next. Therefore, if the ark of sanctification means the grace of contemplation, then this grace is justly coveted, for whoever receives it is not only purified by it but sanctified too."⁷⁰ This grace "kindles the soul for the love of heavenly things."⁷¹ As Van 't Spijker points

⁶⁸ Ben. maj. 1.5

⁶⁹ Ben maj. I.9

⁷⁰ Ben. maj. I.1, Zinn p. 153: O quam singularis gratia! o singulariter praeferenda per quam in praesenti sanctificamur, et in futuro beatificamur! Si igitur per arcam sanctificationis recte intelligitur gratia contemplationis, merito haec gratia expetitur per quam qui accipit, non solum emundatur, sed etiam sanctificatur.

⁷¹ Ibid. ...ad coelestium amorem inflammat.

out, the first chapter secures the role of grace, which frees Richard to devote the rest of the book to contemplation and the activities by which one prepares oneself for it.⁷² Furthermore, the soul only attains the highest contemplations by grace and divine showings. Describing the highest state of ecstasy, Richard writes, “Let no person presume that so much exultation or raising up of the heart is due to his own strength; nor should he attribute this to his own merits. Surely it is evident that this is not from human merit but from a divine gift.”⁷³ Grace begins and concludes the soul’s itinerary, and is always the driving force behind it. It assists in each of the earlier stages, and is solely responsible for the highest: “And indeed in those first four kinds of contemplations we grow daily from our own activity, yet with divine assistance. But in these two final ones everything depends on grace.”⁷⁴

The human being prepares for contemplation through ascending through the process of thinking and meditation, the same pattern we saw in Hugh. Richard’s definitions of thinking, meditating, and contemplating are very similar to Hugh’s, even quoting Hugh’s *Ecclesiastes* homilies. But his scheme has gotten more complicated since he wrote *The Twelve Patriarchs*, especially with regard to contemplation. Thinking is the effortless but directionless wandering of the mind. Meditation involves intention

⁷² Van ‘t Spijker p. 145

⁷³ Ben. maj. V.15, Zinn, p. 336: Nemo autem tantam cordis exultationem vel sublevationem de suis viribus praesumat vel suis meritis ascribat. Constat hoc sane non meriti humani, sed muneris esse divini.

⁷⁴ Ben. maj. I.12, Zinn, p. 172: Et in illis quidem primis quattuor contemplationum generibus ex propria industria cum divino tamen adiutorio cotidie crescimus et ex uno ad aliud proficimus. Sed in ultimis istis duobus totum pendet ex gratia.

and effort in moving the mind toward a definite object. Contemplation, however, is both effortless and unconstrained, like thinking, but bears fruit like meditation. “Thinking crawls; meditation marches and often runs; contemplation flies around everywhere and when it wishes suspends itself in the heights. Thinking is without labor and fruit; in meditation there is labor with fruit; contemplation continues without labor but with fruit.”⁷⁵ The three also differ with regard to the faculty with which they are associated: thinking with imagination, meditation with reason, and contemplation with understanding. These three are ordered hierarchically, with the higher being able to be directed at all of the objects of the ones below them, but also to more. Imagination considers visible things, reason considers visible and invisible things, while contemplation is able to perceive both, and also divine things. Contemplation is therefore compared to a ray of light that illumines more things as it itself is enlarged.⁷⁶

In addition to the mental practice of meditation, one also prepares for the higher levels of contemplation through bodily practices. As with Hugh, one cannot always definitively classify a practice as mental or bodily. In fact, Richard describes an intimate relation between body and soul. Not only does the body obey the commands of the mind (with the exception of sexual organs, as this true son of Augustine must point out), but the soul also knows and experiences what happens to the body. Bodily

⁷⁵ Ben. maj. I.3, Zinn p. 155: Cogitatio serpit, meditatio incedit et ut multum currit. Contemplatio autem omnia circumvolat, et cum voluerit se in summis librat. Cogitatio est sine labore et fructu. In meditatione est labor cum fructu. Contemplatio permanet sine labore cum fructu.

⁷⁶ Ben. maj. I.3

experience plays an essential role in persuading the mind to seek wisdom; rational argument alone would not suffice. Furthermore, it is from the images supplied by the body that the soul is able to rise to the contemplation of invisible things. In the same chapter, Richard explains that the soul and body both participate in penance, when the soul feels contrition and the body sheds tears. Conversely, the devil attacks the soul by disturbing the flesh: “For often malignant spirits, envying the peace of the spirit, disturb the peace of the spirit when they weary the flesh with unexpected and violent temptation, and they make an enemy for the spirit from one of one mind, a seducer from a leader, and they make a stranger from a friend and an enemy from the household.”⁷⁷ For good or ill, what happens to the body affects the soul.

We turn now to contemplation itself, the realities it considers, and how it considers them. As we have seen, contemplation is not distinguished from thinking and meditation by its objects, since it is able to investigate everything they are. It is distinguished in the way it considers them, as well as the objects that are unique to it. Richard relates Hugh’s definitions of the three activities in I.4, but glosses them thus: “Contemplation is the free, more penetrating gaze of a mind, suspended with wonder concerning manifestations of wisdom.”⁷⁸ Wisdom refers, in the language of Victorine devotion, to the Second Person of the Trinity as the Wisdom of God. Thus,

⁷⁷ Ben. maj. II.17, Zinn p. 203: Saepe enim spiritus maligni paci spiritus invidentes, dum carnem subita et belementi tentatione fatigant, spiritus pacem perturbant et reddunt ei de unanime hostem, de duce deductorem et efficiunt de noto ignotum et de domestico inimicum.

⁷⁸ Ben. maj. I.4, Zinn, p. 157: Contemplatio est libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa.

contemplation finds the truth that meditation seeks. In every stage of contemplation, whether it be in the imagination, reason, or understanding, the mind gains access to the reality of things by relating to them as revelatory of the divine. This does not mean that one has complete knowledge of the objects of contemplation, the nature of which is always partly hidden.⁷⁹ Rather, it means that one understands them as they relate to the wisdom and providence of God. One sees why they are “very good indeed.” In the language of Maximus the Confessor, one understands their λόγοι, or their unique capacity to glorify God.⁸⁰

This is evident in all six stages of contemplation, even as imagination and reason are eclipsed in the higher ones. In the first stage, one considers visible things with wonder. One must first contemplate the vanity of the world, but this is not an end in itself: “The one does not take up contemplation of vanity in vain who rises up into praise of the Creator from that which he has a regard for in the lowest things and discovers in all His works something marvelous, laudable, and lovable.”⁸¹ From the love and wonder of this contemplation in the imagination alone, the imagination begins to be formed by reason, and begins to seek the rational principle of all visible things.

⁷⁹ See Richard’s interpretation of the half-cubit measurement as partial knowledge, and thus enduring mystery, in Ben. maj. II.4.

⁸⁰ Λόγοι, “ideas” in this case, are the principles by which God created the world. They are derived from the Λόγος, the Second Person of the Trinity. We might say that the λόγοι are the ways in which created things express the mind of God. Only a purified soul can contemplate them. See Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*. London (Routledge, 1996), pp. 33-47, esp. p. 37.

⁸¹ Ben. maj. II.1, Zinn, p. 175: Ille vanitatis contemplationem non in vanum assumit, qui ex eo quod in imo respicit in laudem creatoris assurgit, qui eum in omnibus operibus suis mirabilem, laudabilem, amabilem reperit.

This is the second stage of contemplation, and is also characterized by wonder.⁸² From there, one rises to the third stage, in which one discovers invisible things through the exercise of reason, when it desires to rise above the likenesses of visible things.

Considering the whole visible and invisible world in the light of divine wisdom, it comes to see how all workings of wisdom are wonderful or delightful, even such terrifying and difficult mysteries as predestination.⁸³ The fourth stage of contemplation is a purely rational contemplation of one's own mind, from which one gains a spiritual understanding not only of oneself, but also of others:

Therefore the first thing in this consideration is that you should return to yourself, enter into your heart, and learn to estimate the worth of your spirit. Investigate what you are; what you have been; what you ought to be; what you are able to be--what you have been by nature; what you are now by sin; what you ought to be by activity; what you are yet able to be by grace. From your spirit learn to know how you ought to estimate the worth of other spirits.⁸⁴

This entails that one does not contemplate a static snapshot of oneself, but oneself over time, in relation to God's work of creation and restoration. We begin to see that the spiritual knowledge of ourselves and others implies an ethical imperative. As in Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*, learning to see oneself and another as the image of God entails a new relationship to them.

⁸² Ben. maj. II.7

⁸³ Ben. maj. II.22-24

⁸⁴ Ben. maj. III.3, Zinn p. 225: Primum ergo est in hac consideratione, ut redeas ad teipsum, intres ad cor tuum, discas aestimare spiritum tuum. Discute quid sis, quid fueris, quid esse debueris, quid esse poteris. Quid fueris per naturam, quid modo sis per culpam, quid esse debueris per industriam, quid adhuc esse possis per gratiam. Desce ex tuo spiritu cognoscere, quid debeas de aliis spiritibus aestimare.

The final two contemplations are of God. The fifth contemplation contemplates the simplicity or unity of God, while the sixth contemplates the Trinity. As in *The Twelve Patriarchs*, the first of these is above reason but not beyond it, while the second is both above and beyond it, seeming to contradict it. As such, it can only be known in an ecstasy of the mind. These last two contemplations are entirely the result of grace, but their purpose is to increase love, which has been present in *The Mystic Ark*, but is rarely mentioned.

The Trinity

Richard's *The Trinity*⁸⁵ is different from the two works we have already considered by virtue of its form, as well as its theological program. As to form, it is a theological treatise, operating in a more scholastic mode, as it pursues a line of thinking rather than a biblical image or narrative, and it relies more heavily on *quaestio et distinctio* than the contemplative treatises (though no one can fault the latter for lack of subtle distinction, especially *The Mystic Ark*). This theological meditation presumes the ascetic and contemplative program of the earlier treatises. In spelling out the theological basis of the program, it advances both the theory and the practice. We saw in our analysis of elements of Richard's theory of contemplation in *The Mystic Ark* that contemplation has a special epistemic access to realities because, unlike thinking and meditation, it knows them as manifestations of divine Wisdom. The highest

⁸⁵ Richard of St. Victor, *De trinitate*. ed. Jean Ribailier. Paris (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1958). Hereafter De trin. Cited in translation as "On The Trinity" in eds. Boyd Taylor Coolman and Dale Coulter, *Trinity and Creation* (VTT1). Hyde Park, NY (New City Press, 2011). pp. 195-382.

contemplations were given solely by grace and went both above and beyond reason, in that they beheld the Trinity in ecstasy, but it still seemed contrary to reason. In this work, however, the most studied of Richard's output, the capacity of reason has expanded, such that he can not only reconcile reason to the eternal three-ness and oneness of God, but even purports to have proved the truth of the doctrine. Whether or not one finds his proof persuasive, the reasoning he uses is both interesting and insightful, and contains elements worthy of imitation.

Though it offers a reasoned proof, the treatise is addressed to those who already believe. It is presented as an "exercise" [*studium, exercitio*]⁸⁶ by which those who have the faith can begin to approximate the knowledge of the blessed. "And so, life derives from faith, and life derives from knowledge. Internal life derives from faith, and eternal life from knowledge. Internal life, in which we live well in the meantime, is from faith; and eternal life, in which we will live blessedly in the future, is from knowledge."⁸⁷ The goal of the ascetic life is to follow Jesus into the third heaven, which one does now in as many ways as possible. At the end of time, we will follow him bodily. But at present, we may follow him spiritually. And as faith grows to knowledge, love will grow as well, because love comes from faith, as Richard explains in the opening lines of the prologue. Presuming the supra-rational contemplation of *The Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Mystic Ark*,

⁸⁶ De trin., Prol., Evans p. 214

⁸⁷ De trin., Prol. Evans p. 210: Vita itaque ex fide, et vita ex cognitione. Ex fide vita interna, ex cognitione vita eterna. Ex fide via illa qua interim vivimus bene, ex cognitione vita illa qua in futuro vivemus beate.

Richard now believes that reason may also come to share in what the soul has contemplated. That this text is part and parcel of the program of spiritual development at the house of St. Victor is clear from references in the text to the liturgical life of the community and the experiences and questions it occasions.⁸⁸

Richard's reasoning is strongly influenced by Anselm, who offered a proof of the existence of God based on *rationes necessariae*, using a definition of the word "God" to prove both God's necessary existence, as well as his attributes of justice and mercy.⁸⁹ Richard also reasons based on a definition of God but one that is slightly different than Anselm's (and does not introduce it until after a discussion on possible relational modes of temporal and eternal being). Instead of Anselm's "that than which nothing greater can be thought" (*id quo nihil maius cogitari potest*), Richard defines the highest being as "than than which nothing is greater *and* that than which nothing is better."⁹⁰ By including goodness as well as greatness in his reasoning from the very start, he introduces relationality into his reasoning about God. This is because goodness is understood in the Platonic tradition as generosity or self-diffusiveness. *Bonum est diffusivum sui*. In book IV of Pseudo-Dionysius' *Divine Names*, God's love is included under Goodness, God's primary name.

⁸⁸ e.g. De trin. II.1, Evans p. 228

⁸⁹ See the Proslogion and "Why God Became Man" in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (eds.) Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1998). pp. 82-104 and 260-356.

⁹⁰ De trin. I.11, Evans p. 219 (italics mine): *quo nichil est majus, nichil est melius*.

Richard's treatise proceeds in three parts, as he summarizes it at the end: "...it was easily proven from the consideration of omnipotence that there is and can only be one God; it was easily proven from the fullness of goodness that God is triune in person; and it was clearly concluded from the fullness of wisdom how the unity of substance is consistent with the plurality of persons."⁹¹ The discussion of the unity and substance of God in the first two books proceeds along lines similar to those of Anselm. However, the discussion of goodness, from which the plurality of persons is proved, is extremely innovative.

Under the likely influence of Dionysius the Areopagite, Richard posits that the fullness of goodness must include the fullness of love, since nothing is better than love. Love, of course, must be the love of someone for someone or something else. He further reasons that the love of a superior for an inferior (i.e. God for creation) would not be the most supreme and perfect love possible. "Therefore, so that the fullness of charity can occur in true divinity, it is necessary for a divine person not to lack the fellowship with a person of equal dignity and, for that reason, a divine person."⁹² Furthermore, this love must be mutual.⁹³ For it to be the mutual love of equals, each must have all the perfections of the other, meaning that both must be eternal, omnipotent, immeasurable,

⁹¹ De trin. VI.25, Evans p. 352: ...quod omnipotentie consideratione facile convivincitur, quod non sit, sed nec esse possit Deus nisi unus; ex bonitatis plentudine, quod sit personaliter trinus; ex plentitudine vero sapientie liquido colligitur quomodo conveniat unitas substantie cum personarum pluralitate.

⁹² De trin. III.2, Evans p. 249: Ut ergo in illa vera divinitate plentitudo caritatis possit locum habere, oportuit divinam aliquam personam persone condigne, et eo ipso divine, consortio non carere.

⁹³ De trin. III.3

etc. But because there can only be one such substance, the two divine persons must be of the same substance.⁹⁴ McGinn considers Richard to have built interpersonality into his definition of divine persons, which carries over into his anthropology. Based on the necessity of self-sharing love of the three persons, person is defined as “an incommunicable existence of the divine nature.”⁹⁵ Incommunicable, according to McGinn, means “‘individual,’ that is, a self-identity capable of being shared.”⁹⁶ As beings who are “made to share in the love of the Trinity, and communicate that love to others,”⁹⁷ Richard locates the human being’s semblance to God in relational love, rather than the the intellectual soul (Augustine is the intended comparison, but we have noted that Augustine’s understanding of the soul as the image of God is also relational: the soul is only properly the image of God when it loves and knows God).⁹⁸

Four Degrees

In his work on the Trinity, Richard discovered the epistemic capability of love. It is able, on his more mature account, to give a rational demonstration of the doctrine of the Trinity due to its interpersonal nature. Faith becomes knowledge through the cooperation of love when love becomes the object of contemplation. However, as with

⁹⁴ De trin. III.8

⁹⁵ De trin. IV.18, 22

⁹⁶ Bernard McGinn, “The Human Person as Image of God: Western Christianity,” in *Christian Spirituality vol. I*, Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, eds. New York (Crossroad, 1993). pp. 312-330. At p. 327.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 327

⁹⁸ For another influential treatment of Richard’s understanding of personhood, see Ewert Cousins, “A Theology of Interpersonal Relations,” *Thought* 45 (1970), pp. 56-82.

Anselm's *Proslogion*, Richard's *The Trinity* is not attempting to demonstrate the doctrine to an objective observer from the ground up. This treatise is addressed to Richard's brothers at St. Victor who were pursuing the knowledge and love of God through a shared form of active and contemplative life. It is an appeal to experience, because love can only be known by a lover. But it is a cultivated experience, as Van 't Spijker has demonstrated. The reciprocal cultivation of intellect and affect that was heavily emphasized in *The Twelve Patriarchs* is not emphasized here. Rather, it is presumed.

Richard discovers the epistemic potential of love in *The Trinity*, but it is in *The Four Degrees of Violent Love*⁹⁹ that we reap the rewards of that discovery. The interpersonal, self-giving pattern of love, which finds its source and exemplar in the Trinity, is now used to reframe Richard's understanding of contemplation and give a Christ-like shape to Christian life. As the jarring juxtaposition of *violenta* and *caritas* in the title suggests, Richard recognizes a violence inherent in love. It can be a destructive violence, as we will see below in the case of higher degrees of love for persons and things other than God. But the program Richard proposes does not remove the violence from love, which is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, the violence is focused. The images of madness and disease with which he describes the intensity and force of the most passionate human love are not softened. Divine love is not abstracted from these;

⁹⁹ Richard of St. Victor, "De IV gradibus violentae caritatis" in *Épître à Séverin sur la charité*, ed. Gervais Dumeige. Paris (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1955). pp. 127-177. Cited in translation as Tr. Andrew Kraebel, "On the Four Degrees of Violent Love" in ed. Hugh Feiss O.S.B. *On Love* (VTT2). Hyde Park, NY (New City Press, 2012). pp. 275-300.

they are subsumed into it in ascetic life, particularly in its monastic and canonical expressions.¹⁰⁰

Richard's progression through four degrees of love is inherent in the nature of love (and therefore in the nature of God), and thus display the shape of all love, whether of God or anything else. He uses the terms *caritas*, *amor*, *dilectio*, and *emulatio* more or less interchangeably. And for all the language of taming the passions that one finds in the Victorines and earlier medieval devotional writers, Richard (not alone among 12th century figures) describes love in language very much like that of unregulated passion: "Of course among these are the feelings of kindness, of friendship, of marriage and familial relationships, of fraternity, and in this manner many others. Yet beyond all of these degrees of love is that burning and seething love which penetrates the heart and enkindles emotion, piercing through the soul itself to the very marrow of the bones, so that the soul may say, 'I have been wounded by love.'"¹⁰¹ This has antecedents in both Augustine and Origen, who both held that love can only be differentiated from concupiscence by its object. It is nevertheless bold to modify *caritas* with the adjective *violenta*, though it has connotations of vehemence and uncontrollability more than physical or mental harm, as with our English word

¹⁰⁰ M.B. Pranger, "Monastic Violence," in *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds. Stanford (Stanford University Press, 2002). pp. 44-55.

¹⁰¹ De quat. grad. 2, Krabel p. 275: Est sane in ea affectus humanitatis, sodalitatis, affinitatis, consanguinitatis, fraternitatis, et in hunc modum alii multi, supra hos tamen omnes dilectionis gradus est amor ille ardens et fervens qui cor penetrat et affectum inflammat, animamque ipsam eousque medullitus transfigit ut veraciter dicere possit: Vulnerata caritate ego sum.

violence. But he is among the first Christian writers to liken the love of God to disease or insanity, though such motifs were already common in Sufism and would later become common in vernacular Christian theology in the 13th and 14th centuries.¹⁰² Like a person sick or insane, the one in love's feelings, thoughts, and actions are controlled by love. He designates his four degrees using scriptural imagery of injury, captivity, and illness, especially from the Song of Solomon and the Psalms. "Behold, I see some people wounded, others bound, others languid, others growing faint--and all from love. Love wounds, love binds, love makes one languish, love leads to weakness."¹⁰³

The first degree of love is wounding love, taking its name from Song of Songs 4:9. Richard describes it thus: "Do you not think that the heart appears to be pierced when that fiery sting of love penetrates one's mind to the core of his being and transfixes his feelings, so much so that he is completely incapable of containing or concealing the boiling of his desire?"¹⁰⁴ He will explain in a later passage that this degree of love affects the whole person, but its presence is intermittent.¹⁰⁵ One does not feel this love all the time, and when it is felt toward an unwholesome object, it can be escaped by avoiding the object and its temptation: "Therefore, we ought to repel the

¹⁰² McGinn, pp. 415-418

¹⁰³ De quat. grad. 4, Kraebel, p. 275: *Ecce video alios vulneratos, alios ligatos, alios languentes, alios deficientes; et totum a caritate. Caritas vulnerat, caritas ligat, caritas languidum facit, caritas defectum adducit.*

¹⁰⁴ De quat. grad. 6, Kraebel p. 276-7: *Nonne tibi corde percussus videtur, quando igneus ille amoris aculeus mentem hominis medullitus penetrat, affectumque transverberat, in tantum ut desiderii sui estus cohibere vel dissimulare omnino non valeat?*

¹⁰⁵ De quat. grad. 6-7

impetus of the first degree in regard to perverse desires not so much by resisting it as by avoiding it

but, not so much by struggling against it as by fleeing from it. And we are able to do so if, always alert, we with a provident mind take refuge in useful and honest occupations and meditations.”¹⁰⁶

The second degree, binding love, offers no respite. It pertains especially to feeling, but does not restrict thought or action. Once inflamed to this degree, the soul cannot avoid the feeling, but it can resist it through actions: “Therefore, when we are unable to repel temptation with virtue or avoid it with prudence, we ought to redeem ourselves with works of mercy and obedience, and rescue ourselves from the yoke of slavery.”¹⁰⁷ It is this degree, which binds feeling, which Richard identifies as “mind.”¹⁰⁸ But if love grows to the third degree, languishing love, it becomes the sole concern of all one’s feelings, thoughts, and actions at all times. “Therefore, in this third degree of violent love nothing besides the one can satisfy the mind, just as it cannot know anything but on account of the one.”¹⁰⁹ In addition to binding feeling, this love in this

¹⁰⁶ De quat. grad. 8, Kraebel p. 278: Primi itaque gradus impetum in pravis desideriis non resistendo sed declinando, non tam reluctando quam fugiendo, repellere debemus et possumus, si solliciti semper ad utiles et honestas tam occupationes quam meditationes provida mente confugiamus, et impleamus.

¹⁰⁷ De quat. grad. 9, Kraebel p. 278: Cum ergo temptationem non possumus vel virtute repellere vel prudentia declinare, debemus per misericordie et obedientie opera nos ipsos redimere et a servitutis jugo eripere.

¹⁰⁸ De quat. grad. 10.

¹⁰⁹ De quat. grad. 10, Kraebel pp. 278-9: In hoc itaque tertio violente caritatis gradu, nichil animo satisfacere potest preter unum, sicut et nichil sapere nisi propter unum.

degree debilitates thought, which Richard places in the “heart.”¹¹⁰ Thought and action offer no deliverance from the third degree of love, but one may still pray to God for deliverance.¹¹¹ In his description of the third degree, we clearly see the epistemic aspect of love and hear clear echoes of Augustine, which will be discussed further below. Finally, in the fourth degree, love becomes insatiable: “And so the fourth degree of violent love exists when nothing at all can satisfy the desire of the boiling mind any longer. This degree, unlike the others, knows no limit to its growth, for it has exceeded the limits of human possibility and it always finds something else that it can desire ardently.”¹¹² As Richard explains using the example of a married couple who love each other in the fourth degree, this love is inherently destructive when one loves anything other than God with it. Like Augustine’s lamented friend in book IV of the *Confessions*, this sort of love needs the person loved be something they are not, and can only lead to unhappiness, and even hatred of the person loved.¹¹³ One loving thus loves with all one’s “strength,” and there is no hope of deliverance except through the prayers of others.

The treatise lays out a mystical program in which one loves God with increasing intensity and exclusivity, leading to an almost complete dissolution of the self in God in

¹¹⁰ De quat. grad. 23

¹¹¹ De quat. grad. 12, Kraebel pp. 279-80

¹¹² De quat. grad. 14, Kraebel p. 280: Quartus itaque violente caritatis gradus est quando esuantis animi desiderio jam omnino nichil satisfacere potest. Hic gradus, quia humane possibilitatis metas semel excessit, crescendi, ut ceteri, terminum nescit, quia semper invenit quod adhuc concupiscere possit.

¹¹³ De quat. grad. 16

the third degree. But the highest degree of charity is not this resting in God, but going forth from God on behalf of one's neighbor. The metaphor he uses is iron melted in the fire, is recast in the mold of Christ, who as God, humbly went forth from the Father to love human beings in God's way. This is explicitly linked to Christ's condescension in the Incarnation and Passion. Remaining God, he went forth on behalf of human beings. In the same way, the soul goes from "thirsting for God," to "thirsting to be in God," to "thirsting in God's way." One loves infinitely and insatiably, loving not only God but all that God loves, and therefore goes forth on behalf of all others. This pattern of ascent, union, and descent clearly parallels Richard's earlier writings on contemplation, but with important differences.

The most important of these difference is that in the course of reframing contemplation in terms of love, Richard makes subtle shifts in his anthropology. In order to interpret the Great Commandment, Richard trades the philosophical language of intellect and affect for the biblical language of heart and soul, to which he adds the third term of the Great Commandment, "strength."¹¹⁴ The dual aims of Victorine asceticism, knowledge and virtue, are now collapsed into a single aim, love, which involves both thought, feeling, and action. Augustine before him had held that each of the mind's primary activities of remembering, understanding, and willing, while not reducible to the others, was equal to the whole of the mind, so that the whole mind

¹¹⁴ De quat. grad. 24

knows and loves. In the prelapsarian state of humanity, knowledge, volition, and desire were perfectly integrated, and it is the recovery of this integration at which the ascetic life aims, though the convalescence lasts one's whole life. Richard has likewise brought all of the activities of the mind together, now under the heading of love. This, I believe, represents Richard's (and the 12th century's) most significant enhancement of the Augustinian tradition.¹¹⁵ However, this enhancement involves several others: Richard's focus in this work is not a hoped for eschatological contemplation that is unhindered by cares. Instead, it is focused on the love of God in the present.¹¹⁶ After one has been united to God in the third degree of *violenta caritas*, in which one loves God exclusively with one's whole being, one then progresses to the fourth degree, in which one loves in God's way. In this degree, love is insatiable, but it does not seek union with God, this having already been given in the third degree. Instead, it seeks the well-being and salvation of the neighbor. Furthermore, because one loves God with all one's being and (as we shall see) other things for the sake of God, one regards all other things as dross, gladly bearing whatever evils life brings. But such evils are borne in this life, not the next.¹¹⁷ It is in this life that evils are suffered and good deeds are performed for the sake

¹¹⁵ Richard is not unique in the 12th century as someone who fused love and understanding. Another such figure is William of St. Thierry. See especially his "Epistula ad fratres de Monte dei," *Pain de Cîteaux*, vv. 33-34, Robert Thomas O.S.C.O (ed.) Translated as William of St. Thierry, *The Golden Epistle*. Theodore Berkeley O.C.S.O. (tr.). Trappist, KY (Cistercian Publications, 1971).

¹¹⁶ A point well made by Andrew B. Kraebel in the introduction to his translation, pp. 263-273.

¹¹⁷ De quat. grad. 45-46, Kraebel pp. 294-95

of the love of Christ and the salvation of one's neighbor. As Kraebel points out, the salvation of the neighbor is the only future-oriented aspect of violent charity.¹¹⁸

There is a third respect in which Richard's treatise realizes the latent possibilities of Augustine: in not so many words, this treatise gives a Latin version of the doctrine of deification. Deification, or *theosis*, is more often associated with Eastern Christianity than with the Catholic and Protestant churches. However, the affective monastics of the 12th century put forward the possibility that human beings could be God's equals in the very real sense of loving in God's way, with God's love. But God is nothing other than God's love. To be united with God, liquified "conformed entirely to the" divine "beauty it has beheld"¹¹⁹ and then, in the fourth degree, to have one's entire life conformed to the pattern of Christ who made God's eternal activity visible in time, is to be made divine. Having passed over into God in the third degree, the soul "adapts itself with *spontaneous desire* to each of God's decisions and forms its every wish in accordance with the measure of divine benevolence."¹²⁰ This leads almost logically to the fourth degree of insatiable self-giving love, because such self-transcending love that has to be expressed beyond oneself is the very nature of God, as Richard learned from his meditations on the Trinity, and now shows in the humility of Jesus who, "though being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but

¹¹⁸ VTT 4, pp. 268-271

¹¹⁹ De quat. grad. 38, Kraebel p. 292: et inspecte pulchritudini configurata tota in aliam gloria transit.

¹²⁰ De quat. grad. 42, Kraebel p. 293, italics mine: immo spontaneo quodam desiderio ad omne ejus arbitrium seipsam accommodat et juxta divini beneplaciti modum omnem voluntatem suam informat.

emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:6-7). Perhaps strangely, going forth from God with the humility of Christ in the fourth degree is more godlike than abiding in God in the third degree. This fourth degree is a love without measure, just as God's love is without measure: "Does it not seem that this degree of love turns a man's mind to madness, as it were, when it will not allow him to hold a limit or measure to his jealous love?"¹²¹ It is love like God's, because heaven and earth cannot contain it. And finally, Richard explicitly tells us that this love "makes a man dare to be more than a man."¹²² He is referring to the audacity of saints to intercede with God to avert wrath from human beings. He gives the example of Abraham interceding on behalf of the people of Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33), but mediating with God on behalf of humanity is a role of Christ.

Concluding Continuities

I attempted to show in the previous chapter that Augustine's theology was an ascetic theology. This is perhaps more obvious with Richard, since he is writing specifically for a community of people living under an ascetic rule (one penned by Augustine, let it be noted). But the most important ascetic dimensions of Richard's treatise are anticipated in Augustine, and it is important to appreciate these continuities. I draw attention to three. First, growth of love into the higher degrees and the ways it

¹²¹ De quat. grad. 46, Kraebel p. 295: Nonne hic amoris gradus videtur animum hominis quasi in amentiam vertere, dum non sinit eum in sua emulatione modum mensuramve tenere?

¹²² De quat. grad. 47, Kraebel pp. 295-6: ecce quomodo facit hominem ultra hominem presumere.

can be resisted harken back to Augustine. Augustine wrote that unresisted habit becomes compulsion, and this underlies Richard's counsel against the first degree of love if it is of something inappropriate, "not so much by resisting it as by avoiding it, not so much by struggling against it as by fleeing from it." Love in the first degree is intense, but not constant. But "so often receding and always returning greater than it had been, little by little this fire softens the mind...It occupies the mind with the constant memory of itself, hems the mind in entirely, binds it entirely, so that the mind cannot pull itself away from that fire or think of anything else--and now from the first degree it crosses into the second."¹²³ Love, whether of good or evil, increases its hold on the mind by habit. This makes it harder and harder for a sinner to repent or vice to be overcome, but it also provides a mechanism for the sanctification or deification discussed above, as the love of God also becomes habitual. To change what someone loves is to change what someone is.

One last Augustinian point that Richard has developed further is the notion of a unity of wills. For Augustine, the unity of operations is one of the most important aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹²⁴ In the church, members are united to one another and to God through their common love or will. It is, as we saw in the previous chapter, their common love which makes them a church. Their common love is the Holy

¹²³ De quat. grad. 6, Kraebel p. 277: Sed itaque recedens semperque seipso major rediens paulatim animum emollit...jugique sui memoria totum occupet, totum implicet, totum obliget, ita ut hoc ei excidere aut aliud cogitare non possit, et jam de primo gradu ad secundum transit.

¹²⁴ Augustine, De trin. II.i.3

Spirit, who is also the common love of the Persons of the Trinity. Something similar happens in Richard's work. In describing the third degree, Richard tells us, "They who reach this third degree of love no longer do anything on account of their own will, nor do they leave anything at all to their own decision. Rather, they commit all things to God's managing: all of their wants and all of their desires hang upon the divine good pleasure; they look to the divine will."¹²⁵ A separate question from that of how much the ascent to higher degrees of love of God depends on grace and how much on the human will, it is clear that in the highest levels, in which one has crossed over into God in an ecstasy of mind, the human will operates perfectly in concert with the divine will, delighting in it so much that the human being begins to love in God's way, accepting humility and abasement for the sake of those whom God loves.

However, this conformity to the will of God is described somewhat surprisingly: "it adapts itself with *spontaneous* desire to each of God's decisions and forms its every wish in accordance with the measure of divine benevolence."¹²⁶ Richard does not talk about obedience or submission so much as the spontaneous adaption of desire. We recall that in Augustine's *De trinitate*, the mind can only truly know and love itself by knowing and loving God, since the good of the soul is God. Though Richard describes the third degree in terms of self-forgetfulness, we could also say that the contemplative

¹²⁵ De quat. grad. 41, Kraebel p. 293: sic qui ad hunc tertium amoris gradum profecerunt, nichil jam propria voluntate agunt, nichil omnino suo arbitrio reliquunt, sed divine dispositioni omnia committunt, omne eorum votum, omne desiderium ad divinum pendet nutum, ad divinum spectat arbitrium.

¹²⁶ De quart. grad. 42, Kraebel p. 293: immo spontaneo quodam desiderio ad omne eius arbitrium seipsam accommodat et juxta divini beneplaciti modum omnem voluntatem suam informat. *italics mine*

who has come to love God in the fourth degree does the will of God, even when it involves debasement, out of a healthy and rightly ordered self-love, because she understands that the her true good is God's will.

But how to reach that happy state? As for Hugh, and in Richard's earlier treatises on contemplation, one prepares for contemplation by ordering one's affects and meditating. Since like those other works, *The Four Degrees* is more of a script for modeling one's affective life, it is not a stretch to suppose that the Victorine canons probably spent most of their lives trying to move from the first to the second degree. Having made their initial conversion to monastic life, the canon has left Egypt for the wilderness. In the wilderness, he must make use of the reading and meditative techniques of the monastic tradition and, to some extent, the newer scholastic ways of thinking, as practiced at the House of St. Victor. "In this state, the Lord often visits the parched soul; he often satisfies it with the internal sweetness and intoxicates it with the sweetness of his spirit."¹²⁷ But the sweetness is not constant.

And so, the canon is left where Augustine described the whole church in the First John homilies: he cannot yet see, so his task is to desire. What Hugh and Richard have contributed is an ascetic program and an interpersonal psychology in which the understanding of love in relation to God is not taken from an analogy of interiority and exteriority, but from experience.¹²⁸ Augustine struggled with his divided will, and

¹²⁷ De quat. grad. 31, Kraebel p. 288

¹²⁸ McGinn, 413

discovered that it was only by God's grace that he could desire God. The Victorines agreed. But they had something to do while waiting. They could perform works of mercy, they could read, and they could meditate, learning to love through "counsel and deliberation," which would bear the fruit of "feeling" and "fervor." And within this already graced life, they never knew when the Spirit would take them up into the third heaven of contemplation, where they would experience the delight of being consumed by the inward flame of love.

Chapter 4
History, Catholicity, and Love:
A Conversation with Ernst Troeltsch

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

-Colossians 3:14-17

At the risk of oversimplification, we may say that for at least twelve centuries, the passage of time posed no difficulty for Christians who believed that Jesus had revealed God to the world and bestowed new possibilities for knowing and loving God upon human beings and all of creation. But beginning in the late medieval period, certain cultural and intellectual developments began altering how God's relationship to the world was understood.¹ A note of contingency entered into western thinking about history, and as modernity dawned likewise about the relationship of historical reasoning and reasoning about divine things. Against this background, eventually historical-critical methodologies were born, which sought to explain the scriptural texts as historical evidence. Like all of the new sciences, modern historicism strove for an unbiased approach to its evidence. Conditions which previously enhanced one's credibility as a scriptural interpreter, such as location within an established tradition or advanced cultivation of pious affections, were now at best something to be bracketed.

¹ Without entirely endorsing it, I direct the reader to the following for an overview: Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*. New Haven (Yale University Press, 1993). See esp. pp. 29-41.

Needless to say, this shift had far-reaching implications for Christianity and Christian biblical interpretation.

This chapter considers some of those implications through the thought of the 19th and 20th century theologian Ernst Troeltsch. While very much a product of a historical and cultural moment that has largely passed, Troeltsch's reflections on the nature of history, culture, and the study of religion remain insightful and challenging. He challenged what he called "supernaturalism" and argued strongly against absolutizing the output of any moment in the history of Christianity as somehow expressing a stable essence. He pointed out the circularity in the argumentation of both Protestant and Catholic theologians and apologists of his day. He was motivated in large part by a desire for epistemological consistency, but also by genuinely theological concerns, even though the trajectory of his thought led him to reject such hallmarks of Christian belief as the understanding of Christ as the incarnation of God's pre-existent Word. That God would providentially guide the Christian church as it developed a normative exegetical tradition, and that this tradition could be distinguished from its competitors, would have been nonsensical for him without exempting that tradition from the critical methods applied to other cultural phenomena. And yet, Troeltsch was no positivist or materialist. He took himself to be writing against such positions as much as, or more than, untenable Christian positions. He did ultimately see God as involved in history.

The work of Ernst Troeltsch does not directly challenge pre-critical exegesis, which was hardly considered a live option by his contemporaries in late 19th and early 20th century Germany. His critique was directed against supernaturalism and evolutionary apologetics for Christianity as the supreme religion on account of its “absoluteness.” However, Troeltsch is the foremost exponent of a modern historicist sensibility that has changed the terms of theological discussion and made pre-critical exegetical techniques problematic. His commitment to modern historical methods and insistence on epistemological consistency pose two major challenges for the recovery of pre-critical exegesis.

First, as he began arguing early in his career and continued right up until his death, the same historical-critical methodologies used to explain non-Christian texts and cultural phenomena on purely natural terms work equally well on Christianity, and their explanatory power is such that they leave no residual data requiring recourse to the supernatural. If accepted, this thesis poses a problem not only for the idealist understanding of Christianity among the world’s religions advanced by Hegel and tacitly accepted by Ritschl and his school, but also for the recovery of pre-critical modes of exegesis which seek more in the biblical text than would be yielded by the sorts of interpretive techniques modern scholars (and less consciously and methodologically, most modern people) readily apply to any other text. On what basis do we seek a spiritual meaning when there is nothing about the text that is left inexplicable by the

modern scientific reading? Honesty requires that this position be confronted, though as we shall see, its epistemological foundations are far from unassailable.

As stated above, we are not presently interested in the category of the supernatural. However, the aim of this project is to reclaim what is essentially a *christlich-theologische Methode* for those who have been formed by modern historical sensibilities and cannot jettison them without dishonesty. Derived from the tradition of 1 John, Augustine, and the Victorines, this method is to be unapologetically agapic, christological, and spiritual, which I have collectively labeled ascetic. In that sense, Troeltsch would hate it. However, my proposed *christlich-theologische Methode* is interested in methods that are descended from the historical-critical methodology Troeltsch knew, because it shares the ancient catholic conviction that the content of revelation is inseparable from the earthly events, texts, and communities which are its occasions. But can we escape Troeltsch's charge of arbitrariness if, although not denying historical-critical methodology's competency in the areas concerned, we take the biblical texts to reveal christological truth, even when a secular scholarly reading would suggest they are about something else? Let it be noted that the secular reading in question could include more than historical-critical methodology. It might, for example, include post-structuralist, deconstructionist, or ideological criticism.

The second and more difficult problem posed by Troeltsch's historicist sensibility is his radically individual approach to phenomena. Building on his early critique of the

absoluteness doctrine, he later went on to deny that there is any essence of Christianity which the historical observer may access, and thus no grounds on which to say which teachings, practices, texts, and movements are or are not faithful expressions of that essence. Historical observation does not yield norms. Do the boundaries set on the plurality of interpretation by the figures regarded as orthodox have any authority or integrity, or are they nothing but the radically contingent results of historical processes, telling us more about who “won” than about the truth of the Gospel? Perhaps what we admit as tradition or the teaching of the church only tells us about our own biases and the ideologies or power structures to which they explicitly or tacitly give allegiance. If we appeal to an authoritative doctrinal or ecclesial tradition to legitimate our interpretations, must we define the limits of that tradition in ways which are implicitly self-serving? It is in response to the second challenge that this chapter makes its principal contribution to this project and to the theological moment to which it speaks. With the help of Kathryn Tanner’s work on culture and theology, I will use the materials from previous chapters to reframe Troeltsch’s notion of essence as one of catholicity.

The sorts of reasoning Troeltsch employs and the assumptions he makes in posing both challenges are instructive. One of his unifying concerns was epistemological consistency. He took this to mean that there is no legitimate way to know a spiritual meaning of a text or an inner unity of the church if these would entail making an exception to the ways of knowing we use for everything else. But I propose

something that Troeltsch does not consider: the epistemology by which one comes to know spiritual realities in the text and in the church is not an exception, but a transformation. In the first case, we seek to transform our habitual ways of knowing into a knowledge of all things in God; in the second, the church is seeking to be transformed into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic body of Christ. Both of these transformations are the work of love. As we shall argue, rationality and catholicity are both gifts to be cultivated using the openness of love. This argument will not refute Troeltsch; it will push him to draw out the implications of his own insights. Troeltsch too learned later in his life that knowledge is a work of love. What he perhaps never realized is that knowledge and love must both be cultivated. This is one of the key insights of the tradition we have been recovering.

More than all?

Theological ethicist James Gustafson takes it as axiomatic that “the same actions, events, texts, and other phenomena that are addressed or accounted for by theological, ethical, moral, and other religious discourse are also addressed and accounted for by other academic disciplines, and vice versa.”² He then observes “I know of few persons who use religious and theological symbols, concepts, and language as their first order of language to interpret themselves, their relationships, their health and illness, their work and leisure, or economic and political events, and so on, that occupy their

² James Gustafson, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004. p. 5

attention...Bible-speak or theological terminology is not the first language of anyone.”³

While his conclusion should perhaps not be extrapolated beyond his own American academic context, he has hit upon the first of the two central problems Troeltsch’s work poses. There was, of course, a time when biblical and theological language were most certainly the first language of many people. But with the turns to the particular that began with medieval nominalism, a host of non-theological discourses have proliferated, be they empiricist or idealist. These discourses have been so fruitful that they have largely supplanted theology as the discourse by whose categories the heirs of the Enlightenment make sense of their world.⁴

Troeltsch noted the utility of modern historical sciences and comparative *Religionsgeschichte* and objected to the habit of Christian theologians of groundlessly exempting Christianity and its scriptures from the sorts of historical criticism they routinely apply to non-Christian texts and traditions. He considered his inclusion of Christianity among the objects of historical criticism to be justified by its fruitfulness,

³ Gustafson, pp. 8-9

⁴ Here I must acknowledge a different attempt to take on this problem than the one I am suggesting, that of the “post-liberal” school of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei. This approach seeks to recover biblical and doctrinal categories as a first language. While I am indebted to this tradition in ways that will become clear below, I find their positions ultimately unsatisfying. The goal of cultivating a specifically Christian way of reasoning and interpreting texts based on the Christian tradition requires that one be able to specify in advance which historical persons, texts, and events count as correct performances of Christianity and which aspects of those performances are normative. This is the very problem Troeltsch has raised, and it becomes especially acute in Tanner’s elaboration. This will be addressed further below. Furthermore, I do not subscribe to Lindbeck’s distinction between first-order and second-order activities. Whereas Lindbeck held that theology and doctrine are governed by an internal grammar which competent users can be expected to have learned, they are neither true nor false, statuses reserved for the first-order activities of “worshipping, promising, obeying, exhorting, preaching” (George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984. p. 69). I consider theology, or whatever one cares to call the interpretation of Christian tradition by Christians, to be already part of the life it informs. It is an exercise in coming to know God in Jesus Christ, to whom it is accountable (both in Jesus’ historical appearance and in his present activity through the Spirit). Any grammar of Christian language is not stable across time and place, and does not need to be, because it is only a medium for what God wants to give through it.

but also by the fact that its assumptions had become so widely and deeply accepted in scientific culture. He likewise perceived that these assumptions had completely transformed the relation of the wider culture to the past, and thus to the present. The consequences for theology were too drastic to be ignored. "Once applied to the scientific study of the Bible and church history, the historical method acts as a leaven, transforming everything and ultimately exploding the very form of earlier theological methods."⁵ We will begin by examining what Troeltsch means when he talks about historical methodology, and move from there to its consequences and the difficulties it poses.

In his early essay "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology," he lays out the basic assumptions and effects of this historical method. He names three aspects of it: "the habituation on principle to historical criticism; the importance of analogy; and the mutual interrelation of all historical developments."⁶ Under the first heading, he refers to the consciousness that reasoning about the past on the basis of evidence yields no more than "judgments of probability," and that this changes how we relate to memory and tradition. If one can only reason inductively and probabilistically about the past, then one becomes aware of the contingency of one's judgments and the available evidence on which they are based. It introduces a skeptical attitude into reasoning about

⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology" in *Religion in History*, tr. James Luther Adams. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. pp. 11-32

⁶ *ibid.* p. 13

the authenticity and reliability of texts. And perhaps most importantly for Troeltsch, it shakes the foundations of any attempt to isolate Christianity from all other historical and cultural phenomena based on its rootedness in historical events of divine revelation: "But the operation of historical criticism in this area signifies above all the definitive inclusion of the religious tradition with all traditions that require preliminary critical treatment."⁷

The skeptical and probabilistic treatment of all historical phenomenon gives rise to the second of Troeltsch's principles, that of analogy, which he hails as "the key to historical criticism." Assuming "the similarity (in principle) of all historical events,"⁸ the historical critic, based on her own experience, makes probabilistic judgments about events, texts, or other phenomenon of which she has no experience. This is the means whereby authenticity and reliability of texts and traditions can be assessed and deception or delusion detected. As he puts it,

The illusions, distortions, deceptions, myths, and partisanship we see with our own eyes enable us to recognize similar features in the materials of tradition. Agreement with normal, customary, or at least frequently attested happenings and conditions as we have experienced them is the criterion of probability for all events that historical criticism can recognize as having actually or possibly happened.⁹

It should be noted that he is assuming that at least some observers are competent to know "illusions, distortions, deceptions, myths, and partisanship" when they see

⁷ *ibid.* p. 13

⁸ *ibid.* p. 14

⁹ *ibid.* p. 13

them, and then diagnose these elsewhere. Not merely an assumption about events, Troeltsch is also assuming a particular account of human nature, human knowledge, and the relation of human subjectivity to the world. His analogical method rests on "the assumption of a basic consistency of the human spirit and its historical manifestations."¹⁰

The third prong of Troeltsch's historical method is the interconnectedness of all events. This means, as one might expect, that each event which occurs is part of a complex "permanent relationship of correlation." Events and the historical forces which affect them are unique, but they are all part of a much larger system, and must be read as part of "the totality of events."¹¹ The practical consequence of this presupposition include Troeltsch's habit of reading evidence in the light of very large-scale theories about the histories of whole civilizations. He believed that the interpretation of every particular history, such as that of Christianity, must "begin with the general context of universal history."¹² As we shall see, he would later give significant nuance this notion of universal history, making it much more modest. But at this point in his career, we will see that he tends to read religions as exemplifying stages in the development of civilizations which behave in similar ways under similar circumstances.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 14.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 14

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19

Though Troeltsch's essay "On Historical and Dogmatic Method" was written in 1908, the consequences of his historical method had already been made clear a decade earlier in his famous (among scholars of 19th century German liberal theology) falling out with his erstwhile teacher, Julius Kaftan, which resulted in his book *Geschichte und Metaphysik*.¹³ Kaftan had objected to Troeltsch's earlier work, *Die Selbständigkeit der Religion* (not to be confused with his later and more famous book, *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte*), in which Troeltsch made an early version of his case that Christian revelation is not in any sense self-authenticating (this having been the claim of the more conservative Ritschlian Wilhelm Hermann) and that claiming a supernatural foundation for the supremacy of Christianity was an epistemological non-starter.¹⁴ The basis for his dismissal of Kaftan's supernaturalism is the core of the first difficulty Troeltsch poses for us.

Troeltsch accused Kaftan of claiming a special epistemology for Christianity, excepting it from the epistemological criteria applied to all other fields. "Since Kaftan claims a specifically Christian theological method and artificially gives it and other epistemological methods equal weight—whereas I am solely committed to the general methods practiced in the secular sciences—the opposition is between two world views, the dominance of one being more cultivated by theologians, the other by non-

¹³ Troeltsch, *Geschichte und Metaphysik*, KGA vol. 1, pp. 617-682. Translations are my own.

¹⁴ For Troeltsch's place in the Ritschlian school and its significance for the epistemological issues of liberal theology, see Gary Dorien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology*. Oxford (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 315-377.

theologians, insofar as the latter personally confess religious faith.”¹⁵ Kaftan’s specifically Christian methodology when dealing with Christian things conflicts with Troeltsch’s core commitment to epistemological consistency. Kaftan took his particular method to be warranted by Christianity’s absolutely divine origin, in contrast with the human conditioning of all other religions.¹⁶ Troeltsch saw this as rank “dualistic supernaturalism,” which was completely unwarranted by the study of the history of Christianity and other religions. Though he would repudiate the notion of a progression of religions toward modern Christianity at the end of his life, he claims in this early work that the emergence of Christianity is completely explicable as the next logical stage in the development of religion at the time of its emergence, and that “principally as a new religious level, it unites all of its predecessors and the related forces that encountered it.”¹⁷ Far from a sign of Christianity’s supernatural origin, this merely goes to show that “all religions are substantially related to one another and only join at their point of confluence, Christianity.”¹⁸ He makes arguments which are typical of his time to the effect that the emergence of Christianity was a result of developments in Judaism over the preceding centuries, and that it contains nothing which was not present in

¹⁵ Troeltsch, *Geschichte und Metaphysic*, p. 618.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 620. Note that Troeltsch specifically distinguishes Kaftan’s absoluteness from the Hegelian or idealistic absoluteness he will criticize in later works, according to which Christianity is the realization of the idea or concept of religion which all other religions

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 622

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 622

germ in Second Temple apocalypticism and Platonism. Driving the point home, he claims that

all of this indicates an entwinement of Christian and non-Christian, a dependence on the general situation. To be sure, this does not cancel out the independence of Christianity [*die zwar die Selbständigkeit des Christentums nicht aufhebt*], but it does give the appearance of a tremendous capacity for assimilation [*ungeheurer Assimilationskraft*]. But this does indeed render untenable any distinction between natural and supernatural, humanly conditioned and divine without mediation.¹⁹

Further, he notes the very human transmission of the Jesus tradition, with gospels disagreeing on details (sometimes major ones), and whose traditionally ascribed authorship is now contested. He therefore asks concerning Jesus, who is only known through this process of transmission, "*Ist es wahrscheinlich, daß, wo die Ueberlieferung so durch und durch menschlich und natürlich ist, das Objekt dieser Ueberlieferung selbst etwas schlechthin Uebernatürliches sei?*"²⁰

Nothing Troeltsch argues logically rules out the possibility of something which Kaftan would call supernatural or absolute, much less a spiritual reading of scripture based on God's transformation of the capacity of all signs in Jesus. But from the perspective of Troeltsch's epistemological commitments, it raises the question of why one should seek a supernatural origin of a movement or a spiritual meaning in a text when the natural, historical interpretation of the evidence leaves nothing unexplained.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 622

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 623. "Is it likely that where the transmission is human and natural through and through, the object of this transmission is itself absolutely supernatural?"

Troeltsch claims, contra Kaftan, that the historical method is justified by its usefulness in every area to which it is applied. Positing something as off-limits for historical-critical study can only be done capriciously, or by moving to another order of reality to which Troeltsch's totally historicized worldview is allergic. He summarizes the crux of his argument: "Starting from a similar position to Kaftan, I have found the compelling force of the historical-critical method much stronger. Once admitted, it won't let itself be limited, and, once trained on the natural course of events [*am natürlichen Geschehen*], its application to supernatural occurrence necessarily dissolves the latter into natural events, that is, ones analogous to all others."²¹ As he puts it in another work, resorting to supernatural explanations for apologetic purposes when natural ones adequately account for the origin and development of Christianity is "the absoluteness of a Christian Sunday causality in antithesis to the relativity and mediacy of a non-Christian weekday causality."²² To Troeltsch's mind, such a split understanding of causality and the epistemology inconsistency that funds it are capricious, unconvincing, and arguable duplicitous.

To apply Troeltsch's critique to our question of a reading activated by the Holy Spirit which allows the reader in the church to find deeper meanings in the scriptural

²¹ *ibid.* p. 621. "Von einer ähnlichen Position wie Kaftan ausgehend habe ich doch den Zwang der historisch-kritischen Methode viel stärker empfunden, die einmal zugelassen sich keine Grenzen mehr ziehen läßt und am natürlichen Geschehen ausgebildet bei der Anwendung auf Uebernatürliches dieses notwendig in natürliches d. h. allem übrigen analoges auflöst."

²² Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, tr. David Reid. Louisville, KY (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 52.

texts than historical study suggests the authors of those text intended, we must ask whether such a reading violates Troeltsch's insistence on epistemological consistency. In other words, when secular scholarly readings which, once admitted, do not let themselves be limited, seem to explain texts and events perfectly adequately on their own secular terms (which are sometimes taken to be the text's own terms), can a contemporary Christian see "more than all"? This is a version of Gustafson's question above. If "the same actions, events, texts, and other phenomena that are addressed or accounted for by theological, ethical, moral, and other religious discourse are also addressed and accounted for by other academic disciplines"--more or less adequately, we might add--is there any good reason to turn to theology, especially when its way of reasoning no longer comes naturally to us?

Doch! Eine Antwort auf Troeltsch

Few contemporary scholars of any humanistic discipline would claim Troeltsch's variety of historicism or the view of rationality in which it is grounded. The claims of historical-critical biblical study in particular are more modest today. Troeltsch himself would later nuance some of his thoughts about universal history and the evolutionary understanding of religious diversity. Theologians, most prominently Karl Barth, would reject Troeltsch's presuppositions outright, claiming the revelation of the Word of God as the only valid starting point for theology (whether Barth has "answered Troeltsch" or

“only bypassed him” is a live question).²³ Most would be quick to point out that all knowledge is socially and historically located, thus making Troeltsch’s epistemology as arbitrary as any other, in effect turning his own critique of absoluteness back on him (Troeltsch himself was not unaware of this problem, especially as he got older, though the idea of unconscious ideological agendas at work in all writing might surprise him). Nevertheless, his assumptions about epistemological consistency, reasoning historically by analogy, and the fundamental similarity of all histories retain their cultural currency. This section will draw out the resources of the texts examined in the previous chapters for meeting this challenge.

A basic insight of all the pre-modern thinkers we have studied is that knowledge entails love. This was a fundamental tenet of Augustine’s work which Troeltsch grasped, if at all, only at the end of his life. We saw in chapter two that for Augustine, the process variously known as will or desire is always active in the generation of knowledge. As he explained at the end of book IX of *The Trinity*, the mind would never seek knowledge at all if it did not desire it. He especially makes the case that there is no knowledge of God apart from the love of God, but even in the most mundane process of the perception of a physical object, the will is involved as the attention that focuses the sense organs and the mind on the object. I do not believe that the position that desire and will are always involved in the production of knowledge requires any defense.

²³ “Barth has not answered Troeltsch; he has only bypassed him” (Wilhelm Pauck, quoted in Gustafson, p. 78 n. 1.).

This entails that there is no neutral knowledge; knowledge is always motivated. It further entails that knowledge involves vulnerability, since I can have no knowledge of any object that I do not in some sense desire, and desire is subject to frustration. It suggests that all knowledge is, in a very important sense, insider knowledge. My knowledge of anything or anyone emerges from my relationship with that person or thing, a relationship characterized by some modality of desiring, and of being desired or not being desired in return. Finally, even absent theological considerations, it raises the possibility that my ability or inability to love, or how I love, may enhance or limit my capacity to learn or know. Augustine diagnosed a craving, possessive, and narcissistic love as the cause of the false ontology of materialism.

If we accept that the role of distorted love in the production and maintenance of distorted knowledge is as pressing a problem today as it was for Augustine, we may ask if Augustine's solution to the aporia of knowing, loving and speaking about the ineffable God provides any present-day warrant for openness to levels of meaning and reality in a text not accessible to a disinterested historian. His solution is to ground scriptural interpretation in the life of the church, which is nothing other than the life of the Holy Spirit, constituting the Christian community as a hermeneutical process with the goal of learning to love. Scripture is read in order to receive God's healing of love and intellect through the mediation of Jesus. Because Jesus has transformed the signifying power of creaturely signs, there is always a deeper level of meaning to be

sought. Specifically, the Christian community seeks to discern the body of Christ in scripture so that we may be prepared to discern it in each other and on the altar. As I will argue in the final chapter, many of the gifts God gives through scripture are based on the christological sense, which is roughly equivalent to the medieval allegorical sense. Any reading which does not contradict sound doctrine and which builds up love is a true reading. As Christians in the body of Christ practice reading and find their love healed and purified, their love which generates all of their knowledge enables them to find even deeper insight in the Bible.

To this Augustinian account, we can imagine Troeltsch raising three objections. First, this love-based exegesis seems to be based on a different epistemology than we use in other sciences and in daily life. Is it not therefore a case of arbitrariness or special pleading? Second, does it not fail to take seriously the historical method's upsetting of the relationship between historical fact and religious truth? And third, is it not inviting every reader to have her own private interpretation based on whatever she takes love to mean? All three objections were largely answered by 20th century theologians. I will formulate my own responses in light of my own emphases.

First, the exegesis of love and the more fundamental epistemology of love require cultivation. They are not our first language, as it were. In fact, because we are distorted by sin, the exegesis and epistemology of love not only seems unnatural, but also has all the force of habit going against it, and that force has been accumulating since the sin of

Adam and Eve. This means that the most fundamental reason for its foreignness is not our enculturation into modern historical sensibilities. Those sensibilities only give it the particular shape it bears at present; they are no more fundamentally foreign to love than the reading and reasoning techniques distilled from the Roman rhetorical and philosophical traditions which Augustine learned as a child and taught as an adult. Because of our fallen state, learning to use the signs of scripture in order to discern Christ in them and to love God through them and them in God does start out as the cultivation of a different epistemology than one uses in the rest of one's life. But its purpose is to change our relationship to all of reality. We are cultivating love and knowledge of all people and things in their otherness so that they can reveal Christ to us. Therefore, we are in keeping with the modern value of epistemological consistency. We are not making an exception to our normal epistemology so much as striving to transform it and expand its limits. In its unredeemed state, it only lets us know objects constituted and distorted by our wounded minds and hearts. But perhaps, our modern reasoning can be baptized just as well as ancient philosophy and rhetoric.

Second, does trying to see Christ as revelation of the Triune God in all of scripture not presume a relation between historical event and religious truth that modern historical methodology has rendered untenable? Troeltsch introduced skepticism into all questions of historical factuality, as we discussed above, and made a strong case that the thoroughly natural and human character of historical transmission

makes any divine or supernatural origin unlikely at best. But the christological and spiritual meanings of scripture are not analytic propositions which are proved by a miraculous event, nor inferences from the character of that event concerning its origin. Instead, the whole created world has taken on new meaning in Jesus who, as the Second Person of the Trinity, is the Word and Wisdom through whom all things are created. Like all meaning, this new christological meaning of signs only exists within a hermeneutic community. In this case, the hermeneutic community is the church. The contingency of the signs is incidental, because the events of the life of Jesus have affected all created realities.

Troeltsch's early work presumes that the interpreter is faced with a choice between two epistemologies and thus two hermeneutics: the historicist epistemology and historical-critical hermeneutic, or a *christlich-theologische* epistemology and hermeneutic. Given that choice, he cannot be faulted for selecting the former. But Augustine and the Victorines do not offer an epistemology for adoption or rejection. They offer an ascetic program, a way to learn to love and to live and know out of this love. It does not seek to acquire knowledge of already existing objects in an already existing subject, like a file uploaded into a computer. Rather, it seeks to become the sort of subject that can enter into a right relationship with other subjects, which is a relationship of loving, knowing, and being loved and known. And while exercises are prescribed, the development of this way of knowing and loving depends not on our

initiative, but on that of the great Other, God. It is cultivated, but it is a gift, not an achievement.

But though this is not the same thing as the orthodox apologetic Troeltsch criticizes in Kaftan and others, does it fall victim to the spirit of Troeltsch's critique? That is to say, even if it is consistent, does it appeal to a private epistemology, thus rendering it inaccessible and unconvincing to modern people? However, this is not a private epistemology, but that of a community. Because of its ecclesial dimension, we could also call this epistemological cultivation a socialization into a way of knowing, which involves an undoing of our prior socialization into sin (a socialization that precedes our birth and affects us on every level). The church has written and unwritten rules which allow the individual practitioner to benefit from the experience of many generations of people. The church's rule of faith is a limit on the creative readings of each individual. Augustine made the proviso that any reading which built up love could be a valid reading as long as it does not violate sound doctrine or morals. Likewise, we saw in the first chapter that the Johannine tradition used the life of Jesus and the possibility of love in the Christian community as a way to anchor its imagination and contest invalid developments of its tradition.

But who gets to determine what the boundaries are? Who gets to judge when an interpretation has ceased to be sufficiently rooted in the life of Jesus or gone beyond the unwritten rule of faith? Is there any way to delimit the core of Christian tradition in

such a way that it can be a matter of reasoned public discourse?²⁴ Or is the idea of an essence at all tenable? This question requires us to examine a second strain of Troeltsch's thought, in which he turned his critique of the absoluteness of Christianity in relation to the world's other religions onto the idea of Christianity itself. This critique proves to be the more fundamental of Troeltsch's challenges.

Quis posuit mensuras eius si nosti vel quis tetendit super eam lineam?

The question that came to haunt Troeltsch later in life was the relationship between observed historical data and moral and religious norms. This led him to question whether a study of the history of Christianity could yield a normative definition of Christianity, an "essence," if one so cares to call it. In setting out in search of an essence of Christianity, Troeltsch is cognizant of the fact that what he calls "essence" is a category that arises in the mind of a modern historian rather than something indigenous to the Christian tradition. Nor is it something of which the historian can have any sort of a priori idea:

On the contrary, it is worked out, by methodical and critical research into sources and by the reconstruction and interrelation of facts, into a causally comprehensible historical picture altogether analogous to those produced by the study of other areas of culture. To grasp the decisive and driving

²⁴ Public in the sense articulated by David Tracy in *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York (Crossroads, 1981): "In principle, society and academy are not purely external relationships or publics for the responsible theologian. In fact, the socialization process will also assure that they are not merely external to the attitudes of any theologian. If theologians share a similar understanding of church as both a sociological and a theological reality, they are also likely to recognize two further needs. First, they must explicate the basic plausibility structures of all three publics [i.e. church, academy, society] through the formulation of plausibility arguments and criteria of adequacy as a general theological model for informing discussions of apparent or real conflicts on particular issues. Second, they must continue the drive to reinterpret or retrieve the classical resources of the church tradition in genuinely new applications for the present day" (p. 31).

religious idea and power out of this complex whole is the task of an account of the essence of Christianity.²⁵

In other words, Troeltsch is seeking some sort of idea or force that is realized in every historical instantiation of Christianity, but which must be inferred from the comparative study of Christian history. His caution against setting out with an idea of the essence is directed against those influenced by Hegel, and is essentially the same critique he more famously levels against the “absoluteness” of Christianity.

Troeltsch immediately complicates the notion of an essence of Christianity by asking where it should be sought. It cannot be abstracted from all the varieties of Christianity which exist or have existed, because there is no way to know which qualities of all Christian churches are essential and which are incidental without begging the question. Nor is it possible to say which churches or movements are authentic expressions of the Christian essence and which are aberrations without likewise presuming to already know what one is looking for. Popular criteria in Troeltsch’s day were the original proclamation of Jesus among Protestants (Harnack) and the development of tradition with the church among Catholics (Loisy, Newman). Harnack, having eschewed apologetics and idealistic philosophy of Religion (including calling into question the possibility of a general concept of religion), proposed that the correct place to seek the nature of Christianity is “Jesus and his Gospel.” But he does not mean that such an inquiry should restrict itself to Jesus himself, because “every great

²⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, “What Does ‘Essence of Christianity’ Mean?” in Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (trs.), *Writings on Theology and Religion*. John Knox Press, 1990. pp. 124-81. This quotation is on p. 129.

and powerful personality reveals a part of what it is only when seen in those whom it influences....we must look at the reflection and the effects which he produced in those whose leader and master he became."²⁶ Inquiry must therefore include first generation of his disciples as well. The logic of studying Jesus through the impression he made on others is carried through to all historical effects of Christianity as well, but Harnack believes that the accumulation of effects can and often has obscured what is essential in Jesus and his proclamation, which is the inward and individual transformation of one's relationship with God, indicated by the outward preaching of "the kingdom of God." While no age of Christian history was without its accomplishments, it was through Protestantism and especially liberal Protestantism that the largely obscured essence of Christianity began to be uncovered.

Troeltsch points out that this option fails because we are able to reconstruct very little of Jesus' teaching with any degree of certainty. As he has noted elsewhere, the study of the earliest documents of Christianity reveals a very human process of transmission of Jesus' teaching, but no pristine original. Moreover, even if a reasonably complete reconstruction of the original teachings of Jesus were possible, we would have to ask whether the essential moment was sometime in Jesus' life, or perhaps the apostolic interpretations of the life of Jesus, perhaps specifically Paul's. When does the

²⁶ Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity*, tr. Thomas Bailey Saunders. New York (Harper, 1957), p. 10

classic period end? And furthermore, “we have to ask: What is it about the original time which contains the truly classical element?”²⁷

The idea of a developing tradition put forward by Loisy and Newman are more sophisticated than Harnack's position, and are also distinguishable from one another. We will here give an outline of Newman's position. Although Troeltsch did not interact with Newman (Troeltsch's proficiency in English was limited, as was Newman's German), Newman's position is very insightful on the whole, despite being deeply flawed on many individual points.²⁸ The final section of this chapter will reformulate several of Newman's constructive points. Newman understood ideas to have a life, which they demonstrate in their ability to “arrest and possess the mind.”²⁹ Living ideas take hold of individuals and communities before being fully understood and worked out. It is a sign of an idea's vitality that those who identify with it continue to formulate it anew and explore its implications in ever changing contexts. Because individuals will only have grasped certain aspects of the idea, their efforts will often appear quite contradictory, and the development is likely to proceed through many missteps and false starts. But as it is explored over time, its fullness and consistency is made more apparent,

²⁷ Essence, p. 147

²⁸ The book which we will draw on here, John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Westminster, MD (Christian Classics, 1968), was written in the final days before the author's conversion to Catholicism and betrays the thought processes of someone who has already decided on a position other than the one he is arguing at the beginning (that the Church of England has access to and stands to benefit from a Catholic tradition that is not liable to many criticisms Protestants have made of it, but that it is not necessary for Anglicans to become Catholic).

²⁹ Newman, p. 36

even as its expression is always changing. Christianity is such an idea for him. It has changed with the times in unforeseeable ways, but its valid developments can be recognized retrospectively through various characteristics. Valid ideas are able to assimilate one another. They can be seen as both developing potentials it always had, but developing in a manner that preserves the past. "It changes with [the times] in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."³⁰ Because Christianity ultimately springs from God's initiative, Newman considers it reasonable to expect that God would supply an authority competent to adjudicate correct development, which he eventually located in the Roman Catholic magisterium.

Troeltsch would consider this option a failure because it can only take into account what did happen, from which it is impossible to infer what ought to have happened. Newman considered all valid developments to already be contained in Christianity from the start, and considered the contemporary church competent to determine which strains of Christianity's development were valid. But in making the judgment that, for example, Athanasius' understanding of the person and work of Christ was valid because it persisted over time and triumphed over that of Arius and those who have been called Arians, we have no way of knowing that what did happen is what should have happened. Only from the perspective of one claimant to the valid

³⁰ Newman, p. 40

development of Christianity, Catholicism (which in *Development of Doctrine* does not yet mean Roman Catholicism), can it be decided which past developments of Christianity have elaborated aspects which were already present in germ and have conserved the vitality of the original idea, and which have introduced something completely new and illegitimate.

Along very similar lines to his arguments that no essence of Christianity can be abstracted from its past, Troeltsch points out that the essence of Christianity cannot be an ideal, even one of which all actually existing forms of Christianity fall short. This is simply because there is no way to determine based purely on the actually existing forms of Christianity to infer what ideal they fall short of. This is similar to Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox. When one has observed all of the moves in a game up to the present, it is impossible to infer the rules of the game. Past behavior does not predict future behavior, and the rule the players follow could be different than what the observer has inferred. Descriptive rules can only be formulated retrospectively. And as Kathryn Tanner explains, since there can be no rule for applying the rules, it is possible that others will apply the rules differently and in contradictory ways.³¹

Tanner takes up Troeltsch's questions, approaching them from the perspective of post-modern cultural theory. She critiques a number of post-liberal theologians who argued, with various nuances, that Christianity is a culture with its own norms for

³¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis (Fortress Press, 1997). p. 143

reasoning about belief and behavior, and that socialization into this culture enables a Christian to distinguish correct performance of Christianity from incorrect. She rightly notes that, contrary to Vincent of Lerins' famous criterion of correct belief, that Christians have differed greatly on what they believe in different places and times, as well as within any particular context. Moreover, there is no subset of core beliefs or practices that is exempted from this tendency toward difference, no deposit of faith in the sense of something left by Jesus or the apostles and guarded across time so that it is not changed, subtracted from, or added to.³² It is impossible to make definitive appeals to an authoritative tradition to validate or rule out a belief or practice as Christian in a way that silences all possibility of disagreement, because the existence of a body of traditional material is not prior to the act of judgment, but is also formed by it. One must decide what counts as tradition.³³ Traditions are not created from nothing, but are constantly reconstructed. "'Tradition' is always a selection from the wide array of materials that could be so designated in virtue of their transmission from before and elsewhere. And even more generally, tradition is always a matter of human attribution; nothing about the materials themselves requires that designation."³⁴ Furthermore, even when conceiving of the integrity of Christian belief and practices as following rules or as the result of correct socialization, working out what the rules are can only be done

³² Tanner, p. 124.

³³ Tanner, pp. 128ff

³⁴ Tanner, p. 133

with any coherence retroactively. Culture simply does not function in such a way that one who knows the rules or who has been correctly socialized can apply the rules or training to a new situation in a straightforward manner such that the next proper action can be determined. There is always an argument to be had.

Troeltsch's critique was compelling in its own time, and Tanner demonstrates its staying power. Even granting that the traditions of Christianity knew nothing of an essence before modernity, Troeltsch has posed serious difficulties for how the unity of the Christian church is understood, especially when a dispute arises about whether a belief or practice is compatible with the Gospel, whatever one takes the Gospel to be, or when multiple entities claim to be the true church. By Troeltsch's light, there is nowhere one may appeal if one wishes to demonstrate that some belief or behavior is excluded by virtue of its incompatibility with what is central to the Christian church or the Christian tradition. It matters little if the rule of faith is written or unwritten, since one may always ask whose rule it actually is. Who is empowered to say where the boundaries of acceptable belief and practice lie, or which communities have the right to preserve and develop it? At Troeltsch's time, many were becoming more aware that the line from Jesus to the councils and creeds was hardly a straight one. The fact that certain movements came to be regarded as orthodox does not mean that there is any reason intrinsic to Christianity why they should be regarded as such.

Troeltsch's constructive proposal is to relinquish any notion of a definable essence of Christianity which can be abstracted from the history of the movement hitherto. Rather, the essence of Christianity or any other movement can only be defined from the perspective of the present moment, and will therefore not be stable across time, or even uniform among different Christians at the same time. "To define the essence is to shape it afresh."³⁵ This lack of essential stability is not a weakness of Christianity, so much as an indication of its strength. Christianity, says Troeltsch, is such a rich and potent religious force that it has been and continues to be capable of being re-articulated in many different historical contexts. It is a sign that God continues to address humanity through Christianity in the present moment: "We seek God as he turns towards us in the present, and in this respect that which he says to us in Christ and in the prophets is by no means superseded, but rather remains yet the only power which provides among us simple health and living profundity, true reverence and beautifying trust."³⁶ On Troeltsch's account, to tie the essence of Christianity to any historical expression of the faith would be to cease believing in "the ongoing power of this essence."³⁷

Furthermore, Troeltsch's concern is not simply with the present, but also with the future. The purpose of asking about the essence of Christianity to begin with is to continue the powerful effect of Christianity into the future. The question of the essence

³⁵ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 162

³⁶ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 175

³⁷ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 162

asks not only for “an abstract unity of what has been, but a unity of what has been and what is to be; and the abstract unity should not merely be a scientific proposition stating a factual relationship conceived with as little ado as possible, but also at one and the same time a rule for our wills and via these a driving spring of future history.”³⁸ Since naming the essence of Christianity is a normative statement about the future as well as an analytical statement about the past, it is not simply a judgment but a creative act. Moreover, it is an act of faith. It is “a faith for the future based on a history which has been historically and scientifically researched.”³⁹ Even without defining an a priori criterion of continuity with the origin and past of Christianity, one must give oneself over to what is fresh and new in that stream, letting a unity of the driving idea and one’s personal (or possibly communal) grasp of that idea emerge, which will eventually be taken up into a new creative synthesis when it no longer conveys the creative power of the idea.⁴⁰

Before proceeding to an evaluation of Troeltsch’s proposals, we would do well to consider some final nuances he gave his thought at the end of his life. He was a very sophisticated and insightful thinker who refined and sometimes changed his views over the course of his career. Thus, his earlier dismissal of non-Christian religions as not making any properly universal claims or having any real spiritual power or of being

³⁸ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 160

³⁹ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 161

⁴⁰ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 166

mere developmental stages on the way to Protestant Christianity are recanted later in his career. In a lecture written for a tour of England but never delivered due to his untimely death,⁴¹ Troeltsch acknowledged that Christianity as it was known in Europe was a highly contingent historical phenomenon that developed in the way that it did because of the peculiarities of European cultures. He retreated from his earlier view of a universal history. This does not entail a rejection of his belief in the interrelatedness of all events, but rather an increased awareness of the particularity of the contexts of all events and a more thoroughgoing application of his mature thinking about the fundamental problem of "relation of individual historical facts to standards of value."⁴² This resulted in a revised understanding of cultures and religions as being expressions of human encounter with divinity in their own right. He abandoned the idea of religions expressing needs and capacities of civilizations at differing stages of development: "What was really common to mankind, and universally valid for it, seemed, in spite of a general kinship and capacity for mutual understanding, to be at bottom exceedingly little, and to belong more to the province of material goods than to the ideal values of civilization."⁴³ In light of the dizzying diversity of humankind, Troeltsch shifts his case for the continued validity of Christianity to its former and

⁴¹ Ernst Troeltsch, *Fünf Vorträge zu Religion und Geschichtsphilosophie für England und Schottland. Historismus und seine Überwindung/Christian Thought and Its Application*. KGA 17. Gangolf Hübinger (ed.) Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006. This volume contains Troeltsch's German manuscripts as well as the English translations prepared for him.

⁴² Troeltsch, "Christian Thought," p. 143

⁴³ *ibid.*

present role in European history and culture. He claims that “only through it have we become what we are, and that only in it can we preserve the religious forces that we need.”⁴⁴ The primary evidence for validity remains profound inner experience within the culture one inhabits, but “This experience is undoubtedly the criterion of its validity, but, be it noted, only of its validity for us. It is God's countenance as revealed to us; it is the way in which, being what we are, we receive, and react to, the revelation of God.”⁴⁵ And while his later views remain deeply Eurocentric and orientalist, he ends this lecture with a promising insight, which brings us back to the theme of the epistemology of love: “In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not One, but Many. But to apprehend the One in the Many constitutes the special character of love.”⁴⁶ He never develops this thought, but we will return to it below.

Troeltsch's constructive proposal has much to commend itself. The language of an idea being embodied is idealist, but by refusing to presume to know what the idea of Christianity is, and even to deny that there is a stable idea imperfectly realized in its various historical manifestations, Troeltsch escapes some of the traps of the idealist tradition (traps which he himself exposed).⁴⁷ To a certain extent, Troeltsch has replaced Eurocentric conceit with a more humble faith characterized by openness, because the

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Troeltsch, “Christian Thought,” p. 144

⁴⁶ Troeltsch, “Christian Thought,” p. 148

⁴⁷ See Dorien, pp. 344-54.

power of Christianity is never possessed or constricted by human conceptions, including those of his own age. To be sure, the extent to which he escapes Eurocentrism is quite limited, a point which will be taken up below. But even beyond his post-Kantian German context, there are some important insights for this project. Though generally considered one of the most radical voices in the liberal Protestantism of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Troeltsch valued continuity with Christianity's past. The purpose of his historical investigations into the religion of the Christian past and the social and historical factors that influenced and became part of its development is not, at the end of the day, to discredit them so much as to determine what in their enactment of Christianity was vital in both senses of the English word, namely, not incidental or unimportant and not moribund or stagnant.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Troeltsch calls for faith in the God of Jesus Christ in the present and future. It is because the God of Jesus Christ still turns toward humanity through Christianity that Christianity is able to have an 'essence' in the present.

Troeltsch's constructive proposal is open to a number of criticisms. Indeed, he was the boogymen for theologians like Karl Barth, who warned that Troeltsch was the

⁴⁸ This is not to suggest that the vital can be isolated from the whole except through an artificial abstraction in the mind of the historian (just as no physician or biologist would be able to distinguish my life from my living body, even if different things are meant by the two terms).

inevitable result of Schleiermacher.⁴⁹ However, one must be very careful when criticizing Troeltsch. As we have noted, he is a very sophisticated thinker and his thought cannot be treated as though it crystalized at any moment in his career. But three critiques are worth discussing, two of which are valid. He has famously been accused of treating the Christian tradition from the vantage point of an outside observer rather than someone inside who knows its power and is in a position to understand its inner unity. Perhaps his work should not be considered theology at all, but philosophy or history. At various times, he considered these disciplines to be the foundation of theology, and late in his career, he moved to the philosophy faculty of Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (now Humboldt Universität zu Berlin). The ease with which he made this move shocked such younger luminaries as Karl Barth.

⁴⁹ Schleiermacher is a complex figure, perhaps even more so than Troeltsch. Like Troeltsch, he has been more known by stereotyped reputation than by careful study of his works, regardless of whether one is sympathetic or hostile. It should be said that Schleiermacher is fundamentally a theologian of the Christian church, going so far as to define theology as a science consisting of various inquiries which would have no intrinsic relation to one another except for “their common relation to a distinct mode of faith, that is, a distinct formation of God-consciousness” (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *A Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*. tr. Terrence N. Tice. Louisville, KY (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011. §1). This definition is further clarified as the information and instruction necessary for a united church leadership (ibid. §5). Theology does seek to understand what is distinctive in Christianity, or likewise, in any particular Christian community, in order to further the healthy development of the church and present its faith in a compelling manner through what Schleiermacher calls philosophical theology. But though he uses the term *Wesen*, like Harnack and Troeltsch, his meaning is somewhat different. The distinctiveness of Christianity cannot be grasped empirically or deductively (ibid. §21, 32), but must also understand the place of religious communities in the development of “the human spirit” (ibid. §22). But one can only understand the human spirit from the perspective of one’s own participation in humanity, and only thus can one understand piety as part of what makes one distinctively human (evident as early as the second speech in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Richard Crouter (tr.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. see, e.g., p. 38). Thus, while the distinctiveness of a church or community’s God-consciousness can only be worked out comparatively, this must be from the perspective of participation in God-consciousness in general. In the case of Christianity, what is distinct is that God-consciousness is characterized by redemption in Jesus Christ, into whose God-consciousness that of all Christians is being transformed and whose God-consciousness constitutes the unity of the church. That this actually reflects a very “high” christology is argued by Kevin Hector, “Actualism and Incarnation: The High Christology of Friedrich Schleiermacher,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8.3 (2006), pp. 307-22, and that it implicitly requires a trinitarian understanding of God by Paul DeHart, “*Ter mundus accipit inifinitum*: the dogmatic coordinates of Schleiermacher’s Trinitarian Treatise,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 52 (2010), pp. 17-39.

But this charge is not particularly useful. At least by Troeltsch's own lights, he saw his evolving work as faithful to Christianity, and particularly to Christ. He is not only right, but he anticipates Bonhoeffer and even Barth when he insists, in the already quoted passage, that "We seek God as he turns toward us in the present," with faith that what God said and did for the human race through Christ has not yet been exhausted. "This," he goes on, "may suffice, regardless of whether it is 'no longer Christianity' or 'still Christianity.'"⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer taught us that faithfulness to Christianity does not mean defending its privilege as the chief exemplar of the human construction of "religion."⁵¹ Furthermore, in making the theologian and the Christian accountable to the God of Jesus Christ rather than to any human religious configuration, Troeltsch actually anticipates Karl Barth's doctrine of the Word.⁵² Barth, especially in his early work, emphasized the Word of God's "no" to all pious constructs, including "Christianity."⁵³ Faithfulness to the Christian gospel is not an allegiance to the "essence of Christianity," however defined, but to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It is something of an irony

⁵⁰ Troeltsch, *Essence*, p. 175

⁵¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison, The Enlarged Edition*. ed. Eberhard Bethge. New York (Touchstone, 1997), pp. 279-281. "Our whole nineteen-hundred-year-old Christian preaching and theology rest on the 'religious *a priori*' of mankind. 'Christianity' has always been a form—perhaps the true form—of 'religion.' But if one day it becomes clear that this *a priori* does not exist at all, but was a historically conditioned and transient form of human self-expression, and if therefore man becomes radically religionless—and I think that this is already more or less the case...what does that mean for Christianity?" (p. 280).

⁵² Tanner implies as much (pp. 130-135).

⁵³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*. tr. Edwyn Hoskyns. London (Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 257-270. "How vast a gulf separates the nineteenth-century conquering-hero attitude to religion from that disgust of men at themselves, which is the characteristic mark of true religion!—But Jesus Christ is the new man, standing beyond all piety, beyond all human possibility. He is the dissolution of the man of this world in his totality" (p. 269).

that Barth should be Troeltsch's biggest critic when his project displays an incredible continuity with Troeltsch's.

A much more serious charge is the colonial and Eurocentric viewpoint he brings to bear on his work, even at the end of his life. By that point, he had given up the colonial fantasy of a supreme validity of Europe's Christian religion because of its allegedly unique proper claim to universal validity. But even when admitting the likelihood that all religious movements are adequate expressions of each culture's encounter with the divine at any given point in its history, he claims Christianity for Europe. Christianity, "as we actually find it, could only have arisen in the territory of the classical culture, and among the Latin and Germanic races."⁵⁴ He bases his later claim for the continued relevance of Christianity not only on God's turning to human beings in Christ, but on Christianity being historically fundamental to European culture (and apparently vice versa).

It's primary claim to validity is thus the fact that only through it have we become what we are, and that only in it can we preserve the religious forces that we need...Our European conceptions of personality and its eternal, divine right, and of progress towards a kingdom of the spirit and of God, our enormous capacity for expansion and for the interconnection of spiritual and temporal, our whole social order, our science, our art--all these rest, whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, upon the basis of this deorientalized Christianity.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Troeltsch, *Christian Thought*, 143

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 143-4

That the Christianity in question is *deorientalized* betrays the eurocentric bias in Troeltsch's claiming of Christianity for Europe. Eastern Christianity is briefly mentioned, but immediately dismissed as being "of quite a different type."⁵⁶ Troeltsch understood religions (including Christianity) entirely in terms of the cultures in which they are found. "In that case," Tanner says, "what it means to be a Christian would be bound up inseparably with what it means to be a member of that social group—say, a member of Western society."⁵⁷ However, agreeing with Tanner, I maintain that Troeltsch need not have resorted to a stable and definable "essence" of Christianity in order to distinguish it from European culture. Still, his implicit Eurocentric account of Christianity should raise our suspicions that there is something important in Christianity that he does not grasp due to his presupposition of a particularly constricted version of modern western rationality.

Such suspicions would seem to be confirmed by a third criticism of Troeltsch's constructive work, one which is both serious and frequently made. It is often claimed that his christology is an inadequate expression of what God does and has done for the world in Jesus. In all stages of his career, the figure of Jesus remains quite central to his understanding of the relation between God and the world, but at no point does he seem to have held anything like a Chalcedonian understanding of the person of Christ. In fact, he is openly dismissive of the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation. He

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 143

⁵⁷ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, p. 102

nevertheless seems to have believed until very late in life that God's revelation in Jesus is the highest available to humankind, and in his last work, he still did not believe that it could be surpassed, even if it was only of supreme validity for the Christian cultures of Europe. Sarah Coakley's 1988 study of Troeltsch's christology, *Christ Without Absolutes*, remains the most useful. Coakley probes Troeltsch's scattered writings to piece together his positive contribution to Christian dogmatics, as well as to find what was at stake for him in his denials of traditional christological ideas. In part, Troeltsch shares his age's distaste for the foreignness of such categories as *hypothesis* and *physis*, but of much more importance is his understanding of history and divine activity. While always affirming God's transcendence, and even incomprehensibility, Troeltsch emphasizes God's immanence in the world and history. Just as he objected to a false epistemological dualism in Kaftan's treatment of Jesus and the supernatural as being somehow exempt from the historical methodologies applied elsewhere, he rejected a two-fold division of God's operation into a more mundane one available for rational investigation, and an extraordinary one which is not, and which happens to be the only one that accomplishes anything of salvific significance.⁵⁸ He also held that a full revelation of God in Christ would be incompatible with his understanding of history and transmission, as discussed above. Coakley correctly notes that he does not give a

⁵⁸ Sarah Coakley, *Christ Without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch*. Oxford (Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 83-4.

demonstrative or probabilistic proof so much as a “cumulative case.”⁵⁹ As Coakley herself argues, his cumulative case contains many useful insights, but is not particularly strong. If God were fully and unsurpassably revealed in Jesus, this would complicate Troeltsch’s account of history, and thus of the “essence” of Christianity.

Coakley convincingly argues that, while rejecting supernaturalism, Troeltsch’s understanding of divine immanence allows him to maintain a view of progressive revelation in history. His metaphysic, according to which all people intuitively participate in Absolute, “and the relativized ‘values’ available in the unfolding course of history are the result of an absolute value cohering (in partial forms) in historical events.”⁶⁰ Troeltsch once spoke of this as “...the absolute in the relative, *yet not fully and finally in it*, but always pressing towards fresh forms of self-expression.”⁶¹ If, however, Jesus was the one in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:19) in such a way that no fuller presence or revelation of God in history is ever possible or desirable, then Troeltsch’s account must be revised. While Troeltsch’s insistence that the object of faith and loyalty is the present activity of the God who was active in Jesus is valid, that activity must be seen in Johannine fashion as drawing out meaning already latently present in the person, life, and teaching of Jesus.

A more excellent way

⁵⁹ Coakley, pp. 103-107

⁶⁰ Coakley, p. 84

⁶¹ Coakley, p. 85, citing Troeltsch, “Historiography,” in Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (1908-26) Italics Coakley’s.

My argument is motivated by the belief that the fullness of God was revealed in Jesus and that the fullness of salvation was wrought by Jesus. Neither will be surpassed, but both will be consummated by the same Jesus at the end of this age. There may be no incontestable essence of Christianity, “but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9). However, I take Troeltsch’s point, especially as nuanced by Tanner, that there is no straightforward path from the events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection to any particular belief or practice that properly carries on those events. Even to say which elements of Jesus personality and life are of theological and ethical significance requires that one already have some idea of what the significance of his life is. And if we turn to tradition, which things that Christians have believed are essential doctrines, and which are merely things that certain Christians happen to have believed (this being in no way prejudicial to the truth or falsehood of such beliefs)?

Troeltsch’s answer is that the essence of Christianity must be continually redefined, and that Christians’ accountability is to the Christian God, not to Christian precedent. While he considered it possible to construe one’s belief and practice in such a way as to no longer be Christian in any meaningful sense, he considered the question of whether one is “really Christian” or “still Christian” to be of secondary importance at best. Even holding to a very different christology, I do not believe Troeltsch is wrong on this point. The category of “essence” is, as he admits, not indigenous to the Christian

tradition, but one can express almost the same insight without recourse to it. Tanner writes of Christian culture. She argues that what holds different ways of practicing Christianity together is nothing intrinsic to their practices, but the relation of those practices to the free agency of God. The unity of Christianity is not a given to be preserved, but rather a task: what Christians share is a commitment to working out the meaning of Jesus. She gives the “strengthening of the bonds of Christian fellowship” as the goal of Christians’ dialogue with one another over the meaning of Christianity. I agree wholeheartedly her observation, but I wish to go a step further, where I believe we will discover something more fundamental than a commitment to dialogue.

What are these “bonds of Christian fellowship”? The Johannine, Augustinian, and Victorine traditions have an answer which we have been cumulatively exploring in the previous chapters: love. According to the Gospel of John, the task laid upon the earliest Christian community by Jesus was “that you love one another.” The author of 1 John made love not only an ethical task, but an epistemological one by bringing together the ethical and confessional threads of the letter in chapter four. I argued in chapter one that the author considered it impossible to love one another when some members of the community held a doctrine which, at least from his perspective, denied the salvific reality of Jesus’ bodily life. This was because the human life of Jesus was not only the object of belief, but also the foundation of the community’s love, a love which actualized Jesus’ continued presence among them through the Holy Spirit. Because the

Spirit always testifies to Jesus, love remains rooted in the historical life of Jesus. But love also has an epistemic openness. The one who loves knows God, and thus is able to perceive more meaning in the life of Jesus than the one who does not love. Moreover, I suggested that the Johannine community's love not only enabled its perception of Jesus' divinity more clearly than the traditions that produced the synoptic Gospels, but also allowed it to be enhanced. On Brown's account, it was enhanced and its knowledge of God in Jesus deepened with each new group that became part of it. What is unquestionable is that it came to be enhanced by and integrated with the synoptic and Pauline traditions. If one identifies with the Christian church of which the Johannine community became a part, then the beliefs of the Johannine community suggest that the knowledge of God in and through Jesus can be enhanced by insights that originate outside of that community. If that is the case, then surely the historicism of Troeltsch and his intellectual descendants can be a source of such insight. Troeltsch is quite right that such methods have a claim on our attention by virtue of their fruitfulness. My constructive argument is that this fruitfulness can be not only intellectual but spiritual, if and only if those methods are deployed with love and an openness to new insight.

Interestingly, Troeltsch himself made an intriguing suggestion about the epistemic openness of love in his last lecture manuscript. Having limited the validity of Christianity as a way of coming to know the "divine life" to those who are socialized in a Christian European culture, he suggests that other human societies might experience

the divine in different ways. It is impossible to comparatively evaluate these different ways without being able to judge whole civilizations, which only God may do.⁶² And he concludes the lecture with the telling sentence, referenced already above, "In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not One, but Many. But to apprehend the One in the Many constitutes the special character of love."⁶³ Due to his death before the delivery of this lecture, he did not have an opportunity to elaborate on this point. But he seems to have understood that loving another with openness, letting them show themselves rather than circumscribing them within one's own epistemological framework, also allows God to manifest Godself and not be circumscribed within an idolatrous and unimaginative epistemological scheme.

Let us therefore accept Troeltsch's account of the essence of Christianity, as far as it goes. It is not to be found in any moment of the church's life, or even in the life of the Savior. It is no credal formulation, no scriptural canon, no succession of bishops, not even a fantasy of something believed by all Christians at all times. It is not a simple formulation in the apostolic age which contained Nicaea and Chalcedon in germ. If it is anything, it is the approach of God to humanity, as God approached humanity in Jesus Christ. But let us approach this Christ in love, as 1 John, Augustine, the Victorines, and even Troeltsch tell us that this is the way to apprehend the unity of divinity in the

⁶² Troeltsch, "Christian Thought," p. 145

⁶³ *ibid.* p. 148. "Das göttliche Leben ist in unserer irdischen Erfahrung nicht ein Eines, sondern ein Vieles. Das Eine im Vielen zu ahnen, das aber ist das Wesen der Liebe."

multiplicity of history and culture. If we love and are loved by Jesus, then we are not seeking to explain Christianity from without, but from inside the community constituted by this love. And if we wish to know the significance of Jesus for the present moment, and thus the “essence” of Christianity, we must ask the fundamental question of what I have been calling theology, which is this: what does God want to give me and others through Jesus? And a second is like it: what must I do to receive it?

What God desires to give is Godself. The reason we ask about the meaning of the whole is so that we may understand how to receive the fullness of what God wants to give in the present. We seek not so much *ein Wesen des Christentums* as the church’s catholicity, its wholeness.

Catholicity is the fullness of the church, of Jesus redeeming presence of love on earth. But with what concrete thing on earth shall catholicity be identified? Here we may learn from Troeltsch and Tanner. Tanner argued convincingly that Christian unity is not a common substratum buried under all of the historical varieties of Christianity, but a task to which all of those historical varieties are called by God the Word. The multiple historical communities claiming to be the church or part of the church are the only church on earth. And for those who are inclined to appeal to tradition, as I am, it must be admitted that there is no tradition apart from the communities which are shaped by it and shape it. Tanner is quite right that tradition is constructed backwards. It falls to the present day church to contest “what counts” as tradition and what the

elements that count mean. It is legitimate and necessary to give interpretations of the history of the church on earth. In doing so, we might very well make claims about what was truly at stake in the events or controversies of any period. For example, I claim that what was at stake in the patristic controversies over the Trinity and the person and nature(s) of Christ was how communion with God is brought about by Jesus.

Communion with God is therefore the normative criterion by which I evaluate the different texts, theologies, and political maneuvering of that period. But I must acknowledge that I am selectively appropriating and configuring a history which others might reasonably configure differently. Any other interpreter must do the same.

However, the Holy Spirit has a role in this constant contesting and re-definition of the Christian tradition. Whatever else it does, the Spirit ensures that no genuine Christian impulse toward catholicity is ever lost, however much it may be submerged. From the variety of voices, theologies, and church types in the New Testament and Apostolic Fathers, it is evident that the Holy Spirit gives different charisms to different communities. Those communities represented in the New Testament canon held their charisms in such a way that they were capable of being enriched by one another. Today, the Holy Spirit works in the same way among the variety of Christian communities. By virtue of possessing Christ, each possess the fullness of the Christian tradition on some level. But each experiences that tradition from a different perspective, conditioned by different histories. And because of the prevalence of certain spiritual gifts in a

community, it may have cultivated a receptivity to that gift. Each has its central insights; each has its blind spots. Those communities are catholic which hold their insights and cultivate their gifts in a way that opens them to the gifts and insights of other communities and thus are in motion toward manifesting the fullness of the tradition, toward true catholicity.⁶⁴ Some communities may have their origin in a truly Christian impulse, but have moved away from catholicity rather than toward it, and are often considered heretical by other Christians. But the Holy Spirit preserves every true impulse, gift, or insight, keeping it alive somewhere in the church, even if it is submerged for a long time.

Two further clarifications are in order. First, the fullness of what God wants to give the church, and thus catholicity, does not need to be seen as being stable across time, though in a certain sense it is. The sense in which it is stable is that what God wants to give, Godself, has been fully given in the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because both of them are the fullness of God, nothing can be added to what the church has in them. In this sense, certain churches may rightly claim to possess “fullness of truth.” On the other hand, catholicity is not stable across time, because the deep things of God are without limit, and no human vantage point allows one to predict

⁶⁴ My claim here is related to Newman’s notion that true developments have an affinity for one another and thus a tendency toward integration, what he called “the *unitive power* of faithful developments” (Newman, p. 189, italics original). He argues in *Development* that the vitality displayed by movements with such unitive power led to a willingness to assume a certain vulnerability, “to dispense with safeguards, and trust to itself against the danger of corruption” (ibid, p. 188). However, it appears to me that Newman was not particularly thoroughgoing in applying this principle, as he also held that an external, formal authority was necessary to authorize or prohibit developments (this even before his conversion).

in advance what the Holy Spirit will draw out of the fullness of God in Christ for any particular Christian community at any given time. One cannot know how all the impulses of the Spirit fit together. In fact, it is not even possible to know for certain which impulses are genuinely catholic, though someone with gifts of knowledge and discernment of spirits, who is also in communication with a wider community and knows the scriptures and the history of the church, will be in a better position to make this determination than others. Note that this wider community might not be represented by a formal hierarchy, but the “tradition of the oppressed.”

The second clarification, following from the first, is that no point in the life of Christ or the history of the church needs to be viewed as containing everything valid development of Christianity in germ. In a certain sense, the Bible does contain every possibility in germ, but this is only because the Holy Spirit is the soul of scripture, pointing it all to Jesus Christ. As the eternal Word, Jesus does in fact contain every creative possibility. But as with the previous point, there is no humanly possible way to predict what will emerge from the encounter of the Spirit of Christ and human beings in all their historical complexity and particularity.

All of this is to say that the deposit of faith is not really a matter of something that must be handed over intact and carefully guarded from anything that would violate its intactness. It is an inexhaustible fount at the heart of the church, and the church’s task is to keep from blocking it. The tradition of the church is a guide, and

often a reliable one, even though it is constantly being renegotiated. But the church is fallible and often sinful. The Spirit does not prevent Christians from doing and teaching truly un-christlike things. But the Holy Spirit does prevent anything that flows from that spring from ever being truly lost. Catholicity is a work-in-progress as the communities that share a certain overflowing, a certain Christian impulse, are integrated with others. And this attitude, this way of holding to an insight or living out a charism that allows it to be enriched is nothing other than love, as I argued in the first chapter. And so, perhaps the church's unwritten rule of faith is, in the final analysis, actually a rule of love. It is this rule which no reading of scripture may violate and still be Christian in any meaningful sense.

The church's unity is, in the end, an inner, invisible life of which our institutions, theologies, and behaviors are but imperfect expressions. But it is also something outward. There is no Christian Church apart from these flawed people and institutions who have different gifts, which God will bring together. It is a task, the task of love, which certainly involves what we believe and what we do. And it is our prayer. No matter how divided our institutions, no matter how profoundly our beliefs clash, or in what different courses of action our moral judgments may take us, nothing can stop us from praying for one another. There may be no definable essence of Christianity, but catholicity or the catholic church are coming into being wherever two or three gather in the name of Jesus and pray for one another. The saints of old pray for us, and we pray

for those to come. Some of us also pray for the departed. To those who are joined by love, prayer, and the name of Jesus, the time that separates us means very little indeed. We, with them, are cultivating the knowledge and love of God in scripture and the catholicity of the church.

Chapter 5
Means of Grace and Hope of Glory:
A New Formulation of the Medieval Fourfold

*“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part;
then I will know fully, even as I am fully known.”*
-1 Corinthians 13:12

The final task of this dissertation is to articulate a theology of biblical interpretation based on the Johannine, Augustinian, and Victorine material in the first three chapters which interprets their insights in such a way that modern academic ways of interpreting the Bible need not be rejected. In fact, these methods can continue and enhance reading in the older vein. For our purposes, the commonality of 1 John, Augustine, and the Victorines is the central epistemic and exegetical value of love. This is also the most striking way in which they differ from typically modern ways of reading, which aim toward objectivity. The first goal of the previous chapter was to establish the credibility of love as a norm even for a reader whose interpretive instincts have been formed by the historical-critical method and the epistemologies on which it is founded. A second characteristic of the Johannine, Augustinian, and Victorine material is that love and the knowledge of love are fundamentally christological and, as a corollary, ecclesiological. For all of them, calling the church the "body of Christ" is not a metaphor. The church is, in a thoroughly miraculous and inexplicable manner, joined to the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth, now glorified in heaven, by the Holy Spirit, who constitutes it as a fellowship of love. Like the elements of the Lord's Supper, it is a real

physical and corporeal presence of Jesus Christ in the world. It is, in fact, a self-interpreting body, and can be described as constituted as a hermeneutic process, in a sense to be explained below. The church is thus the normative site of Christian exegesis. It was therefore also necessary for the previous chapter to establish where this normative site is found and who is a part of it. Rejecting any clean cut test, the previous chapter defined the catholicity of the church as a gift to be cultivated rather than an attainment.

I ground all legitimate Christian interpretation upon love, which is accountable to the authors and earliest audiences of the biblical texts, but which may discover truths in the texts which would not have been apparent to those authors, at least not in as far as we are able to reconstruct their intended meanings with any degree of probability. Christian interpretation is therefore open to the doctrinal tradition of the church, which has often appealed to the Old and New Testaments in ways which are problematic for a historical-critical sensibility. Doctrines appeal to scripture, but are also guides and tools which may be appealed to in scriptural interpretation. I will show that such appeals need not reject historical criticism. On the contrary, taken as normative, these doctrines are enhanced by the understandings of the historical and human context of the revelatory texts. While in principle I hold that no matter is ever permanently settled, some formulations of the doctrinal tradition have been so widely accepted for so long as to carry normative force for almost all Christians, or at least be entitled to the benefit of

the doubt. I will therefore take the dogmatic canons of the first seven Ecumenical Councils as typical of the doctrinal tradition, referring especially to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed because of its liturgical role in my Anglican tradition, as well as many others.

In this final chapter, I will develop a theology of biblical interpretation by reformulating the medieval fourfold reading of scripture. I will push the traditional meanings of each sense in new directions, seeing them less as set meanings inherent in every text than as four ways of reading, each of them a discipline in the ascetic life of the church. As ascetic disciplines, each is an expression of one's communion with God, of prayer in the deepest sense, which is the foundation of the Christian life. Each of these ways seeks to gain something from the God who became incarnate in Jesus¹ and makes us into the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Put another way, each way asks a different question of Jesus as mediator of God's gifts. What happened (literal)? What should I believe or what can I know (allegorical)? What should I do (moral / tropological)? For what may I hope (anagogical)? In the process of laying out each of these four ways, I will develop a christology, ecclesiology, and an understanding of history. I do this gradually, while developing each of the four ways of reading in order

¹ I frequently refer to "Jesus" when a theologian might be expected to say "Jesus Christ" or "Christ." In doing so, I do not deny or downplay his divinity (God forbid!). Rather, my intent is to emphasize that the Incarnate Second Person of the Trinity is the particular human being Jesus of Nazareth. The divinity of the Word is revealed through the particular humanity of Jesus to which it is been joined in one hypostasis. The Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection are not, first and foremost, theological categories, but scandalous events that actually happened in and to the child of Mary!

to show how each one is grounded in Jesus and the possibilities of love that he has brought about.

Let us begin by observing how our Victorine authors moved from the historical meaning to the spiritual meanings, finding them as potentially present in the historical, but awaiting formation. The Victorines took formation as the central metaphor for their spiritual lives, which was rooted in an understanding of creation and redemption as formation. Hugh's discussions in the first part of *On the Sacraments* concerning the creation and ordering of matter (I.1), the primordial causes(I.2) and the will of God (I.4), and even the creation of angels (I.5), serve the purpose of showing how creation comes to be possessed of form. God simultaneously created rational angelic nature and formless matter. In making all material creatures out of this chaotic matter, God gave it form. However, the bestowal of form in creation did not complete God's work of formation. The work of redemption is the completion of the work of formation. The redeemed form of creation was already conceived by God's wisdom when God created each thing. God furthermore caused all rational creation to desire to be fully formed. Each work of creation is therefore a sign or sacrament of the work of redemption, because everything that was ever created on earth was created for the purpose of being fully formed by the work of redemption, begun by the Incarnation of Jesus. Redemption is the meaning of creation. The world and human beings in particular were created in a not-yet-redeemed state because it would increase the love and glorification which

humans would have for God. “The Creator Himself wished first to show it in [humanity’s] creation what He was afterwards to make in it according to its worthiness.”²

The realities which Hugh calls sacraments are signs of the fullness of form to come, or that has come in Jesus, but remains to be fully realized. Hugh mostly writes of sacraments as signs after the fall. They are signs of a hoped for redemption, and allowed people who lived before the fulfillment of creation in Jesus to be saved through faith that it would come, just as we are saved through faith that it did come. But it is clear that there were sacraments in creation before the fall that promised consummation rather than salvation. These would include the works of the first days of creation as well as matrimony, instituted before the fall.³ Even the composition of the human being as material and spiritual has a sacramental meaning: If God can join two such disparate things as spirit and matter, God can also join mortal creature to God’s own glory.⁴ All reading of scripture is the discernment of a form. In Richard, the meditations in *The Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Mystic Ark* can even be seen as creating a form out of the matter of scripture, the doing of which also gives a form to the life of the reader. Knowledge of Christ allows the incompleteness of creation (and thus, of the sacred text) to become sacraments of its completion in Christ. By extension, scriptures are read as

² Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacr.*, I.6.1, tran. p. 94.

³ Hugh, *De sacr.* I.8.12-13, pp. 150-1

⁴ Hugh, *De sacr.* I.6.1, p. 94

both the pattern and the means by which individuals are formed into the likeness of Christ. We move from history to allegory to morals. Anagogical readings are not absent in the Victorines, but they are not emphasized in our texts.

In the following, I will present a similar pattern of movement from the historical to the allegorical and moral, but I found all of these in anagogical reading and employ a contemporary understanding of history, that of Paul Ricoeur, to subtly shift the function of each mode of reading.

Anagogy: Come, my heart says, seek his face

The anagogical sense of scripture is the least discussed. I, however, argue that it is primary. Furthermore, when regarded as such, it can relieve allegory of certain burdens it was never meant to bear. The obvious first question is what is meant by anagogy, and it is fitting that I admit to a slight shift of the usual definition upfront, lest I later be accused of slight of hand. The anagogical meaning is traditionally understood as what a passage of scripture reveals about where all this leads (*anagoge* means initiation), especially with regard to heaven, the resurrection, and the beatific vision of God. Pressing the definition, I use the anagogic sense to mean that which God wants to give the reader, and find it more useful to speak of an anagogical way of reading rather than an anagogic meaning. This shift of the meaning is not without precedent. Henri de Lubac argues for a double sense of anagogy in the Middle Ages. The first is the eschatological truths of scripture. It looks forward to the final coming of Christ as the

fulfillment of the New Testament, just as the first coming of Christ was the fulfillment of the Old. The second sense of anagogy is mystical contemplation of that fulfillment in this life, a contemplation looking ahead to actual fulfillment. "Thus the goal and the path to it are interwoven, so to speak, with the same material."⁵ However, I am speaking of something much more commonplace than ecstatic contemplation. God wishes to give the reader nothing less than Godself, and the full reception is accomplished in the beatific vision, wherein we shall know and love God in the way that the glorified Jesus knows the one he called Father and the Holy Spirit. To receive this gift fully is the goal of Christian life, and thus the goal of reading scripture in the Christian church. We heard Augustine that "He nurses you with milk so that he may feed you with bread, for to touch Jesus spiritually with the heart is to understand that he is equal to the Father."⁶ This was in reference to the resurrection appearance to Thomas, explaining that knowing Jesus in relation to the Father is the end, and that touching the body of Jesus is the means to that end. He then proceeded to describe the situation of the contemporary disciple in the church: "We have nothing to touch but *do* have something to read."⁷ We said in chapter two that the transferral of the mediating

⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, v. 2. Mark Sebank (tr). Grand Rapids, MI (Eerdmans, 2000), p. 185. Providing further warrant for my move, he goes on to argue that the realities disclosed by anagogy in the eschatological sense correspond perfectly to the virtuous life in Christ on earth, such that the two are only distinguished from our limited perspective.

⁶ In Ioh. ep. III.1: *lac nostrum christus humilis est; cibus noster idem ipse christus aequalis patri. lacte te nutrit ut pane pascat. nam corde contingere iesum spiritaliter, hoc est cognoscere quia aequalis est patri.* Ramsey, p. 52

⁷ In Ioh. ep. II.1: *in quo quod palpemus nos non habemus, sed quod degamus habemus.* Ramsey p. 38 (italics are the translator's).

function of the flesh of Jesus onto scripture and church constitutes the church as a hermeneutical process, the goal of which is to train its participants in knowing and loving God. In saying that the church is a hermeneutical process, two things come to the fore. First, loving always involves an element of interpretation, because it entails knowing the thing which is loved (or at least knowing something, on account of which the unknown is loved). The way in which we love something interprets what that something is. In Augustinian parlance, to wrongly enjoy a "sign" as a "thing" is to misinterpret it. God's self-love in the Trinity is also self-interpretation, and the love by which the Holy Spirit constitutes the church is also an interpretation. It discloses the Word's interpretation of God (recall that God the Son "exegetes" God in John 1:18) through our mutual love (and hence, mutual interpretation). Secondly, it pushes (though does not contradict) Augustine's rendering of the body of Christ, raising the question of what the understanding of bodies as processes means for it. This is how contemporary people understand bodies. A body is a system of interdependent biochemical processes from which the unity called life emerges. Augustine has this understanding available as well because he sees the church as constituted by the process of love, revealed in and made possible by the biological and historical processes of the body and life of Jesus. Human beings become part of the body of Christ by entering into the process of loving and having one's love redeemed. That is to say that the life of the church on earth is an exercise in receiving God in Christ, with all the

transformations of intellect and desire that this entails. It is to move from reading scripture to being scripture, like the desert masters whom Augustine praises. Let us now say that the anagogical reading of scripture is an exercise in the way of knowing that characterizes the beatific vision, a knowing that receives itself from its object, God the creator and redeemer. To read anagogically then is to read prayerfully, communing with God in Christ, asking what of Godself God wants to give now, and what one must do to receive it. Anagogical reading is ascetic reading.

Let us now seek to say a bit more about the way of knowing and loving which characterizes the beatific vision in order to better understand what we mean by anagogical reading as a practice in that sort of knowing and loving and the sort of relationship to the biblical text, to God, and to all other realities which it entails. The knowledge of God in the beatific vision is a knowledge of something incomprehensible and inexhaustible. Augustine describes the life of the blessed ones in relation to God at the very end of *The City of God*: “[God] will be the goal of all our longings; and we shall see him for ever; we shall love him without satiety; we shall praise him without wearying.”⁸ Our love is and will remain infinite and thus insatiable, but it will simultaneously be satisfied by God, its inexhaustible object. This love, and the knowledge of God which accompanies it, are the opposite of the sort Augustine diagnosed in *On the Trinity* X, where the human being “sees certain inner beauties in

⁸ Augustine, *De civ.* xxii.30. Bettenson. p. 1088

that more excellent nature which is God; but instead of staying still and enjoying them as it ought to, it wants to claim them for itself, and rather than be like him by his gift it wants to be what he is by its own right."⁹ In that passage, Augustine was diagnosing the causes of materialism as a possessive sort of desire resulting in a constricting knowledge. But here in *The City of God*, the knowledge of the blessed ones is a participation in God, a stillness in which they perceive divinity:

There we shall have leisure to be still, and we shall see that he is God, whereas we wished to be that ourselves when we fell away from him, after listening to the Seducer saying, 'You will be like gods.' Then we abandoned the true God, by whose creative help we should have become gods, but by participating in him, not by deserting him...But now restored by him and perfected by his greater grace we shall be still and at leisure for eternity, seeing that he is God, and being filled by him when he will be all in all.¹⁰

The knowledge of God, even in the eschaton, is a knowledge that can never be closed off; it must always be open to receiving more, because God is inexhaustible. Such knowledge does not impose any concept on God, but is given freely through quiet participation in God.

An anagogical way of reading practices the cultivation of this knowledge now. When we examined Augustine's doctrine of signs in light of the ascetic goal, we learned that the Incarnation is a finite sign of the infinite, and that it enabled all finite things to serve as signs with an inexhaustible meaning. We said that the purpose of reading the

⁹ Augustine, *De trin.* X.7.7, Hill p. 292.

¹⁰ Augustine, *De civ.* XXII.30, Bettenson p. 1090.

Bible as a book of signs was to learn to see all of created reality as signs, entailing a whole new disposition toward everything in it. It is an exercise in knowing and loving all things as gift and revelation, of knowing all things as one will know God. In seeking the anagogical way of reading, we seek a way of knowing that opens up itself to receive from the depths of the other, rather than a way which seeks to dissect the other or violently grip the other with a definition (c.f. the Latin *capere* and the German *begreifen*, “grasp,”; hence *conceptum*, *Begriff*, roughly “concept”). In other words, we seek a way of knowing the other as a subject rather than an object, it being a matter of indifference whether the other in question is a living person or a living text. This will entail a way of loving the other, both because our knowledge and love are always intertwined, but also because it is only love which allows us any access to the other as they are to God rather than merely as they can be to or for us.

When we apply our analysis of Augustine to this understanding of anagogical reading, we may ask how reading in this way restores our disintegrated minds to the image of God. Speaking of “image of God” in this way refers specifically to the human being’s inherent relatedness to God and opening up to God when he or she loves and knows herself correctly; the image is thus oneself. This self, however, is not something possessed, but rather something received from God in the very relationship of knowledge and love. God operates through anagogic reading to heal knowledge and desire. Reading anagogically presents the will with grace which requires a response.

This can happen in many different ways. Learning to recognize them requires practice, and the present author regrets that he is but a beginner, and can only list and describe a few. A first way is that we may be presented with the depth of our fallenness, the myriad subtle ways in which our affective operations are at odds with themselves, and in which we consent to sin. Recall that for Augustine, the will is not a separate faculty which adjudicates among conflicting desires, but the crystallization of those desires which have been accepted.¹¹ Reading the Bible anagogically may begin to shatter the illusion of an independent and innocent will. Augustine became aware that his delight in music, light, and learning were tinged with concupiscence. This distorted both the good things that he enjoyed in limiting them to his experience of them (and thus representations of them), and also distorted himself, attaching his mind to these representations through the *glatino curae*.¹² A false attachment to the things of this world generates false understandings of them, oneself, and God. In anagogical reading, God may challenge the affect or the belief. One may feel compunction, or perhaps notice oneself resisting something in the text. This first way addresses knowledge and offers self-recognition. A second way is the evocation and transformation of desire by grace through reading. This may or may not follow upon the first way. The desire may be for a habitual way of loving God (that is, a virtue) which one lacks. The response may be a prayer for that virtue. One may receive an insight, which may correct a delusion. Or one

¹¹ cf. *supra*, ch. 2

¹² Augustine, *De trin.*, loc. cit.

may not experience anything in particular. It is important not to mistake silence for an absence of grace. Sometimes God trains our desires by frustrating them for a time, even our desire for an awareness of the presence of God. God stretches our capacity through the deferral of fulfillment, to use another Augustinian image.¹³

To complement our description with Victorine terms, analogical reading is meditation in search of contemplation. Meditation, recall, is “a frequent reflection investigating the manner, the cause, and the reason of each thing.”¹⁴ Meditation upon scripture is essential, but belongs in the company of meditation upon creatures and morals. This is to say that the hermeneutic which one applies to scripture is the same as one should apply to oneself and the world. Only the technical tools differ. In the case of scripture, one must learn to read and one must have at one’s disposal a knowledge of the various fields of human endeavor directed toward “the restoration of our nature and the removal of our deficiency.” The knowledge and habits of mind one develops in the investigation of the world help to understand scripture, just as meditation upon scripture is the foundation of meditation upon morals. We seek the “reason” of each thing in scripture and ourselves. Through the mirror of scripture, as Chatillon described its function for the Victorines, we examine our own thoughts, affects, and actions. More than mere examination, meditation is an act of formation. Like the whole of creation, we

¹³ Augustine, In Ioh. ep. IV.6

¹⁴ De med. prol. Van Liere p. 388: *Meditatio est frequens cogitatio modum et cosam et rationem uniuscuiusque rei investigans.*

perceive both the Bible and ourselves as awaiting completion. This makes it and ourselves suitable laboratories. With the aim of attaining the form that we already have in the Wisdom of God (and of which we have some knowledge, because we live after the coming of Jesus), we may try to fit the pieces together to see how they reveal it. Through the sort of reading that Hugh of St. Victor terms “prayer,” we seek to cultivate the affects we find commended in scripture. The knowledge of our own affect informs our reading of scripture, as we saw in Richard’s prolonged meditations. But it is important to remember that the knowledge gained from the experience of affect is not an individual’s. The affective interpretations of scripture we find in Richard’s writings are scripts or patterns based on the experience of the Victorine school and the larger tradition of Christian asceticism (by which I obviously mean much more than mere renunciation, but rather the bodily and mental practice of seeking God in all things, which transforms one’s desires and chastens one’s pride).

Contemplation is a grace which regards what it sees as a manifestation of the wisdom of God. It transcends discursive reason, which depends on imagination to constitute its objects. It is an integration of reason and affect (as love) which gives the contemplating mind access to earthly and heavenly realities, not by constituting them itself, but by receiving itself from them and, ultimately, from God. It is then able to reason even about the mystery of the Trinity. As both a way of knowing and a way of loving, it knows and loves in God’s way. It is a love and a knowledge that never

exhausts the knowability or lovability of anything. It always seeks to receive more of God and to give more of what it receives. It is self-forgetful, but only because it knows itself as loved and has learned to know all other things as loved. This is what is sought in reading the Bible. This is what is practiced, however imperfectly. And this is the gift of God's very self that one hopes to receive.

To read anagogically is to read in a way that allows one to give oneself in love, having already decided to be open to the depths of the other. It is to read in a way that waits upon the other to find out how the other who one loves will give himself or herself (or how she or he may give by not giving--love respects the other's freedom). To revisit a scriptural text which we already interpreted with Augustine, it is to read like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We saw in chapter 2 that in their encounter with scripture, they were encountering the humanity of Jesus in their midst (his threefold body, even), albeit unbeknownst to them. On Augustine's reading, Jesus opened the minds of the two disciples to recognize his body in the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, in the Eucharistic elements, and in their midst as the stranger standing among them, constituting their community. To read with their minds opened by Jesus in order to recognize, receive, and communally constitute the body of Jesus is anagogy. To read anagogically is not to read for information. "You are not here to verify, instruct yourself, or inform curiosity or carry report. You are here to kneel where prayer has been valid." It is to "be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your

mind." It is to "wait upon the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning." And it is not an empty waiting, but an expectant one. "O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast mercy, and he will redeem Israel from all their sins."

If you will enter into this hermeneutic process of loving and knowing that is the body of Christ, or if you find yourself already inside of it, you may expect to receive the fullness of the God who is everywhere and "in whom we live and move and have our being." And who has come near, who stands bodily in our midst, though we do not know it yet. God is as near to you as your own love, if you will but "love your neighbor as yourself." "God is love. "When therefore we love our brother out of love, we love him out of God."¹⁵

Anagogical reading is not to be identified with any particular technique, though some are more immediately suited to it than others. Mental prayer, *Lectio divina*, the rosary, or Ignatian self-composition are tried-and-true methods. But in working my way through the rest of the fourfold way, I shall demonstrate that at least in theory, any technique may be grounded in the anagogical way of reading, especially concerning myself with historical-critical reading, though liberation, contextual, and post-modern techniques also fall within its scope, along with any other reading that will permit itself to begin with the question: What of Godself does God want to give to me through this

¹⁵ Augustine, De trinitate VIII,8,12

text? That is to say that readings are anagogical when the reader makes herself available to God and expects God to encounter and offer Godself to her in the reading of the text.

Littera: Things We Have Heard and Known, That Our Ancestors Told Us

Many luminaries of the theological tradition have considered the literal reading of scripture to be the foundation of the other senses, from Aquinas to Vatican II. We saw that the later Augustine strongly preferred the literal reading if it could be found to be in accordance with the rule of faith and sound morals.¹⁶ The Reformers admitted no other sense than the literal. It would seem on the face of it that if modern biblical studies fits into the fourfold scheme at all, it would be the literal sense with which it is concerned. It should be immediately pointed out that despite its appeal to common sense, not all champions of the literal sense mean the same thing by it. For some, it is the narrative sense. It may or may not be important for them that the narrative be a historically factual one. For some, such as the Reformers and many Enlightenment figures, the “plain” sense is the true meaning of scripture. For those *erklärte Wissenschaftler* whom we love to hate, but on whom we nevertheless depend in many ways, the meaning of scripture was what it meant in its original context. What all of these senses have in common is that they are concerned with history and, with the exception of some Enlightenment figures, with how God is manifested in it. I will therefore again press the definition somewhat and take the literal sense to be *historical*.

¹⁶ Cf. *supr.*, ch. 2.

As with anagogy, I prefer to discuss a historical way of reading rather than a historical sense. It was the task of the previous chapter to develop an understanding of history and meaning. Building on it, I shall here propose that the historical reading of scripture seeks to reconstruct the meaning of biblical texts for the *ones to whom they meant something*, that is, their authors and earliest readers and hearers. We immediately concede that even authorship and audience are not straightforward categories. Some of these texts had multiple authors, and all eventually came to have multiple audiences. It is fruitless to define an “original” audience. But taking the biblical texts to be artifacts of historical communities and processes, we may try to reconstruct the world from which those texts emerged and how they reveal God’s manifestation in it.

We will consider the process of reconstructing the past first from a philosophical perspective, and then from a theological one. The task of a historian was well-formulated by Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur believes that the interpretation of historical documents involves constructing a narrative in which lived time and abstract time are woven together.¹⁷ Following Aristotle’s theory of poetics (particularly of tragedy), Ricoeur understands the production and interpretation of a text to be mimetic. There are three stages of mimesis, which he “seriously and playfully” calls *mimesis*₁, *mimesis*₂, and *mimesis*₃. The first of these is a prefiguring of the world by the poet (or producer of any narrative). It is the poet’s pre-reflective feel of the symbols of culture and language.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. vol. 1 tr. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. pp. 52-90.

The second mimesis is the figuration of that world in the text, which is then refigured by the interpreter, this re-figuration being the third mimesis. The goal of interpretation is not to determine a single, authoritative meaning of the text, whether in the author's intention or in the linguistic structure of the text itself. Rather, the text (mimesis₂) serves a mediating function between the author's pre-figuration of the world and the reader's re-figuration. An exact reproduction of the author's mind is neither possible nor desirable, as this would obliterate the temporal distance between the reader and the writer. However, interpretation is not wholly unmoored from the author and the text. The interpreter must seek to do justice to the source.

Ricoeur famously insists on both an affirming and a suspicious reading of texts. The affirming reading seeks the ways in which the text discloses reality, while the suspicious reading tries to uncover the ways in which it conceals reality, particularly realities of desire, will to power, and interest of which the author may be unaware. It is only by going through the process of interpretation, with its affirmative and suspicious moments, that one becomes a subject, able to imagine "oneself as another." The historian is a special class of interpreter who is concerned with the production of a narrative interpreting the evidence of the past. The historical narrative "stands for" the action of history. He calls the narratives deliberately preserved by the people of the past monuments, meaning that like any other text, they both conceal and reveal. In particular, they reveal the story that the powerful of history want told about themselves.

Every document is also someone's monument. The historian's point of access to the past is therefore what he calls "the trace." A trace is the mark left by something "that has passed." It is both a presence and an absence. It is an absence because the person or animal who left the mark is no longer present, but it is present as a mark, one which disrupts the system of signs and symbols into which it is introduced. It "signifies something without making it appear."¹⁸ The historian tells a narrative based on the traces she discovers. She can neither re-enact the absent but real past, nor see it as entirely other. It is temporally distant, but remains real through its influence on the present in its traces. She refigures the events of the past in a narrative that "stands for" them, under the feeling of an indebtedness to the past, an obligation to do justice to the persons to whom things happened.

A biblical scholar with a historical-critical orientation can operate very well within Ricoeur's framework. There is no single original meaning to be recovered, since the signs the writers employed in their writing are, like all signs, multivalent. They exist in a symbolic cultural matrix, the author's pre-figuring of which (Ricoeur's *mimesis*₁) is figured in the text (*mimesis*₂). Like any other interpreter, the biblical scholar must refigure the symbolic world of the writer, but she does so in her own symbolic world, which is different from the author's (*mimesis*₃). She is distinguished from other interpreters by the tools and methods she has available. She has a command of the

¹⁸ *Time and Narrative*, v. 3, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. p. 125

biblical languages, she knows the manuscript tradition of any given text, she is familiar with other texts and records of the relevant regions and time periods, and she is trained to look for signs of redaction, rhetorical devices, genres, and oddities of the text that she will seek to explain. She is something of a detective. But she may ask more than “who did what, when, and where?” She may ask more, even, than opportunity and motive. She may ask what the deed performed means. How does the text disclose the author’s reality for re-creation in her own reality? Her answer obviously depends on her theory of who the author was and in what circumstances the text was composed or edited. Her interpretation is tentative, not final. This is also in keeping with Ricoeur, for whom the work of interpretation is never finished. The historian is not only a detective, but also a poet. Ricoeur’s *mimesis*³ is an act of creation, refiguring the world of the original author or authors in one’s own imagination, and the process continues if one chooses to produce a text. Moving from an informed sense of how the symbols of the writer’s world fit together, one gives them concrete shape in one’s own imagination.

We may now enhance this philosophical analysis theologically by weaving it into the Augustinian understanding of reading scripture in the body of Christ (a tradition to which it is not entirely foreign). We have seen that in the Augustinian scheme, scripture consists of signs which mean something to someone, to the Christian community as the body of Christ. If historical-critical reading concerns itself with the language, symbols, and material, political, and social circumstances of a text, then it is seeking to imagine

the world as it was for the producers and early readers of a text. It asks what the signs mean and how their meanings relate to one another for the church and its teaching ministry. Any sign may dispense the grace of God in Christ, but Augustine has shown that this may happen in many ways. All of them are valid if they produce the love of God and neighbor and accord with the rule of faith, but even he considered the meaning of the author to be the proximate goal. This was once the goal of scientific biblical studies (*"wie es eigentlich gewesen ist!"*), but the aims of most historical-critical readers have become more modest. Literary theory has also discredited the notion of an authorial intent or original meaning. The literal reading which I commend is less concerned with an authoritative meaning than with people and communities, and this may be imagined (or if one prefers, composed) on the basis of evidence (traces, in Ricoeur's terminology). Empathy is thus an indispensable skill for historical reading.

It may seem that in describing my historical way of reading as imaginative and empathic, I have taken it well beyond the scope of historical-critical studies, but this is not the case. The entire historical-critical task seeks to see the world as someone else. It begins with language, the basic tool of biblical studies. Learning the intricacies of Greek and Hebrew grammar and the multivalent meanings of words, one requires very contrived methods, such as memorizing rules and paradigms. But the purpose of the very artificial rules and paradigms is to develop the linguistic impulses into which a native speaker or highly fluent non-native speaker was socialized. At later stages of

study, one goes so far as to learn the differences between the language of those who were educated in grammar and the dialect and linguistic habits of non-educated speakers in an effort to understand how an encomium in praise of the emperor, a magical spell on a papyrus, or a letter from a soldier to his family were experienced based on their language. Moving from grammar to rhetoric, this is also the goal of genre studies. The peoples of the biblical world were certainly aware of various genres. We seek to construct and understand a symbolic universe when we compare words and images in a text with those found in other biblical texts, or other Semitic or Hellenistic literature. This is even the motivation for attempting to determine the time and circumstances of a text's composition. All of these inquiries help us reconstruct what the language and symbols of a text meant for those closest to its genesis.

This idea of a symbolic universe inhabited by human beings and expressed in their texts should not be mistaken for a stable or universal structure, but is a very particular and fluid configuration. Symbols always carry a surplus of meaning which is renegotiated over time and configured and reconfigured with other symbols. Every retelling is a reinterpretation, which is to say a new act of poesis. Symbolic discourses and their meanings are determined by structures of power but also can be used to resist and transform those structures.¹⁹ As such, symbols are constantly contested even within

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: An Introduction*. tr. Robert Hurley New York: Vintage Books, 1978. A reckoning with the implications of Foucault is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this project. However, it is to be born in mind that Foucault does not conceive of power as a stable configuration, but rather a highly unstable one (pp. 92ff).

a community. They are constantly evolving, are differently experienced by every member, and sometimes cease to be meaningful.²⁰ They do not have a single meaning like the cyphers of a code, which can be deciphered into words. Words, of course, also do not have a one-to-one correspondence with things they designate, but likewise have their meaning within a configuration of other words and other symbols, such that, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, a French speaker and a German speaker really do not mean the same thing with the words *pain* and *Brot*.²¹ Language is also part of a community's configuration of symbols. Speaking theologically, if we take all signs to be signs of God (whose signification is facilitated by the Incarnation), then their meaning is inexhaustible. The practice of historical reading I am commending seeks to imagine how the symbols fit together at a particular point in time for the various people involved.

Source and redaction criticism enhance our imagination of the symbolic universes of the Bible by investigating the story of the story, how the tale "grew in the telling." How was 1 Isaiah's vision different from those of 2 and 3 Isaiah, and what happens to it when it is seen through the lens of the later contributors? What did

²⁰ For an influential discussion of symbols on which I am consciously drawing, see Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*. New York (Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 41-54.

²¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn. New York (Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 69-82. An even better example is the German *Brötchen*, a very small loaf of bread meant to be consumed by one person at a single meal. The obvious English translation is "roll," but as an American with German family, I can attest that a roll is not a *Brötchen*. A roll is something one eats while waiting for a meal, or perhaps as an accompaniment to a main dish. A *Brötchen* is the meal, partly because it is often made of a heartier dough than an American roll, but more so because it simply is something to be eaten in its own right, perhaps accompanied by other items. If you cut a *Brötchen* in half lengthwise and put some meat, cheese, or vegetables between the two halves, you do not get a sandwich, but a *belegtes Brötchen*. That is, not a new kind of thing of which the bread is simply one part, but the old thing with something added to it.

Matthew and Luke know about Jesus (historically or theologically) that rendered Mark in need of significant retelling? In the first chapter of this project, we saw that Raymond Brown's telling of the story of the Gospel of John is about how additions to the Johannine group of disciples from different communities resulted in new insights into the Jesus story, which they chose to express through an expanded story that left the original intact, but blazed a new trail through it or weaved a new yarn into it.²² We examined the theology implicit in their ongoing re-interpretation of their story. Love rooted in Jesus and expressed in the Johannine community had an important epistemic dimension for them. Now the old can only be read in light of the new, and vice versa, though textual clues and imagination allow one to theorize about what belongs to which stage. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I attempted to demonstrate an application of this method on 1 John. Finding elements of the Enuma Elish in Genesis 1 or the hymn to the Aten in Psalm 104 lets us put ourselves in the place of the storyteller or poet and refigure the experience of this fragment of Babylonian or Egyptian religion bring forth a previously unexplored possibility in our Judaic tradition. Even the reconstruction of Q need not be fruitless.

Despite the frequent complaint of many seminarians (including a younger version of the present writer) that the historical-critical reading they learned is not particularly useful for pastoral practice, the practice of historical reading is not only

²² cf. *supra* ch. 1

relevant to pastoral practice, but is in principle the same practice as pastoral care,²³ with only the minor difference that the biblical scholar is exercising “pastoral care for the dead.” One turns one’s loving attention to another person, often a person in distress, and trusts that one’s loving attention to the person creates a space in which the Holy Spirit will convey grace, whether the effect be strength, consolation, or even justification, assurance, or sanctification. The pastor and the person in need have no privileged access to each other’s subjectivity, but the presence of the same Spirit can serve to bridge the gap and convey sanctifying grace, and the Holy Spirit is present where there is a community of love. The tools one uses in pastoral practice are very similar to the tools of the biblical scholar. One must learn the language of the persons to whom one relates in a pastoral capacity, which may not be the same as one’s own (or if it is the same language, it may be used in a different way, reflecting differences in race, class, and other factors). The person to whom one speaks is in the midst of a symbolic universe constituted by a number of historical conditions, including religious, political, social, and economic systems. Part of the development of “cultural competence” is to learn about these systems and imagine what it is like to live with them. This is necessary on both an individual and a communal level. To borrow an anthropological term, it is an exercise in what Clifford Geertz calls “thick description.” While Geertz did

²³ My description of pastoral care is from the perspective of someone who has been professionally trained for ministry (including specialized training in pastoral care through coursework, pastoral internships in faith communities, and Clinical Pastoral Education) and who hopes to exercise a priestly vocation that includes pastoral care. But while I have the professional in mind, everything I will say applies not just to the care provided by a trained minister, but to the pastoral ministry of the church, which is exercised by the whole community.

not originate the term, he is the one who famously used it to describe ethnography as the fundamental method of anthropology. A thick description goes beyond the mere description of observed behavior and its results (i.e. "thin description") and seeks to understand the symbolic framework of a culture that makes those actions intelligible to their performers.²⁴ While Geertz's understanding of the symbolic dimension of culture has been rightly criticized by more recent work which disputes his tendency to describe the symbolic dimension as distinct from other social discourses and exercises of power,²⁵ this does not limit its usefulness for our purposes. We seek a tentative picture of the reality through which the persons in our care understand their experiences, and we assume that all of its elements are mutually-conditioned (this was one of Troeltsch's insights we reviewed in the previous chapter). A pastoral ethnography of persons we encounter today or through scripture also requires reflection on one's own participation in the systems that constitute the other's universe and of one's own agendas, which is very analogous to the ways in which a historical-critical biblical interpreter must try to be aware of her own theological agendas so that she can bracket them, and of the symbols and assumptions that constitute her own world, so that she can avoid anachronistic interpretations. Most of what one does as a pastoral caregiver is listen,

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York (Basic Books, 1973). pp. 3-32.

²⁵ For example, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, esp. pp. 27-54.

imagine, and discern the presence of God, while trying not to impose one's own agendas. Only out of this process does an occasional intervention emerge.

In the activities of historical-critical biblical interpretation and pastoral care, we see that two imaginary universes encounter one another. Where pastoral care differs is that it involves two people, each of whom pre-figures and figures their own symbolic universe and reconfigures the other's, albeit not in the same way. Each reflects what he or she sees back to the other. It might be alleged that this is where the analogy breaks down, because the text which the historical-critical scholar studies does not simultaneously interpret and reflect the scholar.²⁶ But if Ricoeur is right, then there is no stable subject before, during, and after interpretation. Rather, the subject is formed through the act of interpretation. Therefore, in both pastoral care and historical-critical biblical scholarship, there is a mutual interpretation between two persons, in the one case, and a person and a text in the other.

In historical-critical scholarship, as in pastoral care, one's empathic and imaginative reconstructions of the story and symbols of the other are fallible and tentative. They are not mere catalogues of the past, but creations of something new in the mind of the interpreter with the past as material. But they are, importantly, creations with a debt to the past. Where the sort of historical or literal reading I am commending takes its leave from purely secular historical-critical scholarship as it has developed as a

²⁶ I doubt that many bible scholars alive today would make such a claim. Recall also Schweitzer's remark about the reflection in the well--and that in the golden age of modern German biblical scholarship!

normative exegetical practice in institutions of higher learning in the modern West, is in its understanding of the nature of this debt to the past or present other. In the case of pastoral care, and that of Christians interpreting scripture, there is only one debt that counts for anything: "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). Bringing together Ricoeur's debt to the past and the knowledge of the other through love in the Augustinian tradition, we try to make our refiguring of the past as faithful as possible to the people whose present it was, because we owe them a debt of love. And the love that joins us to them is nothing other than the Holy Spirit, using the medium of the pages of scripture. Since literal or historical reading is motivated by love, its foundation is the anagogical way of reading, wherein one makes oneself vulnerable to God through love.

Two points of partial continuity with our premodern interpreters (and thus, partial innovation on my part) are noteworthy. First, we recall that the Victorine reading technique, as explained by Hugh under his heading of prayer, involved discerning what affect of the inspired writers each text expresses, and to attempt to feel that affect oneself when reading or reciting. This was, of course, part of the formation of affect into virtue through ascetic practice, which Richard explained in detail in *The Twelve Patriarchs*. Hugh understood inspiration in a way which entailed that the writers were always experiencing and expressing a pious affect. The later reader was to try to reproduce this affect. I, on the contrary, am quite open to the likelihood that the

scriptural writers were often expressing less than pious orientations of their being. They were not only situated in and constituted by symbols and languages, but also by ideologies. Thus, they are often self-deceived and self-serving. The scriptural texts are, in Ricoeur's language, monuments as well as documents. But the Victorine's were well-aware of the possibility of self-deception. In light of this, I wish to press the Victorine understanding of affective reading and suggest that it be developed into an empathic reading. An empathic reading does involve exercising one's affective capacities. We exercise and form these capacities by establishing an affective relationship with the writers and their communities. In doing this, we fall back onto the questions of the anagogical method, asking what God was giving them, whether they succeeded or failed in receiving it. And further, we ask what God is giving us through them.

The second point of partial continuity and partial innovation concerns Augustine. We recall that he held that all things except for God can also be signs, and all signs eventually point to God through the transferral of meaning. The Bible, for Augustine, is a set of signs that is particularly well-adapted to the end of healing broken intellect and will, and the interpretive community to whom the signs of scripture are intelligible is the church, which is a hermeneutic process constituted by its relation to the threefold body of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit as the love of the Father and the Son. Scripture is essential in the mediation of the body of Jesus in all three forms (the historical body of Jesus of Nazareth, the church, and the Eucharistic host).

Jesus' body is never physically recognized apart from scripture (Richard of St. Victor made a similar point with regard to the authenticity of epiphanies of Jesus, based on the presence of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration). If we now conceive of the historical mode of biblical interpretation as an empathic imagining of the symbolic universe of the writers of the biblical texts and the communities from which they emerged and to whom they were addressed, then it is not merely the signs on the pages of the Bible that are revelatory, but also those same signs as they are taken up in the church's imagination.

It is therefore necessary to give some account of what the church's imagination is. Remember that the church as the body of Christ is an interpreting body, a hermeneutical process. The church's imagination is the source and product of that interpreting. It is also, as we shall see, the hinge on which we can pivot from literal to allegorical reading, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. The church's imagination cannot be located in any one repository, other than in the Second Person of the Trinity, who is the Logos, Wisdom, and Imagination of God. The Second Person is the place of the creative principle of the world and the divine creative principle. God imagines all things in the Word,²⁷ so that in their creation, they express some aspect of the Word

²⁷ See Augustine's discussion of creation in the Word in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* II.6.12. "So then, nothing could have been created, whether before time (which does not mean co-eternal with the creator), or from the start of time, or in any particular time, of which the creational formula—if it can rightly be called a formula—was not alive with co-eternal life in the Word of God co-eternal with the Father; and that is why scripture, before introducing each element of creation in the order in which it says it was established, looks back to the Word of God, and first puts, 'God said, Let that thing be made.' It could not, you see, find any reason for reating a thing, about which it had not found in the Word of God that it ought to be created." (Augustine, *On Genesis*. tr. Edmund Hill, O.P. Hyde Park, NY (New City Press, 2002). pp. 197-8.)

(their *rationes* in the language of the western church, including the Victorines; their *logoi* in the language of Maximus). Augustine demonstrated that in the human mind, imaginative acts are accompanied by acts of volition or love, just as volition and love are always accompanied by intellectual acts. Intellect and volition are, after all, two aspects of the same mind and always operate together, along with memory. The same is analogously if incomprehensibly true in the Trinity. For Augustine, the Holy Spirit is the common love or will by virtue of which the church is one body. Because a common operation of love requires a common operation of intellect or understanding, there is also a divine principle of intellect in the church. St. Paul calls this “the mind of Christ,” which he describes as a corporate possession of the church (1 Corinthians 2:16). But this divine principle of intellect in the church, the mind of Christ, is nothing other than the divine creative principle per se, the Wisdom of God. This is what I call the church’s imagination.

The church’s imagination, the mind of Christ, exists in tension with the impious intellection of its members, which are a distorted expression of it. This is exactly parallel to the manner in which the love of Christ exists in tension with the concupiscent loves of the church’s members, even as these are nothing but its distorted expression. Our only access to the church’s imagination is through the imaginations of the church’s members, which open up to God just as their love does. This is what we share with each other in our fellowship, in the pastoral ministry of the church, and what is shared with

us in a privileged way in the holy scriptures, which were some of the earliest artifacts of the church's imagination, and which have proven fruitful again and again. Somewhat counter-intuitively perhaps, this is what is sought in the historical reading of scripture, for which historical-critical reading can be a very useful tool. But it must be driven by and aimed at love, for only love can know another person, biblical or not.

Allegoria: Mortals ate the bread of angels

The etymology of allegory ($\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, other+ $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega$, I speak) is "saying something else." In Augustine, and even more so in Hugh, allegory specifically refers to Old Testament signs and events as revealing truths about Christ and New Testament signs as revelatory of the age to come. That is to say that both Testaments, while having a present meaning in their own right, are also open to or even expectant of a fuller meaning in the future. For both, the mechanism of this fuller signification is Jesus, "in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Many patristic and medieval figures spoke of a spiritual meaning of the text. The spiritual meaning of the biblical text was seen as a function of the spiritual meaning of history or, more broadly, as rooted in an understanding of the relationship of God and the world. Contending that this is a peculiarly Christian understanding, De Lubac alleges that philosophical (i.e., non-Christian) allegories "on the one hand reject as myth what appears as an historical account, and deny to its literal sense what they claim to reveal in its meaning as a

mystery."²⁸ Christian allegory, on the other hand, seeks "to understand the spirit of history without impairing historical reality." Rather than being the mere packaging of moral or metaphysical truth, "the very facts have an inner significance; although in time, they are yet pregnant with an eternal value."²⁹ While the choice of framing this understanding in opposition to the Greek philosophical tradition is unnecessary and of questionable value, De Lubac has correctly characterized the exegetical practice of many early Christians, particularly Origen. In his more famous work, De Lubac attempts to explain the logic by which allegorical exegesis actually proceeds in medieval Christianity, turning especially to the 12th century as the point at which the principles of such exegesis were worked out, although he points out that they are not new. At that time (and let us bear in mind that this is the time of Hugh), there was a recognition that allegory and tropology were governed by rules, that they had an "objective structure" reflecting the divine ordering of reality.³⁰ Accordingly, allegory and especially tropology are freer than history, but must be internally governed by the goals and methods of the spiritual life, and must even take account of context and not connect two things that are too disparate.

De Lubac correctly sees the development of dogma as a fruit of the knowledge of scripture. This sensibility developed into Augustine's theory of signs and Hugh's theory

²⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*. tr. Lancelot C. Shepherd and Elizabeth Englund, O.C.D. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988., p. 184

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 185

³⁰ *Medieval Exegesis*, v. 1, p. 16

of sacraments, whereby the created realities signified by words are themselves signifiers of spiritual realities. The continuity of creation and salvation or, more specifically, of natural and divine signification, hinges on christology. The Incarnation is the sign of signs which facilitates their signification of the infinite and ineffable, the potential for which they always had by virtue of the world's creation in the Word or Wisdom of God, a relation which it will perfectly manifest eschatologically. This is the basis on which the scriptures which are the Old Testament for Christians can be read allegorically as revealing something of Christ, and why all allegorical reading is christological. This christological reading may concern Christ as the eternal Word and Wisdom. It might concern what was then the future and now past reality of the Incarnation of the Word. It might discover the voice of the church as the body of Christ or the individual soul redeemed by Christ. And it might discover the future reality of all of creation consummated in Christ.³¹

But the christological reading of the Old Testament (or, for that matter, of creation) should not be seen as undoing or rendering obsolete the meaning of the texts for the communities that first produced them or their ongoing meaning for Judaism as Torah and Tanakh. The christological meaning of the signs of creation and of God's covenant with the Jewish people is a new order of meaning which those signs take on in

³¹ De Lubac is able to define the three non-literal senses of scripture very precisely with reference to three "advents" of Christ. The first is his Incarnation, and allegory corresponds to this. The second, his coming at the end of days, corresponds to anagogy. His interior advent in the soul of the individual corresponds to tropology. All are thus christological and mutually interrelated (*Medieval Exegesis* v. 2, p. 179). Note that this does not quite correspond to my proposal.

light of the Incarnation. De Lubac offers some help here, even though he is not explicitly concerned about supercessionism. He is quite clear that the coming of Christ and thus, the Christian testament, did not so much uncover a meaning already present in the Old Testament as create the meaning:

It is only for God, from the eternal point of view, that the Old Testament contains the New already in a mystery: *semel locutus est Deus et plura audita sunt*. The entire Bible contains no other Logos than him whom we adore in the flesh; so that if, to suppose an impossibility, Christ had not come, no man confronted with the sacred text would have the right to go beyond its literal meaning; 'The Lord is the Spirit.'³²

He is somewhat disparaging of the literal meaning, but he need not be. The Hebrew Bible already has meaning, and Jews have not fundamentally misunderstood it. In Jesus, it has a new meaning in addition to the old. Or better yet, the reality which the text discloses has taken on a new meaning, one which remains open and inexhaustible. The same is true of the New Testament. In De Lubac's words, "As this mystery is in process of fulfillment and will not be completed until the very end of time, the New Testament does not contain, any more than the Old, a complete meaning in a literal sense."³³ Each Testament is a figure of a truth to come, and neither's signifying power can be exhausted. The New Testament, however, can never be surpassed.³⁴

De Lubac insists that the church is both the source and norm of spiritual exegesis. Scripture is the fountainhead of the apostolic tradition of the church, to be received from

³² De Lubac, *Catholicism*, p. 190

³³ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, p. 186

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the church as if from Christ. It is only within the church's apostolic tradition that scripture can be rightly interpreted. Its spiritual senses especially are only present in the church. The normative development of dogma is seen as a fruit of knowledge of scripture.³⁵ I do not disagree, though I find his treatment of the church unsatisfying. He makes a rather easy identification of "the church" and the figures and movements of Christian antiquity who, for lack of a better word, won. He has little defense against the charge that the voice he identifies as that of apostolic tradition is a male, imperial voice presuming to speak for the whole. It is only possible to speak of a catholic consensus when those who reject one's position are no longer regarded as catholic. In the previous chapter, I argued that catholicity is a work-in-progress. There is no stable set of affirmations or institutional structures that serves as a guarantee or *sine qua non* of the legitimate development of the Christian tradition. In fact, it is the Incarnation's opening up of every sign's inexhaustible signifying potential that renders such a stable configuration impossible, unnecessary, and undesirable. What one finds instead is ongoing interpretation and contestation. Catholicity, as we said, emerges when one imaginative configuration of the Christian universe is able to integrate the impulses driving its competitors, impulses which never disappear, even when a "heresy" is suppressed. Strictly speaking, nothing is ever settled in this age, though some doctrines and institutions have been so spiritually fruitful as to have become foundational. While

³⁵ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* vol. 1, pp. 25-7

it is always legitimate to voice a critical impulse, attempting to remove an element that has become foundational is usually spiritually perilous, and a wise Christian should give the traditional doctrines of whatever portion of the church she finds herself in the benefit of the doubt. In my Anglican tradition, as in most other Christian churches, we receive the Apostles and Nicene Creeds as normative statements of the teaching of the church and give high regard to all of the dogmatic canons of at least the first four Ecumenical Councils. These have been shown to not only to facilitate spiritual growth, but to be capable of integrating many other insights and perspectives. They are reliable guides for drawing out the depths of what God offers in scripture, but they are themselves neither necessary nor sufficient criteria of catholicity.

The sole and sufficient rule for exegesis is love. In my proposal, a rule of love has replaced what some of the earlier fathers called the rule of faith, and it replaces it by including it. Love is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who mediates the presence of Jesus. As such, love is rooted in the events of history, and one only loves by being taken into those events, by living and loving in imitation of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. 1 John laid out ethical and confessional tests of true participation in the fellowship of those among whom Jesus was and is present: no one knows or loves God who hates her brother or sister, and no one knows or loves God who denies that Jesus has come in the flesh. Love, and such action and belief as it entails in the Christian community, is the norm of interpretation.

With this norm established, we may now ask how we may go about reading allegorically (that is, christologically). The procedure I propose for reading Jesus in creation and the first covenant, and for reading the depth of the life of Jesus as revelatory of God goes all the way back to the Johannine texts with which this project began, and seeks to enhance them with our other materials. Anyone encountering the Christian proclamation does so in some relation both to the universal and the local community of Christian believers, which we call the catholic church. That body of believers is most fundamentally constituted by the love of God, which is the person of the Holy Spirit, expressed as love for one another. But as I argued in the first chapter, the love of God was made known by Jesus as the temporal presentation of God's eternal activity of love. To love means to be taken into that activity through the humanity of Jesus.

Being drawn into God's love is also how we are drawn into God's imagination. The Holy Spirit makes the past event of Jesus' life present, extending the incarnation into the church and allowing us to love as Jesus loved. The more we love "in deed and in truth," the more the Spirit enables us to see into the depth of Christ. The Spirit does not present every person with the same view of the depths of God in Christ. Each person has a different *ratio*, a different way of beholding and reflecting Christ's glory. Sometimes, the Spirit gives a particular person or community certain key insights which shape their imagination of all of the other symbols and ideas in the ecclesial

imagination. There are two criteria by which to test new insights. First, the Holy Spirit “will reveal nothing of his own,” but always allows deeper comprehension of the mystery of Jesus, with the aim of increasing the knowledge and love of God. Second, the Spirit gives insights in a way that is open to enrichment. Integrating old and new insights into something more truly catholic is the task of the church in every age. The heretics may have been wrong, but never entirely wrong (the latter is quite impossible, for “even the demons believe and tremble”).

The imagination of the church into which one is drawn does not exist in any sort of abstraction from the world in which the church exists (the Wisdom of God is oriented toward expression of divine ideas in creation). Allegorical reading is therefore enhanced by historical reading. Apart from the concrete humanity of Jesus, the doctrines of the ancient church are dry. It is of no interest to anyone that a complete human nature and the complete divine nature were united in the hypostasis of the Word without confusion, change, division, or separation if they have no experience of anything they would be inclined to call a hypostasis or nature.³⁶ The doctrine is intended as a description of what we have explored in relation to 1 John and Augustine, which is the humanity of Jesus as the temporal mediation of the eternal God. Outside of the church’s ongoing effort to discern the body of Christ and through it, the divinity of Christ, the

³⁶ I am aware of the irony in referring to the teaching of Chalcedon as a doctrine of the undivided church when its promulgation was the occasion for the second longest-lasting schism in the history of Christianity. However, recent dialogues between the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches and the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches have been quite productive, with all sides agreeing that the intent of Chalcedon was correct, and that each side was attempting to express the same truth in different ways.

doctrine is meaningless. Inside that tradition though, the doctrine of the hypostatic union has been so fruitful over time that it has become a reliable exegetical rule. Using the allegorical way of reading, we discern Jesus' humanity in both testaments (indeed, in all of creation) because his human nature reveals his divine nature, and thus *the* divine nature, and heals our ignorance and concupiscence so we can know and love the God who is revealed. Here in particular, the allegorical reading is not only founded on the historical, but is enhanced by the historical-critical method, re-conceived as the historical exploration of the church's imagination. Historical study gives texture to our imagination. It enables us to discover God not only in ideal human life, but in this particular human life of Jesus of Nazareth and in the lives of the particular communities constituted as his body by the Holy Spirit. And discovering, we are healed.

Moral: What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?

How we apply the cure is the moral meaning of scripture, or better yet, the moral or tropological way of reading. Like historical and allegorical reading, it is the fruit of anagogical reading, but it builds specifically on the allegorical. Traditionally, it asks the question "What should I do?" I propose that it pose this question in light of the anagogical question of "What does God want to give me?" Specifically then, "What must I do to receive what God wants to give me?" But since the gifts of God, and above all, God's "incomprehensible love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ," are not only or even primarily for individuals, but for the church and even the

world, it can also be formulated in the plural: “What must we do to receive what God wants to give us?” or “What must we or I do in order for the world to receive what God wants to give to it through me?” There are many ways to ask this question of a biblical text, and what I propose is not to be taken in isolation. This is a discursive practice which is meant to build on less discursive ones such as *lectio divina* and the broader Christian spiritual life (as an Anglican, I conceive of this as consisting of, minimally, such works of piety as the Eucharist, the Daily Office, and remembrance of God).

A fruitful method for reading tropologically is to meditate on the tensions between the dogmatic tradition and the historical imagination disclosed by historical-critical study. Christian doctrine is founded upon scripture, but the foundation and the superstructure often seem maladapted to one another. The dogmatic tradition tells of a Second Divine Hypostasis, the Son, who is consubstantial with and begotten by the First Divine Hypostasis and from whom a Third Divine Hypostasis possibly proceeds (depending on whether one follows the eastern or western tradition). But historical reading of the Gospels is more likely to show a Galilean peasant or poor artisan in an occupied country who brilliantly adapted the ethical and apocalyptic traditions of his people in an itinerant ministry of preaching and wonderworking (however the wonders themselves be bracketed). He attracted a local following of women and men from different classes. Whether this was meant to be a political movement is a matter of some debate, but it is clear that his teachings and symbolic actions had strong political and

economic overtones. These were recognized by the occupying authorities and their local clients, who acted swiftly to suppress the movement by executing its leader. Even without historical-critical training, it is easy to notice the tension that often exists between the Nicene Creed that follows a homily and the Gospel reading that precedes it (especially when the preacher, who should be connecting the two, is clearly uncomfortable with one or the other).

Alternatively, one may meditate on the tensions between the various voices, drawn out by historical and other sorts of criticism. The goal is to learn how their basic impulses are in tension with one another and yet contain one another, with the aim of learning how to embody each. I will conclude this chapter and this project by modeling the latter through a reading of two tellings of the same story.

Mark 15:21-41 and John 19:17-37

By almost all accounts, Mark's Gospel is older than that of John, though some material in John may be quite early. As we have discussed, John's Gospel underwent at least one and probably two major revisions. Applying the criterion of embarrassment, we might be justified in thinking that Mark's version more closely reflects the historical occurrence of the crucifixion, though it is of no importance (in a very Poirot-esque sense). We may use the texts we have to make educated guesses about the concerns of each author, and perhaps of how they conceived of the relation of the story they tell to history.

Mark's account of the crucifixion is largely characterized by silence and passivity on the part of Jesus. He utters no words other than the cry of dereliction. He does not even carry his own cross. Grammatically, he is not the subject of any verb other than "accept" (λαμβάνω) in verse 24 (which actually expresses the refusal of an action), "cry out" (βοάω) in verse 34, and "expire" (ἐξπνεύω) in verse 41. This silence and passivity is set in the midst of a great deal of action, mostly expressed with active verbs: they "compel" Simon to carry the cross, they "crucify" Jesus, they "part" his garments. They taunt him, they fill a sponge and give it to him. There are even noteworthy meteorological events transpiring, as darkness covers the land at midday. But Jesus remains silent and passive until his final cry. It is only after Jesus breathes his last that the least likely human actor draws the least likely conclusion from the manner of Jesus' death: surely that man was God's son.

How did he reach that conclusion? There are precedents in both Jewish and Hellenistic literature, but we may also look closely at the text itself.³⁷ The whole Gospel of Mark is characterized by the so-called "messianic secret." Not only does Jesus never outwardly claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God, or a Davidic royal figure, but he commands those whom he has healed and the demons whom he has driven out to tell no one. They all disobey, but these people are not the sort whom one takes seriously. In the more intimate company of his own disciples, Jesus approves of Peter's

³⁷ For example, in some sources, unnatural darkness accompanies the deaths of famous rabbis and of Roman emperors. Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus. Bd. 2*. Zurich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979. p. 321

pronouncement that he is the Messiah, and he shows himself in divine glory in the company of the greatest of the prophets to an even smaller group of disciples, but they are to tell no one until he has risen. He has told the parable of the sower to the crowd (4:3-9) and interpreted it privately to his disciples (4:13-20). But what he did not tell the disciples that he was talking about his whole life: Jesus' secret is proclaimed openly, but is misunderstood and rejected. He then interprets it secretly to his disciples, and it will indeed bear fruit in them, but not yet. The seed is buried and will not come up until the right time, when Jesus himself emerges from where he was buried. The centurion, unlike most others in the Gospel, simply manages to read the signs that are in plain sight, even at the crucifixion.³⁸

Signs in plain sight abound in Mark's crucifixion narrative. The very hours of the day are pregnant with apocalyptic overtones.³⁹ *Daraus ergibt sich, dass die Stundenangabe die Kreuzigung Jesu als ein von Gott verfügbares Geschehnis wertet, das im Zusammenhang mit den Endereignissen zu betrachten ist. In ihr offenbart sich Gottes endgültiges Gericht und Heil.*⁴⁰ Mark has arranged the scenery in a way that signals to the reader that what is happening is of divine significance. The reader who knows scripture will note the parallels to the psalms, even before Jesus quotes one. And lest there be any doubt, a sign

³⁸ What exactly the centurion saw that convinced him is less important than that he saw rightly. (Gnilka, p. 314; and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. p. 767. Collins also sees a possible allusion to the imperial cult in the centurion's proclamation.)

³⁹ Gnilka notes precedents and parallels in Dan 7:12, 4 Ez. 4:36ff.; 13:58. The units of three hours in particular catch his attention. p. 317

⁴⁰ Gnilka, p. 317

indicates that the crucified man is “Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews.” Pilate meant this sign ironically, perhaps even meaning to give offense to the Jewish community of Jerusalem, but he has written the truth despite himself. Following the mock coronation of 15:17 (where again, the soldiers speak more truth than they know), Jesus is now ironically enthroned and recognized as having “come into his kingdom,” with the criminals on either side of him occupying the places requested by James and John, who did not know what they were asking (10:35-40).

This anti-coronation scene gives way to anti-theophany. In 15:34, Jesus invokes Psalm 22:1 before his death. While the text probably does not mean that Jesus recited or alluded to the whole psalm, the reader is free to be reminded of it. It sounds a note of forsakenness, in stark contrast to God’s explicit claiming of Jesus at his baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7), but his allusion to the beginning of the song does not necessarily undo its end, just as this moment of divine abandonment does not necessarily undo the divine acknowledgement of paternity. If the parallel to the baptism and transfiguration is intentional, then the moment of divine absence is also one of divine presence. That this is a moment of revelation, of access to God even as God has apparently withdrawn, is further suggested by the other event framing Jesus’ death, the tearing of the veil in the Temple. Joachim Gnnilka notes that in the Old Testament, the veil not only keeps people from going in, but also from *seeing* in (cf. Ex. 30:6 and 40:3).⁴¹

⁴¹ *ibid.* 324

Yarbro Collins goes a bit farther, agreeing with previous scholars that a link between the rending of the curtain and the rending of the heavens in Jesus' baptism is intended, and that it evokes Isa. 63:19, but in a non-traditional way. Thus, 15:38 indicates a "non-traditional theophany":

Indeed, one could say that it is an ironic theophany. The death of Jesus on the cross is accompanied by a real, but ambiguous and mysterious, theophany, which suggests that the will of God is fulfilled in the apparently shameful death of Jesus on the cross. The presence of God is signified in the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus by the voice from heaven, but God's absence at the cross is implied by Jesus' cry in v. 34. The absence of God at the cross suggests that how and why Jesus' death is the will of God are difficult to understand and express.⁴²

One might press the matter even further, and recall that in the Holy of Holies now visible through the curtain, there was no statue or effigy of the deity, as in most other temples of the ancient world. As every reader of Exodus knew and Pompey was surprised to learn, the place of God's perpetual presence was an empty space. This simultaneous presence and absence or revelation and hiddenness of God has been transferred from the Temple to the body of Jesus. After experiencing this theophany of abandonment, the gentile centurion gave voice to the truth of who Jesus was: not only son of David, but Son of God.

Mark shows us an apocalyptic and ironic portrait of a man forsaken by his associates and even by God, passively enduring his agony until crying out and expiring. But Mark's moment of abandonment and death is a theophany to whoever will see it,

⁴² Yarbro Collins, p. 764

and the signs are everywhere. The very hours of the day are revelatory; they tell us to expect to see the hand of God in what look to be meaningless events, even meaningless suffering such as we see in front of us. Jesus himself has associated the darkness of the sun with the moment of revelation in the Markan “little apocalypse” (13:24). So now, as he hangs on the cross with the label “king of the Jews,” he has our full attention. When he cries out and dies, at the moment when God seems most absent from the world, the veil of the holy of holies is torn, allowing anyone to look in and see the place of God’s presence, which we always knew to be empty. And not power and presence, but powerlessness and absence move the centurion to confess that Jesus is (or at least was) the Son of God.

The crucifixion in John could hardly be more different. He gives us a man doing the will of God, making arrangements on the cross for the future of his family and his followers, shown to be priest and king even by his humiliation, seemingly determining the moment of his death, and actively handing over his spirit and the Spirit of God. We note immediately that Jesus carries his own cross (19:17). The sign indicating the charge against Jesus is trilingual, and is a matter of debate between the chief priests and Pilate. The division of the clothing is familiar from Mark, but now there is a tunic that is sufficiently intact for the soldiers to decide who will take it by lot. But whereas Jesus was forsaken by God and all of humanity in Mark’s crucifixion scene, here we find him

accompanied by three women, *las tres Marias*,⁴³ and the beloved disciple. More striking still, he speaks. He entrusts his mother to the beloved disciple. There are no portents; the sun is not darkened. And Jesus, though crucified, seems to be completely in control. He knows that all has been accomplished. He asks for the drink at the last moment, unlike in Mark, where it was foisted upon him. And he seems to choose the moment of his death, with a declarative or performative statement that “it is finished.” The death itself is described in the active terms of giving up / over his Spirit.

John has some of the same episodes as Mark, but not all of them. There is the inscription of the charge, “the king of the Jews,” but it is now trilingual. This makes it, as Raymon Brown notes, more like a royal proclamation than a criminal charge.⁴⁴ The Jewish authorities protest, but Pilate is unable or unwilling to alter his decree. The soldiers take Jesus’ clothing for themselves, but now it is explicitly said to be in fulfillment of scripture, and John introduces the seamless garment, the garment of a priest. Jesus is sentenced as the slaughter of the Passover lambs begins in John and dies along with them, but he is both priest and victim. Jesus has companions besides the criminals on either side; the women who watched from a distance in Mark are near, and we are explicitly told that his mother is among them, along with the beloved disciple. Brown may well be right that she symbolizes the new Israel or the church and he the

⁴³ The list of the women is ambiguous and may actually be a list of four women. The difficulty hinges on whether “Mary, the wife of Clopas” is meant to provide the name of his mother’s sister, or if she is a different woman. Grammatically, either is possible. See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)*. Garden City, NJ (Doubleday, 1970), pp. 904-5.

⁴⁴ Brown, pp. 918-20

Christian.⁴⁵ At any rate, he cannot be wrong in ascribing significance to the fact that Jesus' mother bookends his ministry in John, being present at Cana and the cross. She was denied at Cana because Jesus' hour had not yet come; this is the hour, and she is made the mother of the disciple whose community will stand in for Jesus when his roll is complete and he is gone. A drink is given to Jesus at the last in John, as in Mark, but in John he requests it so that the scripture can be fulfilled. It is not entirely clear what scripture John has in mind, but the effect of myrrh and hyssop is to bring to mind the anointing of a sacrifice, reinforcing the dual role of priest and victim. No cry of forsakenness is heard, but rather a statement of completeness. Jesus came to do the will of the Father, and it is done. In fulfilling it "to the end," he has given over the Spirit to his followers, who are now not only his friends (15:13-14), but also his family. Jesus has glorified the Father and been glorified (13:31-32). Jesus' death is the hour of his glorification (12:23-24), and now it is for his new family to glorify God (15:8) and to receive God's glory (17:22). And of the final oddity of the Johannine account, the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side which may symbolize baptism and the Eucharist, this may be said: "It is important to remember that during this episode Jesus is already dead. In Johannine thought the drama of the cross does not end in death but in a flow of life that comes from death: the death of Jesus is the beginning of Christian life."⁴⁶ And

⁴⁵ Brown, pp. 922-27

⁴⁶ Brown p. 913

as we have emphasized in the first chapter, Jesus' whole life and death is a performance in time of God's love, and to love God is to enter into it.

What are we to make of the two accounts? John either has an independent tradition, or he has some version of the Markan narrative and has modified it. They tell us different versions of the story to show us something different, what I have called the fundamental impulse of each community. The forsakenness of Jesus as revelation of God's presence in Mark, the glorification of Jesus as the revelation of God's love in John. Harmonizing the two accounts is as pointless as it is fruitless, but harmonizing these two driving insights has been the work of the church's imagination for two millennia.

How can these two portrayals be the same Jesus? How can god-forsakenness also be a moment of consummate communion with God? Under the guidance of the dogmatic tradition, especially as worked out by the ecumenical councils, we may read Mark as concerned mainly with the humanity of Jesus who is also divine, and John with the divinity of Jesus who is also human. The Council of Chalcedon teaches us that the two natures of Jesus were joined in one hypostasis without confusion, change, separation, or division. The later councils teach us that the one hypostasis in which these two natures were joined is that of the Second Person of the Trinity. Therefore, whatever happens to Jesus, including any experience of god-forsakenness, happens to the hypostasis of the Word. The common being (*ousia*) and common operation of the three persons of the Trinity precludes a breach in the communion of Jesus with the

Father, even as Jesus is crying out in forsakenness. If we accept the dogmatic tradition on this point, then we are led to ask about the nature of the communion of the Persons of the Trinity, and can only conclude that perfect communion can include even the most profound experience of alienation, just as God's omnipotence can include the weakness of the Crucified, God's infinity can include finitude, and God's life can include death, all without disruption. Furthermore, Jesus' humanity is the revelation of his divinity, and his god-forsakenness is the revelation of his communion. Mark and John somehow contain each other.

In this light, we note that Jesus' cry of dereliction was nothing other than the beginning of Psalm 22. We need not assume that the first verse stands in for the whole psalm, which would perhaps diminish the force of the cry (and possibly the cries of all of those with whom it was in solidarity), but it should call it to mind for the reader, making the triumphant thanksgiving at the end of that psalm relevant to this text. Thus Gnilka: *"Die im Danklied des Psalms bekundete Rettung aber bezeugt, dass die von der Gemeinde geglaubte Auferstehung die Voraussetzung ist, dass man mit Hilfe des Psalms die Passion Jesu beschrieb. Damit ist der Ruf der Gottverlassenheit des Gekreuzigten nicht abgeschwächt."*⁴⁷ In light of Psalm 22, we are reminded that although Jesus' last utterance in Mark is a cry of anger and accusation at his own forsakenness, it is still a prayer.⁴⁸ And from this we can learn and even may deduce that every accusation against God is a

⁴⁷ Gnilka, p. 322

⁴⁸ A point made by both Gnilka (p. 322) and Collins (p. 759).

prayer. Anger and doubt may be expressed in prayer. It is a prayer every time someone says, "God, if you exist, fuck you!" It may even be an act of identification with the crucified Jesus, and thus a hidden revelation of his glory and love in the midst of one's own despair.

If we believe with 1 John and Augustine that God's communion with Godself is also the communion of the church, then reading Mark in light of John also teaches us that the oneness of the church runs deeper than even its most profound divisions. We may fail to keep Paul's command to "let there be no division among you," but we cannot thwart Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one." At a bare minimum, this means that all churches are actually in communion with one another. Our fellowship is nothing other than the Holy Spirit, who is not only the love of the Father and the Son, but their Gift, as Augustine showed us. It also means that the author of 1 John is wrong about not praying for one another, as it presumes that we are able to determine to whom God gives the gift of Godself. Will we not pray for those for whom Jesus prayed?

Finally, reading Mark in light of John teaches us something normally associated with Matthew 25: in Jesus, God identifies with the cry of the suffering and oppressed. Jesus' cry was God's cry. The lesson to learn is not that obedient submission to suffering is God's will, but that God not only hears the cries of God's people and answers them, but makes them God's own. "Whatever you have done unto the least of these who are my brothers and sisters, you have done unto me." We always knew that God inhabits

the praises of God's people (Psalm 22:3). Mark teaches us that God also inhabits their lamentations.

We also learn something important from reading John in light of Mark. John tells us that the hour for which Jesus came into the world was his glorification. Knowing from Mark that it is also his moment of humiliation and abandonment, we could conclude that the crucifixion reveals an eternal dynamic of the Trinity: the Son's submission to the Father. Such a position is characteristic of Hans Urs von Balthasar, and feminist theologians have rightly objected to it.⁴⁹ The glory of Jesus is the very glory of the Father. When John identifies this glory with the crucifixion, we must remember Mark and Psalm 22. We are being taught that God's glory is solidarity. And we are taught that if we are to be heirs of the divine glory and "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), then we must not only see Jesus' humanity as the revelation of his divinity, but his divinity as the revelation of humanity. We are to share Jesus' glory, and to do so, we must stand where he stood.

We have just begun with a historically informed reading of two biblical texts and used that reading to move from the imagination of the authors to the imagination of the church, which allowed us to see the crucifixion as a revelation of the Trinity and a call to solidarity. These steps were literal, allegorical, and moral ways of reading. Many other literal, allegorical, and moral readings are possible. This leaves the anagogical, which I

⁴⁹ For a discussion and critique of Balthasar's position, see Linn Marie Tonstad, "Sexual Difference and Trinitarian Death: Cross, Kenosis, and Hierarchy in the *Theo-Drama*," *Modern Theology* 26.4 (2010), pp. 603-631.

cannot demonstrate here. I have approached these texts in prayer and asked what God wants to give me through them, but I cannot do this for my reader, except in the most general way. So to the question of what God wants to give, let the most general answer suffice: "He gave over the Spirit."

Conclusion

I have taken a different tack from most other defenders of pre-critical exegesis, in that I have grounded my retrieval in an epistemological intervention which does not discredit historical-critical reading, but nudges it in a different direction. I have asked the very modest question of what it means for historical-critical exegesis if we take seriously that knowledge is grounded in love. I derived this insight from 1 John and used Augustine and the Victorines to work out its theological implications, before engaging the historicist epistemology of Troeltsch, and finally proposing my version of the fourfold reading of the Bible. In the final analysis, the fourfold reading of scripture and the historical-critical method are not particularly foreign to one another. How could they be? Historical-critical study is grounded in love as much as any other kind. I only ask it to name its love. When the scholar realizes that she is a lover, she will want what all lovers want, which is to love better. May her love of knowledge become a love of wisdom! If this scholar is a Christian, then she knows that before she was a lover of knowledge or wisdom, she was loved by Wisdom. "In this is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us."

I do not ask anyone to transport themselves into the biblical world. There is not one biblical world, but many biblical imaginations. Like one's own imagination, they are works in progress. When one's imagination encounters theirs, both will be transformed into something new. One will find that somewhere, a third imagination has joined this encounter, perhaps unnoticed. Whoever comes to know him after the flesh will come to know him after the Spirit. Whoever learns to know Jesus will learn to know God. Receive God, reader, and receive yourself as God imagines you. Let your reading be ascetic reading and your theology ascetic theology. Ask the same questions as before, and one more: how does God want to give Godself and myself to me? You do not ask alone. The entirety of the Christian doctrinal tradition has the purpose of helping you ask this question, whether of scripture or the world. Do not seek knowledge for its own sake, but for love's sake. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." If you want to know, learn to love.

Reader, you will know as you are known when you love as you are loved.

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"Of making many books there is no end." -Ecclesiastes 12:12

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